

The Eras of Reform Judaism
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Touchstone Text

It is not I that belong to the past, but the past that belongs to me
-- Antin, Promised Land, 1912

Goals

1. PPs will have a better understanding of Reform Judaism
2. PPs will be able to apply their understanding of Reform Judaism in their home congregation
3. PPs will be inspired to evaluate their Reform Jewish beliefs
4. The PPs will be able to understand the different platforms of Reform Judaism over time.

Objectives

1. The PPs will be able to distinguish between different eras of Reform Judaism.
3. The PPs will create a platform for their TYG based on their beliefs.
4. The PPs will explore the platforms of Reform Judaism.
3. The PPs can articulate what Reform Judaism is and how it has evolved over time when asked to do so

Materials

1. Markers/pens/pencils (Enough for a couple per TYG)
2. 40 Highlighters (5 per group)
3. One piece of printer paper per TYG
4. Appendix A
5. Appendix B
6. Appendix C
7. Appendix D
8. Appendix E
9. Appendix F
10. Appendix G (8 copies; one per group)
11. Appendix H (only excerpts on God, religious life, torah, Israel, and Jewish people)
12. Appendix I (only excerpts on God, religious life, torah, Israel, and Jewish people)
13. Appendix J (only excerpts on God, religious life, torah, Israel, and Jewish people)
14. Appendix K (only excerpts on God, religious life, torah, Israel, and Jewish people)

15. Appendix L. (one per TYG)
16. Costumes representative of the different years for the Rabbis

People

- 2 Program Leaders/1 Time Keeper
- 4 “Rabbis”
- 8 Groups
- 8 Group Leaders
- Participants
- TYG Advisors if Available

Space Needed

- Port Hall set up with 4 chairs in a circle in the center
- Bitan area
- Rotunda
- Grassy area between Port Hall and Rotunda

Time Table

00:00-00:07 Intro
00:07-00:35 Platform Activity and Discussion
00:35-00:37 Transition to TYG
00:37-01:07 TYGs Time
01:07-01:25 Conclusion

Detailed Procedure

00:00-00:07 Intro

*As PPs enter Port Hall two board members will ask them to sit quietly in the middle of a circle of 4 chairs. Each chair will have a person dressed as a Rabbi from the specific era they represent. Then, the four Rabbis will act out **Appendix A**. After acting the whole script out, PPs will split into 8 groups based on a sticker on each nametag.*

00:07-00:35 Platform Activity and Discussion

00:07-00:23 Platform Activity

*After PPs split into 8 groups, a group leader will take 1 group anywhere in Port Hall, the Bitan, or the grassy area between the Bitan and Port Hall. Each group leader will divide the group accordingly into 5 mini groups. The GLs will instruct the groups to identify the important positions and beliefs on the given topic of the platform according to **Appendix G**. Each mini group will also have **Appendix H, I, J, or K** depending on the year their large group is studying. Each mini group will highlight the points of their*

given topic. This is so the group can learn from what the group has picked out instead of being told. They will spend 5 minutes identifying and 10 minutes presenting their topic.

00:23-00:35 Discussion

Group leaders will then hold discussions with their groups. They can use their assigned **Appendix (B, C, D, or E)** for questions but they can also make questions as the discussion progresses

00:35-00:37 Transition to TYG

Each TYG will be pre-assigned a place as to where they will meet. During this time, the PPs will go to their designated space.

00:37-01:07 TYGs Time

During this time, each TYG member will work individually to fill in their own personal chart on their beliefs that have been discussed prior. PPs will be encouraged to use what they learned and talked about in the group discussions. Once everyone in the TYG is done with their chart the TYG will debate about their beliefs. After everyone has had a chance to share their opinion the TYG will discuss what they believe as a whole. After the TYG is at agreement they will record their beliefs on a clean piece of printer paper. PPs will be encouraged to use what they learned and talked about in the group discussions

Please see **Appendix L** for the guide that the TYG will use

01:07-01:25 Conclusion

PPs will split up by region. All NFTY CAR PPs will go to Port Hall and all NFTY NO PPs will go to the Bitan. Once in the designated locations, PPs will be instructed that one TYG at a time, the TYG will come to the front of the group at share one aspect of their platform. TYGs will be strongly encouraged to share about their most meaningful point of the platform. Once all TYGs share, the program leader that is with the region will say "Just because we wrote these platforms, does not signify the end of defining our beliefs. We encourage you to share these platforms with your TYG and congregations and expand and edit them as well. Every 30 years, the Reform Jewish platforms are rewritten by most of the rabbis in the world. As your TYG evolves over time, we hope that your platform evolves as well."

Appendix A

Rabbi Echad(1885): ... And with that, the last sentence of the Pittsburgh Platform will say that we discourage Jews from making Aliyah. All Jews are Jews because of religion, not because of what ethnic group they are a part of

Rabbi Arbah (1999): Excuse me?! You are a Rabbi of the JEWISH PEOPLE and you are going to say that we discourage making Aliyah?!

Rabbi Shalosh (1976): Chill out man, in 1976 our platform said people can live anywhere they choose and still be Jews! I mean let's be real, the civil rights act just got passed and people can be who they want where they want. Blacks can be blacks, Mexicans can be Mexicans, and Jews can be Jews without worrying about their safety!

Rabbi Shtaim (1937): NO, NO, NO! It's 1937! Jewish people are being targeted by Hitler's regime and we need our own place with only Jews and the only place for that is Israel!

Rabbi Arbah: Reform Jews should always make choices and should be encouraged to do so, saying that people shouldn't live in Israel is giving them no options!

Rabbi Shalosh: Guys, you're upsetting G-d! Just take a breather, step back, and figure out what the man upstairs would want! After all, he's the center of Jewish life.

Rabbi Shtaim: But being able to choose what the center of a Jewish life, let's people define their Jewish self!

Rabbi Shalosh: How can you say that?! All Jews must learn about their past because their past defines a Jewish people!!

Rabbi Echad: You must understand that their past will define people based on how it's interpreted, such as the teachings of the Torah are meant to be interpreted, in my platform we are strongly against teaching the Torah literally and interpretations make more sense anyways!

Rabbi Shtaim: Wait, stop right there! We should adapt to all the teachings and apply them ALL in our daily lives

Rabbi Arbah: You just all need to take a chill pill, as Reform Jews, we should accept all Jewish people and whatever lifestyle choices they make.

Rabbi Echad: You say that despite the fact we all know the ancient laws shouldn't and don't apply to modern Jews.

Rabbi Shalosh: Can this just be done with? Peace and love man, BSVA!

Rabbi Shtaim: Umm no way.

Comment [AB(-G-N2): This is a good script. I'd love to see it be a little bit longer and have each rabbi be more distinct. It's tough to distinguish between anyone but the 'don't go to Israel' and 'go to Israel' positions.

Rabbi Echad: One of us is right and we obviously know who that is!

Rabbi Arbah: Have you all ever realized we all live in completely different time periods?

(All but Rabbi Arbah looks at their clothes)

Rabbi Echad: No.

Rabbi Shtaim: Shut up! So? What's the point?

Rabbi Shalosh: What are you trying to get at? Yeah, we know we are different but what's the big deal?

Rabbi Echad: That my platform of Reform Judaism is the right one!

Rabbi Arbah: No, my platform of Reform Judaism is the right one!

Rabbi Shtaim: No, my platform of Reform Judaism is the right one!

Rabbi Shalosh: No, my platform of Reform Judaism is the right one!

Rabbi Arbah: Have you all ever thought that maybe because we lived in different time periods, dress differently, act differently, saw different things, that maybe that's why we all have different views?

Appendix B

1885 Questions

1. Which historic events occurred during this time period?
2. How do you feel these events could have affected the Reform Jewish people's beliefs of the time?
3. Why do you think the Rabbis in 1885 believed Judaism beliefs about G-d was the highest understanding of what God is?
 - a. How does this affect your image of the Rabbis during 1885?
4. How does your congregation follow the Torah?
 - a. Why do you think the Rabbis during 1885 only wanted to follow certain teachings in the Torah. Does this affect you today?
5. What defines you as a Jewish person?
 - a. How do you or do you not fit the platform of the Jewish people in 1885?
6. How do you feel when you pray with your Talit?
 - a. Why do you think the Rabbis in 1885 looked down on wearing special religious clothing? Did it have to do with the time period or the mind set of the Jewish leaders at the time?
7. Why do you think the Rabbis in 1885 wanted to bring justice and righteousness to Israel?
 - a. How did it reflect on the society at the time?
8. Is being Jewish for you more of a religion or a culture and why?
 - a. Why do you think Judaism as viewed as only a religion in 1885?
 - b. Do you think there is a reason why the Rabbis in 1885 did not feel a connected to Israel in a culture way?

Appendix C

1937 Questions

1. Which historic events occurred during this time period?
2. How do you feel these events could have affected the Reform Jewish people's beliefs of the time?
3. In 1937 the Rabbis view on G-d is modest compared to their view of G-d in 1885. Why do you think they only state in 1937 that G-d teaches them the right way to live, while in 1885 they believed the Jewish people understood G-d at a higher level than other Jews in the world.
4. Has your prayer experience transformed over time?
 - a. If so, how is this connected to the Rabbis view that each generation must adapt the teachings of the Torah to its own needs.
5. What is important about Judaism being the soul and the Jewish People eyeing the body?
 - a. Do you think this still stands true today in Reform Judaism?
6. In 1937 the Rabbis state that Judaism is a way of life and that the Jewish people must observe the Sabbath. Why is the need for culture so strong in 1937?
7. The Rabbis believe in 1937 that the Jewish people must promote good relations between different groups. What was the state of the relations of the Jewish people during 1937 with other countries?
 - a. Why was it then necessary to promote relationships?
8. Why do the Rabbis support a Jewish migration to Israel also known as the land of Palestine in 1937?

Appendix D
1976 Questions

1. Which historic events occurred during this time period?
 2. How do you feel these events could have affected the Reform Jewish people's beliefs of the time?
 3. Do you feel the G-d should be at the center of our lives?
 4. Why would people feel that G-d should be at the center?
 5. What do you feel defines you as a Jewish person?
 6. Does the heritage define a Jew? If so, is it important to learn Hebrew and be a part of the ethnic part of Judaism?
 7. In 1976, the Rabbis said that Reform Jews should study Jewish traditions and choose to observe those which are important to each person, what was so important about that statement?
 8. Why was it important to ensure that the Jewish community in Israel was continuing to grow?
 9. What did the Rabbis mean when they said "...urge Jews to make their lives Jewishly meaningful"?
 10. Does a person have to live in Israel to make his/her life "Jewishly meaningful"?
 11. If Israel did not exist, where do you feel a Jewish person could live to make his/her life "Jewishly meaningful"?
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Appendix E
1999 Questions

1. Which historic events occurred during this time period?
 2. How do you feel these events could have affected the Reform Jewish people's beliefs of the time?
 3. Why do modern day Jews feel it's important to study the Torah's teachings?
 4. What do you consider "your larger Jewish family"? What does it mean by embracing them?
 5. What does it mean to "improve our Judaism"?
 6. While there is room to improve our world with Tikkun Olam, what could we do to "improve our Judaism"?
 7. Modern Jews' view of Israel is that Israel should express the best values of Judaism, what are those "best values" and how can we demonstrate them?
 8. Why is important to support Jews all over the world, what can we gain from them?
 9. How can every person have a sacred relationship with G-d if we all make the same covenant with G-d?
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Appendix F

	God	Torah	Jewish People	Religious Life	Mission of Israel	State of Israel
1885	<p>The One Jewish God is the same God worshipped in other religions. Judaism's belief about God is the highest understanding of what God is.</p>	<p>The Torah was written in an ancient Israel, a time and place very different from our own. Today we follow only those Torah teachings which are fitting and holy for our modern world.</p>	<p>The Jewish People is made up of those who are dedicated to the rational ideals of our historic faith and the spreading of God's law of morality to the world.</p>	<p>The ancient laws of kashrut, the priesthood, and special religious clothing are not appropriate for modern Jews. We prefer Jewish practices which elevate our spiritual life.</p>	<p>We feel obligated by the spirit of Moses's law to participate in the great task of modern times: to bring justice and righteousness as solutions to the problems of society.</p>	<p>We see ourselves as members of a religion, not as members of a people/ an ethnic group/ or a nationality. We believe that we can build and find God's messianic kingdom in the whole world (not only in Israel).</p>
1937	<p>There is only One God, and this One God created and rules the world and teaches us the right way to live.</p>	<p>The Torah is valuable for its moral teachings and insights, but each generation must adapt these teaching to its needs.</p>	<p>Judaism is the soul and the Jewish People is the body.</p>	<p>Judaism as a way of life is more than just a moral and spiritual religion. It also requires the observance of Sabbaths and holy days and of those customs and ceremonies which possess inspirational value.</p>	<p>Judaism seeks a just society, one that is fair, one that takes care of the poor, offers opportunity for all, that promotes good relations between different groups, and will establish justice for all.</p>	<p>The land of Palestine has been made holy by Jewish memory and hope and we support the up-building of the land of Israel as a Jewish homeland.</p>

1976	Different Jews have different ideas about God, but we unite in the belief that God is real and at the center of our lives.	Torah—both in its ancient words and its modern adaptations—results from the ongoing relationship between God and the Jewish People.	The Jewish people must be defined both by religious faith and by our ethnic/cultural heritage. This heritage includes reverence for both the Hebrew language and the Land of Israel.	Jewish rituals and customs, Sabbaths, holy days, and life-cycle ceremonies connect us to God and to other Jews. Reform Jews are called upon to study Jewish traditions and to choose those which are meaningful to them.	We are committed both to establishing a just society and to maintaining a thriving Jewish community.	We are privileged to live in a time where meaningful Jewish lives can be lived in Israel, in the United States, and in other countries. We rejoice in this development and urge Jews to make their lives Jewishly meaningful wherever they live.
1999	We believe that we are in a sacred relationship with God, a relationship that we can experience as we encounter other people and the natural world.	Torah is a gift from God, and we are called to study it and to follow its teaching, for through Torah and its mitzvot, we craft our relationship with God.	The Jewish People is united by love of Israel and love for other Jews. Though we may have many differences, we embrace each other as members of this larger Jewish family.	The holy observances of Jews are the ways that we can meet God and live lives filled with goodness and holiness.	We believe that God gives us a dual mission: to continually improve our Judaism and to continually improve our world (<i>tikkun alam</i>).	We are committed to the State of Israel and urge it to express the best values of Judaism in everything that it does. We also support Jewish life in other parts of the world and urge all Jews to support Jews everywhere.

Appendix G

God	Torah	Jewish People	Religious Life	Israel

Appendix H, I, J, and K

I cannot figure out how to attach the original platforms, which are in PDF format to this document, therefore I attached it in the email

Appendix L

TYG GUIDE

Please follow these steps with your TYG 😊

- 1 Individually fill your own chart with your personal belief about each topic. The attached chart should be used as a guide for the topics your TYG can look at but you are not limited to those. Some other suggestions are
 - o Kashrut rules at events
 - o Ethical voting procedures
 - o Services at events
 - o Limudim at events
- 2 Debate as a group about your beliefs. Please listen to everyone and remember everyone is entitled to his or her opinion.
- 3 Discuss as a group what your TYG together thinks about each topic. Even if not everyone in your group agrees on something find a common ground. Please record your beliefs on a group chart.

When your TYG is done, please return to Port Hall if you are in CAR or the Bitan if you are in NO.

	God	Torah	Jewish People	Religious Life	Isi
Personal Belief					
Why?					