

Excerpts From:

REFORM ZIONISM

AN EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

MICHAEL LIVNI (LANGER)

**Section 1 - Reform
Judaism and Zionism**

Perspectives for an Action Program: Reform Judaism and Zionism as Jewish Responses to the Modern Age¹

The Modern Age and Human Evolution

Reform Judaism and Zionism have been in the past and continue to be in the present responses of the Jewish people to the challenge of what we may broadly described as the Modern Age. The coming of the Modern Age probably constitutes the greatest discontinuity not only in the 6,000-year recorded history of mankind, but also in the three to four million year evolutionary history of the genus *Homo*. The challenges that the Modern Age posed (and poses) for the Jewish people are really secondary to this major discontinuity that the Modern Age constitutes for all mankind.

As Rene Dubois has pointed out in his book "The God Within,"² during the millions of years since humans first made their appearance, the normative social environment was the small group or band. During the last 5,000 to 10,000 years when we gradually developed sedentary habits, the normative community became the village. In either case, the social basis was a relatively small group, generally an extended family group or perhaps a group of extended families which formed a community. The ecology of the group was a rural one. The social cohesion of such communities was maintained by a framework of implicit mutual obligations between members. At a later stage (corresponding to the beginnings of recorded history), such mutual obligations became more explicit. Such an evolution from the implicit to the explicit is clearly traceable in the development of Jewish traditions.

One hundred and fifty thousand generations developed within a social milieu of a certain common communal quality. It would be reasonable to assume that such a period of time was adequate to allow for some selection of the species in this direction. In other words, in terms of biological endowment the communal-

1. Published in part: CCAR Yearbook, Vol. 85, 1976; *Midstream*, April 1977. Published in full — 1977 in: Langer, Michael, ed., *A Reform Zionist Perspective*, UAHC Youth Division, New York, 1977.

2. Rene Dubois, *The God Within*, Charles Scribner, 1972. See esp. ch. 3 & ch. 13.

extended family framework with inter-personal relationship based on mutual obligations is the normative one for *Homo Sapiens*. The generalization can be made without gainsaying the tremendous variety of such frameworks that did develop.

The Traditional Order Breaks Down

It is the last five to ten generations which have witnessed the breaking down of the traditional order in its many forms, thus bringing about the major discontinuity in our evolutionary history. Such a period is equivalent to perhaps one twenty-thousandth of our existence, or one day in the life of a fifty-year-old adult.

The dynamics of the passing of the traditional order can be briefly sketched. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries sundered medieval philosophy into natural science, political philosophy (political science), theology and metaphysics. The religio-philosophical base of human existence which related man through community to the cosmic was undermined by Copernicus and Galileo. An age of discovery, both scientific and geographic, was initiated. The economic and technological changes stemming therefrom led straight to the Industrial Revolution.

The political philosopher, John Locke, posited a political state whose purpose was to ensure "the rights of the individual" as against defining the obligations of the individual to his community. The cumulative result of these processes was the disintegration of the organic community and its world outlook. The Age of Discovery provided the opportunity of founding new communities unfettered by traditional ties. New wealth flowed into the hands of new classes who had no place in the traditional order. Most important of all, the rural ecology on which traditional society was based broke down as the Industrial Revolution progressed.¹

The dislocation of the rural population to an urban setting was characterized by the transformation of the extended family village unit to the fragmented urban nuclear family. Within the city itself, new modes of production broke up the network of guilds and fraternities — the medieval urban equivalent of the village socio-economic framework.

In summary, the Modern Age made traditional ways of understanding and looking at the world meaningless and social frameworks and established norms lost their relevance. Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of these epochal changes

1. See for this perspective Stanley Meron, "The Individual and Society," Ichud HaKvutzot VeHaKibbutzim, 1966. (English translation in Langer, Michael, ed., *A Reform Zionist Perspective*, UAHF Youth Division, New York, 1977, pp. 38-48.)

was (and is) that they constituted not a one-time discontinuity to which humans could adjust, but rather a continuing and continually accelerating discontinuity as a “constant” factor in one’s life.

Secondary Effects on the Jewish Community

The erosion of the medieval community’s organic order, both temporally and spiritually, was bound to have effects on its various components — including the Jewish community. For a correct analysis of the Jewish response to the modern age, it is most useful to distinguish between the primary impact of the modern age on the Jewish community itself as against the secondary effects on the Jewish community of the breakdown of the traditional order among the peoples in whose midst Jews lived. Two such *secondary* effects were the Emancipation of the Jews and the rise of modern anti-Semitism.

As Arthur Hertzberg has pointed out,¹ the Edict of Emancipation was not primarily altruistic. Rather it was a grudging conclusion reached by Rationalists who identified organic Jewish community with the feudal order. In order to eradicate every vestige of medieval community and communal authority, the Jews too would have to forgo their communal autonomy and become individual citizens in the nation-state. The political philosophy of the French Revolution would not permit the existence of communal frameworks as intermediaries between the citizen and the state.

A more ominous secondary effect on the Jewish people stemmed from the compensatory reactions within some nations to the loss of organic community. The dislocation and frustrations engendered by this breakdown of traditional society resulted in some cases in a process of substituting the nation as “organic community.” The end result of that process for Jews was modern anti-Semitism, as a result of which Jewish existence became increasingly non-viable in Central and Eastern Europe. Thus we have the birth of the problem of the Jews. Hence the “problem of the Jews” was a secondary effect of the impact of the Modern Age on certain host-societies within which Jews lived.²

1. Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, Jewish Publication Society, 1968.

2. An incisive analysis of the peculiar vulnerability of the Jews to the disaffection of those dislocated by the transition from the medieval order to the political nation-state will be found in Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, World Publishing, Meridian Books, Cleveland, Second Edition 1958.

THE MODERN MANIFESTATION OF THE PROBLEM OF JUDAISM

But the focus of our discussion is the effect that the onset of the Enlightenment had on Judaism itself. Our concern is the impact of the Modern Age on the traditional Jewish community, bound together as it was by its network of explicit and implicit mutual obligations, communally accepted as binding norms, and a way of life — its *Halacha*.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century many Western European Jews came to feel that operative Judaism as defined by traditional *Halacha*, and Judaism as a form of community and expression of Peoplehood, were non-relevant in the emerging modern world. Traditional Jewish community was seen to be as dated as medieval society itself. This became the problem of Judaism — i.e., the question of the contemporary viability of Jewish organic community based on the norms of Rabbinic Judaism. Both the problem of the Jews (or modern anti-Semitism, depending on which side of the coin you want to look) and the *problem of Judaism* reflect for us as Jews in different ways the results of that major continuing discontinuity in human evolution and history introduced by the advent of the Modern Age.

The Response of Reform Judaism

In Western Europe the first major response to this challenge was Reform Judaism. The founders of Reform Judaism in the first half of the nineteenth century correctly divined that the far-reaching political, social and economic changes taking place in the Western world heralded a new epoch in history. If the social order presaging an organic community was being replaced by a new form, the nation-state, then Judaism would have to reflect (indeed it was its duty to reflect) in its own way the radically changing historical conditions.

At first the early Reformers reacted by an attempt to formulate new norms — a new *Halacha*. Gunther Plaut has pointed out that Reform's abandonment of traditional *Halacha* (Jewish Law) did not necessarily imply negation of *Halacha* as such.¹ Rather, this reflected a determination to reform the *Halacha* and define new forms of observance and commitment based on what were understood to be the ethical and moral teachings of Jewish tradition. That tradition, when scrutinized by the "Wissenschaft des Judentums" (the Science of Judaism), was in any case seen to have evolved considerably due to changing historical circumstances during the three millennia that had passed since the seminal experience of the

1. Gunther Plaut, "Is Reform Ambiguous?," *Reform Judaism*, October 1974.

Israelite tribes in the Sinai Desert. Was the Jewish “body” (the particularistic people-community) still a necessary vehicle for the Jewish spiritual heritage? Abraham Geiger thought that it was not.

Perhaps it was because of the fact that the social sciences and behavioral sciences were among the last to develop, that a fatal flaw came about in the analysis made by the “Wissenschaft des Judentums” at this stage. It failed to see (from a theoretical point of view) that *because of the breakdown of community the social basis for achieving a consensus on new and binding Jewish norms (a new Halacha) was absent.*

The failure to perceive fully the role of community and the role of “community of communities,” i.e., peoplehood, led the founders of Reform Judaism to abrogate Judaism’s tie to the land of Israel. The basis of this annulment of God’s contract with Abraham was the negation of the particularistic in Jewish peoplehood and the affirmation of Israel’s universal mission of disseminating a special ethic — in particular the prophetic ideals of social justice — to all humanity. Judaism was to be a religion of universal significance but not a particularistic nation community intolerable to the modern nation-state.

The stance of classical Reform was in keeping with much of the optimistic outlook of most of the nineteenth century, which interpreted contemporary events as heralding mankind’s evolution from particularistic to universalistic frameworks. We will recall that Abraham Geiger, in his de-emphasis of the particularistic within Judaism, was a moderate when compared to a contemporary of his, another German born into the Mosaic persuasion, who negated all religion and especially Judaism in the name of a universalistic outlook which posited economic class as the true and ultimate determinant of community of interest in human history.

World War I and the resulting collapse of the Second International exposed the fallacy of the Marxist assumption that class interest would take precedence over identification with nation-community. The pathological culmination of the concept of organic “nation-community-race” in the land of Reform Judaism’s birth called for serious re-evaluation of Judaism’s universal mission and made the negation of Jewish national particularism (peoplehood and a national home) untenable.

Both Marxist Socialism and Classical Reform, in spite of their major differences, can be seen today as quintessentially products of the nineteenth century — products of political and social forces whose immediate political progenitor was the French Revolution. But in a wider sense, these forces represented initial nine-

teenth-century responses to the passing of traditional society and the problematic onset of a new epoch.

The Response of Zionism

Modern Zionism emerged towards the very end of the nineteenth century, almost two generations after Reform Judaism and a generation after the East European Haskala. From the vantage point of the cumulative post-Emancipatory experience of the Jewish people during the nineteenth century the Zionist movement drew two conclusions:

1. In most cases the modern political state constituted a new type of particularistic polity inimical in varying degrees to Jews as such. Only within a sovereign state of their own could the Jews find a place where they would be fully free and equal. Such was the political solution posited for the Problem of the Jews by Herzlian Zionism.
2. The dynamic historical bond between the Jewish people, the land of Israel and their religion made Eretz Israel not only the mandatory focus of their national aspirations, but also the most likely place where a Jewish community might evolve norms of living and a contemporary Hebrew culture which could ultimately be relevant for Jews everywhere. This then was the orientation of Achad Ha-Amist or Cultural Zionism in confronting the Problem of Judaism.

The Outlook of Labor Zionist Chalutzim

It was the synthesis of a medley of socialisms — Marxist, anarchist, social democratic, populist and moral (religious) — with Zionism (especially Cultural Zionism) that engendered the most radical of the Zionist responses to the Modern Age. This was the Labor Zionist response and in particular the response of its pioneering (chalutzic) element.

The Labor Zionist trend accepted in principle a synthesis of political and cultural Zionism. In particular, Labor Zionism espoused the Hebrew revival. But the chalutzic (pioneering) movement within Labor Zionism went much further in terms of practical interpretation and in its religious demand of personal self-realization and commitment.

Political Zionism was perceived as being only a means for enabling the chalutzim to contend with the total challenge of the Modern Age. In this context,

first priority was to be given to reconstituting the Jewish community by radical reforms in its ecology:

1. At least in part there was to be a revival of a communal village framework. Personal relationships were to be defined by the mutual obligations of members of the community to each other and to the community as a whole. The idea of extended family was to be interpreted anew by the egalitarian kibbutz-commune *chavura*.¹ Physical labor and “return to the soil” were the cardinal tenets of the *chalutzim* in their determination to revive a rural ecology for the Jewish people in its National Home.
2. The artisan skills and service professions were to be organized in their own trade unions. However, these were to be somewhat similar to the medieval guild-communities in their all-encompassing concern with the social, cultural and even religious (now transposed to political) aspects of their members’ lives.
3. An umbrella organization (*Histadrut*) of these frameworks for mutual responsibility — both agricultural collectives on the land and guild-unions in the cities — would provide initiative for economic development. Thus the dichotomy between the innovating capitalist class and the exploited laboring class was to be resolved, at least in part, by creating a significant sector of the economy in the Jewish National Home where both functions were modulated by the same over-arching workers’ community (“*chevrat haovdim*”).

It is to be emphasized that such a concept assumed a national network for community based on the acceptance of mutual obligation, not only between members of a given community for each other, but also of all communities for each other.

4. The vision of a new Hebrew society, freed from the constraints of a rabbinic *Halacha* more or less in alliance with the undemocratic authority structure of *shtetl* society (*parnasim*²), provided the motivational amalgam for the Labor Zionist conception. Certainly the level of social idealism expressed in the *shtetl* community was seen as falling short of and often perverting the prophetic ideals of social justice.

Hence Labor Zionism was a particular interpretation of Cultural Zionism — of the new Hebrew society. It saw itself as a do-it-yourself Cultural Zionism which emphasized the concept of community (a Hebrew laboring class community) in the Jewish National Home as being a prerequisite for a renaissance of the Jewish

1. *Chavura* — fellowship based on shared ideals.

2. *Parnasim* — the providers of funds (the ‘big givers’).

People. The Halacha for such a community was to be adapted from contemporary schools of socialist thought which were seen as being of universal significance and as constituting the carriers of Jewish ideals of social justice. As already noted, Rabbinic Judaism and its 613 mitzvot were further discredited by their association with the social conservatism of the shtetl's power elite.

A PARALLEL BETWEEN REFORM AND LABOR ZIONISM

It is of some interest to note a fascinating parallel between classical Reform and classical Labor Zionism. Classical Reform (and radical Reform to an even greater extent) believed optimistically, and perhaps naively, that the age of universal enlightenment would be a guarantor of their civil rights and status everywhere. Events interpreted by the Zionists as harbingers of worse yet to come were seen as local and passing aberrations on the highway of human progress. Indeed, as carriers of the ethical and moral values of Judaism, as free and equal citizens of the political state, Reform Jews saw themselves as active promoters, wherever they might be, of the universal enlightenment which seemed so congruent with universalist Jewish values. Those values were no longer in need of nurture by a particular Jewish polity.

On the other hand, the Labor Zionists (in particular the Marxistically oriented wing) identified so strongly with the "Progressive Socialist" regimes that in some cases they conceived of the Jewish National Home as only an intermediate step to a universalistic socialist utopia. The Soviet Union as the "Mother of Socialism" was almost beyond criticism, even when left-wing Labor Zionists were being actively persecuted. Labor Zionism would "prove" ultimately that it was all a mistake — the emerging Jewish Workers Society would finally be found to be deserving of Soviet Russia's approbation.

The rejection of the universalist Reform outlook by German nationalism was traumatic and total. In America the universalist outlook was expressed through social action. The ambiguous relationship of the Jews to the Negro struggle for civil rights, the Vietnam War, the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War have all served to bring about a new perspective and a new balance between Jewish particularism and universalism within American Reform.

It was not until the 1950s that the Soviet Union's uncompromising attitude — both in internal and external politics — forced even the radical Labor Zionist left wing to divest itself of its illusions regarding its socialist "mentor." The ideological crises within Labor Zionism (and in the kibbutz movement) in the two decades between 1940 and 1960 with regard to the orientation to socialism were

surely more acute than the controversy with regard to Zionism that was taking place within Reform Judaism.

Let us summarize up to this point. The advent of the Modern Age posed and is posing the greatest challenge that Judaism has ever faced. The viability of Jewish community was and is problematic. Without a communal framework, within which there are communally accepted and binding norms, there can be no basis for the development of Halacha and there can be no firm foundation for a Jewish way of life.

The classic response of Reform was affirmation of tradition but with radical change (reform) by renewed interpretation and by new legislation, with respect to Halachic norms. Jewish community and the community of communities (peoplehood) were largely negated in favor of integration ("self-effacement," Achad Ha-Am called it) in the newly formed nation-states and the fulfillment of a universal mission within them. Jewish particularism was to be expressed in a brotherhood of the spirit alone.

The response of Labor Zionism and in particular the kibbutz movement was affirmation of Jewish peoplehood and Jewish community, but with radical change (reform) in their structure and ecology. On the other hand, Labor Zionism negated the particularistic Jewish Halacha tradition in favor of adaptation to various streams of universalist socialist ideology.

Hence, these responses, the Labor Zionist response and the Reform response, were mirror images of each other. Neither response related to the problem of "flesh *and* spirit," Judaism in its totality. Neither response related to the double challenge of the creation of an organic Jewish community, committed by virtue of its being a Jewish community, to evolving a Jewish way of life (Halacha) compatible with the Modern Age.

Both Reform and Labor Zionism were motivated by concern with social justice arising from the impact of the Modern Age. Labor Zionism approached the question from a particularistic stance but with a universalistic ideology. Socialism was its "religion." Reform Judaism's point of departure was universalistic — rejecting Jewish particularity — but its "ideology" was Judaism.

It behooves us to examine, at least briefly, the historical processes by which we are arriving at a synthesis between the response of Reform Judaism and Zionism and especially Labor Zionism.

The Evolution Within Reform Judaism

It is, of course, true that a strong and articulate minority within the Reform Movement always identified with Zionism. Stephen S. Wise, Judah Magnes, Abba Hillel Silver, Gustav and Richard Gottheil, and James Heller (a Labor Zionist) were central figures within American Zionism. Indisputably their Cultural Zionism was a central motif in their personal Zionist commitment. But historical circumstances were to determine that the focus of their activity was largely the political struggle for the establishment of the Jewish State. The question of Liberal Judaism shaping a new Jewish way of life in the emergent Jewish National Home could not be a major focus for them. They were Reform Jews who were Zionists. An ideological synthesis between Reform Judaism and Zionism was latent in much of what they said and did, but they were not perceived as promulgators of a distinct "Reform Zionism" as such.

The rise of Nazi Germany made anti-Zionism (in its political sense as a movement opposed to the creation of a sovereign Jewish State in Palestine) almost untenable in the American Jewish community, including its Reform wing.

Two additional factors prepared Reform Judaism for the Columbus Platform and a future synthesis with Zionism. First, Reform Judaism became increasingly a movement of the descendants of East European Jews less ambivalent in their relationship to Jewish Peoplehood than the members of "Our Crowd."¹ Secondly, the approach to Jewish Peoplehood, posited in Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionist Judaism as an evolving religious civilization, had been anticipated by Classical Reform (Geiger) almost a century before the publication of "Judaism as a Religious Civilization." But Kaplan's thesis of reconstructing the Jewish community was predicated on the indissoluble link between religion and peoplehood, which Classical Reform negated.

The Maturing of Israeli Zionism and Labor Zionism

Let us recall that, although Zionism was born in response both to the problem of the Jews *and* the problem of Judaism, the pressure of historical events demanded an emphasis on the immediate and practical. Zionism concerned itself with the establishment of a secure political framework which could solve the problem of the Jews. Diaspora Zionism concerned itself with fund-raising and political work. Until 1948, Israeli Zionism concerned itself mainly with the actual struggle involved in the creation of the State of Israel. In the period immediately after the

1. Stephen Birmingham, *Our Crowd*, Harper & Row, 1967. Saga of New York's German-Jewish families.

establishment of the State, the central concern became the defense of the State and the absorption of hundreds of thousands of new, disadvantaged immigrants.

Almost from the time of the initial confrontation between cultural and political Zionism at the beginning of the century, and until well after the establishment of Israel, questions of survival simply shunted aside any serious discussion on cultural Zionism — i.e., the significance of the State as a means for ensuring a viable Jewish response to the Modern Age.

Developments within the kibbutz movement and the relationship between the “Labor Zionist elite” and the Zionist movement as a whole illustrate the process which took place.

Labor Zionism had always been a particular variant of Cultural Zionism. Its socialist vision of the new Jewish society was not shared by the Zionist “establishment” as a whole. But within the practical realities of upbuilding the National Home, the kibbutz movement was a useful — perhaps indispensable — partner. Kibbutzim represented the most economic way to settle the land for the chronically under-financed Zionist movement. The relatively high intellectual level of kibbutz members and the principle of collectively farming large areas made the kibbutzim the logical vehicle for the rapid introduction of a modern agriculture for the growing Jewish urban population. In the 1920s and 1930s the kibbutzim constituted an important framework for the absorption and training of immigrants. From the late 1930s and until the early 1950s the kibbutzim were the most feasible and flexible way of establishing Jewish settlement in the face of growing Arab and British hostility. It would be difficult to imagine what the armistice lines of 1949 would have been were it not for the role of the kibbutzim, direct and indirect, in the struggle for statehood.

All of this had little to do with the kibbutz’s relationship to Cultural Zionism. Many kibbutz members, too, came to see their role as that of a means to the end of creating the Jewish State. Through the 1950s the kibbutz movement went through a major crisis of purpose. Many kibbutz members felt that it was hardly relevant to remain on the kibbutz. The climax had been reached and passed.

The crisis of purpose and identity was sublimated, institutionally, in a bitter and destructive ideological battle on the nature of the kibbutz’s (and Zionism’s) relation to socialism. It was the “Mother of Socialism” herself who put an end to the strife by unambiguously and traumatically disowning the Socialist Zionists who had blindly sworn fealty to her.

It was not until the relative calm of the early 1960s that many thinking Israelis and kibbutz members began to ask themselves: “Now that we have a Jewish State — what do we do with it?” Of special interest has been the evolution of the

thinking of younger Israelis on the subject of their Jewish identity. The impact of the Eichmann trial in 1961 and Yigael Yadin's Masada "dig" in 1964 were early, well-publicized manifestations of young Israelis' concern with their identity.

The proliferation of "Circles of Searchers for the Way" (Chugim L'Mechapsei Haderech), the establishment of an intellectual and literary journal, *Shdemot*, by and for the young kibbutz members, the establishment of the first Progressive Jewish congregations and the Leo Baeck School, were less apparent signs of a return to the concept of Cultural Zionism — a search for the Jewish meaning of the Jewish State. The Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War were decisive in demonstrating to Israeli youth their Jewish identity. It became clear to them that only the Jewish People were really committed to Israel's survival. The Jewish bond is now perceived by many young Israelis to be functional for that survival. "Zioniut," once a term of disparagement, has again become respectable.

Within the kibbutz movement itself, a definite shift has taken place in the kibbutz's self-image. The kibbutz sees itself more and more as a society (albeit "secular"), living according to Jewish values. The socialistic rhetoric is becoming muted. Concern for Jewish content is on the rise. Most significantly, the kibbutz is coming to be seen as one possible expression of the Jewish significance of the Jewish State, both by those within it and by many thinking Israelis without.¹

The Synthesis Between Reform and Labor Zionism

It was in the period between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War that the Reform Movement began to seriously think in terms of its impact on the Jewish State. In order to confront the political and religious reality, it was clear that a Progressive Jewish presence would have to be established. The World Union for Progressive Judaism moved its headquarters to Jerusalem. The Hebrew Union College established a campus in Jerusalem and made a year of study there mandatory for ordination in the Reform rabbinate. A group of rabbis from the Central Conference of American Rabbis initiated a series of dialogues with leaders of the kibbutz movement and the idea of a Reform kibbutz was born. The idea, however, had to await realization until the youth groups of the tiny Israeli Reform Movement matured sufficiently to attempt to realize it. A real Reform kibbutz movement also depends on the evolution of a pioneering Reform youth movement in North America.

1. In his thesis for the Doctor of Hebrew Literature at Hebrew Union College, Rabbi Shalom Lilker, today a member of Kibbutz Kfar Hamaccabi, claims that the kibbutzim have been a religious phenomenon all along. Lilker's thesis, *Kibbutz Judaism: A New Tradition in the Making*, was published by the Herzl Press, New York, 1982. Lilker's analysis is partly based on and was anticipated by Martin Buber a generation ago in his essay, "The Experiment That Did Not Fail," in *Paths to Utopia*, Beacon Press, 1958.

In January 1976, the World Union for Progressive Judaism formally affiliated with the World Zionist Organization and its Jerusalem based director, Rabbi Richard G. Hirsch, became a member of the WZO Executive. At the Biennial of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, in November 1975, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the UAHC President, responded to the challenge of the UN Resolution equating Zionism with racism, by declaring:

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

Heady stuff for a movement that harbored within it the most vocal Jewish anti-Zionist element — The American Council for Judaism. Nor should one underestimate the ambivalence felt towards the “establishment” in Israel by prominent circles within Reform — because of the “dovish” proclivities with regard to Israel’s foreign policy, because of the Orthodox stranglehold on established religious expression, and lastly, because of the demand for increased funding for Judaism in America.

Hence it would be incorrect to assume that Reform Zionism will imply uncritical support of the State of Israel. Its central thrust will probably be a socially concerned Cultural Zionism, with particular emphasis on the development of a Progressive Judaism in Israel.

The synthesis between Reform Judaism and Zionism, in particular Labor Zionism, is a resolution of opposite and sometimes opposing but fundamentally complementary responses. The cataclysmic events of the last sixty years of Jewish history were the dynamic which at times hindered and are finally militating in favor of such a synthesis.

Such a synthesis is based on Reform’s acceptance of the “triple covenant,” as posited by Rabbi Schindler. Jewish tradition is inseparable from Jewish Peoplehood. Likewise, there can be no meaningful Jewish Peoplehood without an affirmative relationship to Jewish “religious civilization.” Ongoing Reform (“Reconstruction”) is a necessity both for Jewish tradition and for the Jewish People as community, wherever they may be.

It seems to me that we have arrived at a point where we must assume a Reform-Zionist synthesis in order to deal effectively with the problem of Judaism. Hence, we pass from the realm of historical analysis to a tentative statement

based on such a Reform or Progressive Zionist synthesis, and an ensuing proposal for an action program with regard to Progressive Jewish education and Reform-Zionist Aliyah.

BASIC THESES FOR A REFORM ZIONISM

In my opinion, our chief concern today, in our confrontation with the Modern Age, is the continued creative survival of the Jewish People, be it in the Diaspora or in Israel. This definition of concern in no way detracts from the focal importance of Israel, whether immanent or actual, as the National Home and center of the Jewish People. But the concept "Eretz Israel" is relevant only within the context of Am Israel and hence, we are bound to accept Eli Wiesel's words to the Jewish Agency assembly in June 1974: "Whatever our geographical or economical differences may be, it is my absolute conviction that the oneness of our people is of an ontological nature. Whoever chooses one against the other cannot be defined as truly Jewish. Whoever attempts to oppose Israel to the Diaspora or vice versa will inevitably betray both in the end."

The Meaning of Reform Zionist Commitment

In order to realize our commitment to deal with the continued survival of the Jewish People, we must reject the views of those, be they Israeli or American, whose point of departure is the dichotomy between Israel and the Diaspora. There can be no Jewish "agenda" which does not base itself on both Diaspora and Israel, if we do indeed affirm the oneness of the Jewish People and its common historical destiny. The Jewish State cannot be seen as an end in itself. We must not deprecate the important role that Israel has played and may still continue to play as a physical haven for Jews in need. But ultimately, as Achad Ha-Am foresaw, the political state of Israel is only a means to the end of making contemporary Judaism viable in all free societies.

Such an orientation is a prerequisite to a Zionist commitment today, whether for an Israeli Jew or an American Jew. The presence of a Jew in Israel does not automatically make him a Zionist. Nor can we accept the concept of Aliyah as an isolated act constituting the end-all of Zionist commitment. True, Aliyah will always be considered a valued act within Jewish tradition, but as an ideal act within the Zionist context it is of significance only insofar as it expresses an abiding commitment to action — a continuing sense of "cavanah."

A suitable *modus* must be found for Diaspora Zionists to express concern in

matters affecting the Zionist nature of the State of Israel. Similarly, the question of Zionist orientation in the Diaspora must be seen as a legitimate subject of concern for Israeli Zionists.

A Reform Zionist commitment implies a readiness to innovate in utilizing and interpreting the Jewish heritage and communal institutions both in the Diaspora and in Israel. Such creative innovation by those firmly rooted in their identification with the Jewish group (Jewish Peoplehood) should result in a vital and dynamic Judaism with its own unique contributions to an ever-changing world. Such a Judaism would, hopefully, impart greater significance and meaning to the individuals who identify with it, and through it.

To achieve maximal self-realization Reform Zionism presumes ongoing interaction between a Progressive Judaism in Israel and the various Liberal Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

An Action Program for Education

The time is ripe for Jewish educators and youth workers in America to confront, coherently, the question of motivating the next generation to involve itself in and to identify with the Jewish People, be it in the Diaspora or in Israel. The historically innovative stance of Reform Judaism makes it a natural candidate for new approaches to Jewish education.

Motivation toward and identification with the Jewish People implies an affective relationship. In the past, an affective relationship to and identification with Judaism was effected through the medium of the organic Jewish community. It was the community and the extended family that provided the social setting and the experiential situation within which education took place. Such an organic community is no more.

It was Martin Buber who pursued the problematics of the breakdown of community and in particular, Jewish community, as a result of the advent of the Modern Age. The ramifications are many — absence of community means absence of dialogue between individuals, it means the alienation of the individual from the group. In Buber's eyes, only through organic community could the individual relate to God. This led Buber to the position that *without authentic Jewish community there can be no authentic Jewish experience*.

Hence, the basic educational problem both in Israel and in the Diaspora is: How do we create an environment of Jewish community within which we can educate our children and youth? Let no one think that this is not a real problem even in Israel. But it is a much greater problem in the Diaspora.

Building a Progression of Experiential Education

The question of Jewish day schools as a learning community is one that the Reform Movement has already begun to contend with, but it remains problematic for the Movement. The trend toward some ethnic retrenchment in America may well prove to be a factor that will hasten American Reform's re-evaluation of its traditional stand on this issue.

Without any doubt, the Jewish camping movement is the bright spot in the educational picture for youth here. Not all Jewish camps are utilizing their potential, but it seems that the Reform Movement, fortunately, has a group of rabbis and educators committed to using the camp setting to create community, to create *chavura*, to acculturate the child and adolescent to certain values, attitudes, and identifications. The availability and utilization of camp as an educational resource for Reform Jewish youth should be a major item on the Reform Movement's agenda. The camp experience should be a stimulus for a creative temple youth group. In part, the content of the camps' educational program is an outstanding example of creative adaptation from the nascent ethos of the Jewish State.

The Role of Israel in the Educational Progression

For the older adolescent (let us not forget that in this society, adolescence as a social and psychological phenomenon, extends well into one's twenties) the question of Jewish identification becomes an acute one. The more developed emotional and intellectual capacity necessitates an additional dimension of experience, of *chavaya* (the experience), to stimulate and enrich the concept of Jewish Peoplehood and to evolve a mature identification with Jewish history. A properly structured Israel experience or series of Israel experiences are the best educational resource at our disposal for ensuring that the Zionist commitment will be one of the components in the crystallizing personality of the older adolescent.

Clearly, the Israel programs of the Reform Movement must be planned and administered in such a way as to integrate Progressive Judaism as part of the *chavaya* (the experience). There must also be advance planning at the congregational level (religious school, junior youth group, senior youth group) with regard to the integration of youth returning from the Israel experience. Part of the programmatic content of that experience should be devoted to the participants' role in their home communities.

A positive Israel experience should also motivate Jewish youth to continue

upgrading their general level of Jewish literacy during college. It should engender the desire to live in Jewish community. The graduates of the UAHC camps and Israel programs constitute the future lay and rabbinic leadership of American Reform, perhaps even more by virtue of common bonds and *chavura*¹ experience than because of intellectual convictions.

A Reform Zionist Jewish Identity

Within this perspective on the development of a positive Jewish identity, it is more than legitimate for the Reform Movement to be concerned with the particular role of a dynamic Liberal Judaism in determining its shape.

We return for a moment to our historical analysis:

The Classical Reform position is that Liberal Judaism sees itself as being concerned with the attempt to reform *Halacha* so that Judaism might, in the words of the Augsburg Synod, “unfold itself in the spirit of the new age.” Let us not be confused by the fact that the events of the past century have necessitated a rather more somber interpretation of the spirit of that “new age.” It is a Zionist thesis that such an “unfolding of Judaism” is maximally possible only if Jewish experience and existence can be expressed autonomously at all levels of social and political organization normative to a given age. Only thus can Judaism potentially confront over a period of generations the possibility of reforming the gamut of *Halacha* whether by interpretation, legislation or both. Therefore, a Reform Zionist outlook must concern itself with the significant augmentation of the Progressive Jewish presence in Israel. It is a primary need for the sake of continued dynamic development of Reform in the Diaspora.

The projected Reform (Progressive Jewish) kibbutz, hopefully the first of a number, is surely the most concrete symbol of the rapprochement between Reform Judaism and Zionism in general and the synthesis between Progressive Judaism and Labor Zionism in particular. The avowed purpose of this kibbutz will be to serve as a proving ground for Progressive Judaism within an authentic community. For a small number of young people, in Israel and in the Diaspora, who will seek a very special type of personal commitment to the ideals of Progressive Judaism, such a kibbutz may provide the path of self-realization. Clearly the existence of Progressive Jewish communities in Israel is of decisive importance for the nature of the educational potential that Israel has for Reform Jewish youth from the Diaspora.

1. *Chavura* — *Gemeinschaft* (fellowship) orientation.

The Need for a Reform-Zionist Aliyah Movement

But this is not enough. If Reform Judaism perceives the political entity of the State of Israel as a framework, as a means for the continued evolution of Jewish law and tradition, then it will concern itself with having a broader impact on the social and religious fabric of the society developing there. The affiliation of the World Union for Progressive Judaism with the World Zionist Organization is quite logical, but in and of itself such an affiliation does not ensure for Reform the role which it desires. Indeed, without a Reform-Zionist Aliyah movement, such an affiliation will lack practical consummation. I say a *Reform-Zionist Aliyah movement*, not merely the Aliyah of individuals who are Reform Jews, even though the Aliyah of such individuals is surely of great significance to themselves and to the ties between America and Israel.

A Reform-Zionist Aliyah movement must organize itself in such a way that it will have specific impact identifiable with its orientation to Progressive Judaism. That means group Aliyah — for example to the same development town or neighborhood in an urban area. It means Aliyah to a locale where the sense of community and the sense of “shlichut” (to the idea of Progressive Judaism) might be more easily maintained against the pressures of everyday life. It might mean Aliyah which would focus on new potential projects for Reform in Israel — e.g., educators who would establish new options in education similar to the Leo Baeck School in Haifa and in other parts of the country.

A COMPLEMENTARY RELATIONSHIP

It will be of importance and significance to Israel and Israeli society if American Jewish youth experience Israel as a norm in their Jewish education. In the opinion of many Israelis, it would be most desirable if a more significant Progressive Jewish presence were established in Israel through a consciously Reform-Zionist Aliyah. *But the decisive importance of these phenomena will be in the vitalizing feedback to American Reform Judaism itself and in ensuring its capability of responding to the challenge of our times with a viable Judaism.* This is the nature of the complementary relationship between Zionism and Reform Judaism as I see it today.