

Program Title: Building Our Judaism: The Reform Movement
Category: NFTY Study Theme 5765
Author(s): Sabrina Sussman, PVP and Sarah Ruben, RCVP – NFTY-NEL
Created for: NFTY Study Theme Proposal, NFTY Convention 2005, Los Angeles, CA

Touchstone Text:

"Throughout our history, we Jews have remained firmly rooted in Jewish tradition, even as we have learned much from our encounters with other cultures. The great contribution of Reform Judaism is that it has enabled the Jewish people to introduce innovation while preserving tradition, to embrace diversity while asserting commonality, to affirm beliefs without rejecting those who doubt, and to bring faith to sacred texts without sacrificing critical scholarship."

-from the Preamble to "A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism", adopted at the 1999 Pittsburgh Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis

Goals:

1. To educate PP's on the history and development of the Reform Movement.
2. To build PP's awareness about the fundamental organizations of Reform Judaism, such as the URJ (UAHC), CCAR, HUC-JIR, NFTY, and the RAC.
3. To demonstrate to PP's the processes involved in the formal assumption of religious beliefs in the North American Reform Movement.

Objectives:

1. PP's will identify their challenges with present-day Judaism.
2. PP's will develop a platform representing their beliefs, and addressing their challenges.
3. PP's will organize the governing bodies of their stream of Judaism, representing the final development of their beliefs as a group.
4. PP's will present, and compare their results with those of other groups.

Materials:

Copies of CCAR Platforms for all groups (attached, 1 per group)
Copies of Select Bodies of Reform Judaism (attached, make 5 copies per group)
Poster Markers (a few per group) Post-It Paper (1 pad per group)
Paper (small stack per group) Pens/Pencils for PP's

People:

One or two main program facilitators One groupleader per group of about 10 PP's

Space Needed:

Multiple breakout rooms (one per group) One central room

Timeline:

00:00-00:07 Whole Group Introduction, Split into groups, Travel time
00:07-00:22 Activity One: "Defining our Challenges"
00:22-00:37 Activity Two: "Developing our Platforms"
00:37-00:52 Activity Three: "Organizing our Movement"
00:52-00:57 Travel time
00:57-01:00 Wrap-up

Detailed Procedure:

00:00-00:07 Whole Group Introduction, Split into groups, Travel time

Main program facilitator says: "Today, we will be looking at this year's NFTY Study Theme, 'Taking the Reform Jewish Journey: Embracing Tradition and Exploring Innovation.' Split in smaller groups, we'll take the journey that created Reform Judaism."

Divide PPs into groups of about 10, and each group should travel to a breakout location with a groupleader.

00:07-00:22 **Activity One: "Defining our Challenges"**

Groupleader says: "Welcome everyone! Our first activity takes us back to Germany in the early 1800's, a time when German Jews felt dissatisfied with the established expressions of Judaism. At the time, being Jewish meant being traditionally observant, meaning one's Judaism was always noticeable. For example, men wore kippot and tzitzit (fringes), and Jews lived in communities only with other Jews. Seeing themselves as enlightened and cultured people, German Jews felt the accepted expressions of Judaism were holding them back, restraining their Judaism. The Jews in Germany wanted to split away from what they disliked about Judaism, in order to better practice it for themselves. While we as modern Reform Jews do not necessarily come across the same challenges as these German Jews, we face challenges of our own. **What are your challenges with Judaism as it is expressed today?** If there were something you could change, what would it be? What makes it hard for you to connect to the practice of Judaism? We'll brainstorm challenges as a group, and then record them on this Post-It paper."

Group brainstorms and records challenges as described.

Once completed, the groupleader should read the following transition information before moving on to the second activity. "The German Jews of the 1800's were the first Reform Jews, as they allowed their challenges with Judaism to reform their practices as Jews. They formed their first temple in 1818, the Hamburg Temple. Prayers and sermons in German, not Hebrew, were introduced. Also, they began to omit prayers dealing with issues they disagreed with (such as the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem). Around the 1840's, the new German style of Reform Judaism began to spread throughout Europe. At the same time, beginning in the 1830's, German Jews began to immigrate to America in substantial numbers. Revolutions and riots in Europe in 1848 spurred even greater Jewish immigration to America. As more and more Jews came to America, Reform Judaism began to establish itself in the United States."

00:22-00:37 **Activity Two: "Developing our Platforms"**

Groupleader says: "As Reform Jews began to organize their beliefs and interpretations of Judaism, platforms outlining the basic tenets of Reform Judaism were developed. Within Reform Judaism, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, or CCAR, a group of all Reform rabbis, publishes these platforms. The first CCAR Platform was adopted in 1885, and since then there have been four new platforms reevaluating the Movement's beliefs. The CCAR Platforms are adopted by rabbinic action, and used as guiding sources of Reform Jewish thought. Attached are the five actual platforms written and passed by the CCAR. Using our group list of challenges and the CCAR platforms as a guide, we're going to create our own Reform Jewish platform. Our platform should address our basic beliefs, our challenges from the previous activity, and how we intend to overcome those challenges. We'll record our platform on the Post-It Paper."

Groupleader guides creation of platform as described above, using CCAR Platforms as guides and recording the final platform on the Post-It Paper.

00:37-00:52 **Activity Three: "Organizing our Movement"**

Groupleader says: "Over the years, Reform Judaism in North America began to organize itself into many different bodies to best achieve its purposes. We'll go around now and hear about the main bodies that are a part of the Reform Movement."

Groupleader distributes copies of descriptions of bodies of the Reform Movement (about 5 copies per group, people can share), and has separate PPs read aloud each paragraph description of a body of the Reform Movement (see attached page "Select Bodies of Reform Judaism").

After all descriptions are read, groupleader says: "As you can see, the Reform movement organized itself into many bodies, from individual congregations to rabbinical schools to NFTY and more. Earlier, we stated our personal challenges with Judaism today, and developed a platform. Now, like we heard about for North American Reform Jewry, we're going to organize our movement. How can we organize to combat our perceived challenges and live out our platform? We can create a different stream of Judaism with governing bodies, or we can focus on developing individual concepts we think will further our Judaism, such as camps, congregations, or anything else. We can use the information we just read as reference on the formation of the Reform Movement in North America. Again, we'll record our thoughts on the Post-It Paper. This will be the final activity in the creation of our movement."

Groupleader guides group through organizing their movement as described above, recording the final organization on the Post-It Paper.

00:52-00:57 **Travel time**

Groupleader leads group back to central location for wrap-up. The group should bring all supplies back with them. As each group arrives, they should bring their Post-It Papers to the front, where they will be put on display.

00:57-01:00 **Wrap-up**

When all groups have returned to central location, main program facilitator says: "Today, we have each, in groups, experienced the journey that builds Reform Judaism. The Post-It Papers from each group will be on display so that we can all see some of the different paths of reforming. Changing in response to our own needs, and making educated decisions, we took the Reform Jewish journey, stating our challenges, developing platforms, and organizing to function as a movement. We can see that Reform Judaism is identified by its constant changing response to the outside world. Beginning with the German Jews of the 1800's, and continuing through today with the youth of NFTY, Reform Judaism is built on the belief and practice of innovation of Jewish thought and tradition in response to modern times. Now that we have seen how to build Reform Judaism, it is upon us to continue building our Judaism, to learn and grow, embracing tradition and exploring innovation."

Select Bodies of Reform Judaism

In 1873, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise founded the central body of the Reform Movement in North America, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, or UAHC. Now known as the Union for Reform Judaism, or URJ, the Union is the congregational arm of the Reform Movement. Its "primary mission is to create and sustain vibrant Jewish congregations wherever Reform Jews live. The Union provides leadership and vision to Reform Jews on spiritual, ethical, and political issues as well as materials and consultation for programs in the congregation. The Union also provides opportunities for individual growth and identity that congregations and individuals cannot provide by themselves, including camps and Israel programs, study kallot, and national and regional biennials." The URJ is affiliated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism, or WUPJ, which serves congregations and communities in nearly 40 countries, encompassing over 1,200 Reform, Progressive, Liberal and Reconstructionist congregations and over 1.5 million members throughout the world. (<http://urj.org/about/>)

In 1875, the Hebrew Union College, or HUC, was founded in Cincinnati. HUC served as the rabbinical seminary of the Reform Movement. Since then, in 1950, HUC merged with the Jewish Institute of Religion, which was founded by Stephen S. Wise to train rabbis with a more national orientation. HUC-JIR, the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, is the "academic, spiritual, and professional leadership development center of Reform Judaism. HUC-JIR educates men and women for service to American and world Jewry as rabbis, cantors, educators, and communal service professionals, and offers graduate and postgraduate degree programs to scholars of all faiths." HUC-JIR now has four campuses in Jerusalem, Cincinnati, New York, and Los Angeles. (<http://www.huc.edu/about/history.shtml>)

In 1889, Isaac Mayer Wise established the Central Conference of American Rabbis, or CCAR. It is the body of all rabbis associated with Reform Judaism. The CCAR governs the Reform rabbinate with ethics codes and guides official Reform practice and belief with "responsa, authoritative answers to questions about Reform Judaism and Jewish living," "resolutions, formal positions adopted by vote at CCAR conventions," and "platforms, broad statements about Reform Judaism adopted by Reform rabbis". The CCAR has published five platforms over the years, defining Reform Judaism. (<http://www.ccarnet.org/index.html>)

In 1939, NFTY was founded as the youth arm of the Union. It was created at the urging of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods in order to provide an outlet for young people to engage in the life of their synagogues. In 2005, NFTY became a snif, or branch, of Netzer Olami, the youth movement of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, or RAC, was formed over 40 years ago by The Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, a joint commission of the URJ and the CCAR. The RAC "pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the American Jewish community and serving as its advocate in the capital of the United States" (<http://urj.org/csa/index.cfm>)

CCAR-Declaration of Principles- 1885 Pittsburgh Conference

Convening at the call of Kaufmann Kohler of New York, Reform rabbis from around the United States met from November 16 through November 19, 1885 with Isaac Mayer Wise presiding. The meeting was declared the continuation of the Philadelphia Conference of 1869, which was the continuation of the German Conference of 1841 to 1846. The rabbis adopted the following seminal text:

1. We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers, in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended midst continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation, this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.
2. We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as the priest of the one God, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domain of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age, and at times clothing its conception of divine Providence and Justice dealing with men in miraculous narratives.
3. We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only its moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.
4. We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.
5. 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.
6. We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason. We are convinced of the utmost necessity of preserving the historical identity with our great past. Christianity and Islam, being daughter religions of Judaism, we appreciate their providential mission, to aid in the spreading of monotheistic and moral truth. We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.
7. We reassert the doctrine of Judaism that the soul is immortal, grounding the belief on the divine nature of human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We reject as ideas not rooted in Judaism, the beliefs both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (Hell and Paradise) as abodes for everlasting punishment and reward.
8. In full accordance with the spirit of the Mosaic legislation, which strives to regulate the relations between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.

CCAR-The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism-1937 Columbus

In view of the changes that have taken place in the modern world and the consequent need of stating anew the teachings of Reform Judaism, the Central Conference of American Rabbis makes the following declaration of principles. It presents them not as a fixed creed but as a guide for the progressive elements of Jewry.

A. Judaism and its Foundations

1. *Nature of Judaism.* Judaism is the historical religious experience of the Jewish people. Though growing out of Jewish life, its message is universal, aiming at the union and perfection of mankind under the sovereignty of God. Reform Judaism recognizes the principle of progressive development in religion and consciously applies this principle to spiritual as well as to cultural and social life. Judaism welcomes all truth, whether written in the pages of scripture or deciphered from the records of nature. The new discoveries of science, while replacing the older scientific views underlying our sacred literature, do not conflict with the essential spirit of religion as manifested in the consecration of man's will, heart and mind to the service of God and of humanity.
2. *God.* The heart of Judaism and its chief contribution to religion is the doctrine of the One, living God, who rules the world through law and love. In Him all existence has its creative source and mankind its ideal of conduct. Though transcending time and space, He is the indwelling Presence of the world. We worship Him as the Lord of the universe and as our merciful Father.
3. *Man.* Judaism affirms that man is created in the Divine image. His spirit is immortal. He is an active co-worker with God. As a child of God, he is endowed with moral freedom and is charged with the responsibility of overcoming evil and striving after ideal ends.
4. *Torah.* God reveals Himself not only in the majesty, beauty and orderliness of nature, but also in the vision and moral striving of the human spirit. Revelation is a continuous process, confined to no one group and to no one age. Yet the people of Israel, through its prophets and sages, achieved unique insight in the realm of religious truth. The Torah, both written and oral, enshrines Israel's ever-growing consciousness of God and of the moral law. It preserves the historical precedents, sanctions and norms of Jewish life, and seeks to mould it in the patterns of goodness and of holiness. Being products of historical processes, certain of its laws have lost their binding force with the passing of the conditions that called them forth. But as a depository of permanent spiritual ideals, the Torah remains the dynamic source of the life of Israel. Each age has the obligation to adapt the teachings of the Torah to its basic needs in consonance with the genius of Judaism.
5. *Israel.* 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 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. Throughout the ages it has been Israel's mission to witness to the Divine in the face of every form of paganism and materialism. We regard it as our historic task to cooperate with all men in the establishment of the kingdom of God, of universal brotherhood, Justice, truth and peace on earth. This is our Messianic goal.

B. Ethics

6. *Ethics and Religion.* In Judaism religion and morality blend into an indissoluble unity. Seeking God means to strive after holiness, righteousness and goodness. The love of God is incomplete without the love of one's fellowmen. Judaism emphasizes the kinship of the human race, the sanctity and worth of human life and personality and the right of the individual to freedom and to the pursuit of his chosen vocation. Justice to all, irrespective of race, sect or class, is the inalienable right and the inescapable obligation of all. The state and organized government exist in order to further these ends.
7. *Social justice.* Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to the economic order, to industry and commerce, and to national and international affairs. It aims at the elimination of man-made misery and suffering, of poverty and degradation, of tyranny and slavery, of social inequality and prejudice, of ill-will and strife. It advocates the promotion of harmonious relations between warring classes on the basis of equity and justice, and the creation of conditions under which human personality may flourish. It pleads for the safeguarding of childhood against exploitation. It champions the cause of all who work and of their right to an adequate standard of living, as prior to the rights of property. Judaism emphasizes the duty of charity, and strives for a social order which will protect men against the material disabilities of old age, sickness and unemployment.
8. *Peace.* 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 and relies upon moral education, love and sympathy to secure human progress. It regards justice as the foundation of the well-being of nations and the condition of enduring peace. It urges organized international action for disarmament, collective security and world peace.

C. Religious Practice

9. *The Religious Life.* Jewish life is marked by consecration to these ideals of Judaism. It calls for faithful participation in the life of the Jewish community as it finds expression in home, synagogue and school and in all other agencies that enrich Jewish life and promote its welfare. The Home has been and must continue to be a stronghold of Jewish life, hallowed by the spirit of love and reverence, by moral discipline and religious observance and worship. The Synagogue is the oldest and most democratic institution in Jewish life. It is the prime communal agency by which Judaism is fostered and preserved. It links the Jews of each community and unites them with all Israel. The perpetuation of Judaism as a living force depends upon religious knowledge and upon the Education of each new generation in our rich cultural and spiritual heritage.

Prayer is the voice of religion, the language of faith and aspiration. It directs man's heart and mind Godward, voices the needs and hopes of the community and reaches out after goals which invest life with supreme value. To deepen the spiritual life of our people, we must cultivate the traditional habit of communion with God through prayer in both home and synagogue.

Judaism as a way of life requires in addition to its moral and spiritual demands, the preservation of the Sabbath, festivals and Holy Days, the retention and development of such customs, symbols and ceremonies as possess inspirational value, the cultivation of distinctive forms of religious art and music and the use of Hebrew, together with the vernacular, in our worship and instruction.

These timeless aims and ideals of our faith we present anew to a confused and troubled world. We call upon our fellow Jews to rededicate themselves to them, and, in harmony with all men, hopefully and courageously to continue Israel's eternal quest after God and His kingdom.

- - - - -

CCAR-Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective- 1976 San Francisco

The Central Conference of American Rabbis has on special occasions described the spiritual state of Reform Judaism. The centenaries of the founding of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion seem an appropriate time for another such effort. We therefore record our sense of the unity of our movement today.

One Hundred Years: What We Have Taught

We celebrate the role of Reform Judaism in North America, the growth of our movement on this free ground, the great contributions of our membership to the dreams and achievements of this society. We also feel great satisfaction at how much of our pioneering conception of Judaism has been accepted by the Household of Israel. It now seems self-evident to most Jews: that our tradition should interact with modern culture; that its forms ought to reflect a contemporary esthetic; that its scholarship needs to be conducted by modern, critical methods; and that change has been and must continue to be a fundamental reality in Jewish life. Moreover, though some still disagree, substantial numbers have also accepted our teachings: that the ethics of universalism implicit in traditional Judaism must be an explicit part of our Jewish duty; that women have full rights to practice Judaism; and that Jewish obligation begins with the informed will of every individual. Most modern Jews, within their various religious movements, are embracing Reform Jewish perspectives. We see this past century as having confirmed the essential wisdom of our movement.

One Hundred Years: What We Have Learned

Obviously, much else has changed in the past century. We continue to probe the extraordinary events of the past generation, seeking to understand their meaning and to incorporate their significance in our lives. The Holocaust shattered our easy optimism about humanity and its inevitable progress. The State of Israel, through its many accomplishments, raised our sense of the Jews as a people to new heights of aspiration and devotion. The widespread threats to freedom, the problems inherent in the explosion of new knowledge and of ever more powerful technologies, and the spiritual emptiness of much of Western culture have taught us to be less dependent on the values of our society and to reassert what remains perennially valid in Judaism's teaching. We have learned that the survival of the Jewish people is of highest priority and that in carrying out our Jewish responsibilities we help move humanity toward its messianic fulfillment.

Diversity Within Unity, the Hallmark of Reform

Reform Jews respond to change in various ways according to the Reform principle of the autonomy of the individual. However, Reform Judaism does more than tolerate diversity; it engenders it. In our uncertain historical situation we must expect to have far greater diversity than previous generations knew. How we shall live with diversity without stifling dissent and without paralyzing our ability to take positive action will test our character and our principles. We stand open to any position thoughtfully and conscientiously advocated in the spirit of Reform Jewish belief. While we may differ in our interpretation and application of the ideas enunciated here, we accept such differences as precious and see in them Judaism's best hope for confronting whatever the future holds for us. Yet in all our diversity we perceive a certain unity and we shall not allow our differences in some particulars to obscure what binds us together.

1. *God* -- The affirmation of God has always been essential to our people's will to survive. In our struggle through the centuries to preserve our faith we have experienced and conceived of God in many ways. The trials of our own time and the challenges of modern culture have made steady belief and clear understanding difficult for some. Nevertheless, we ground our lives, personally and communally, on God's reality and remain open to new experiences and conceptions of the Divine. Amid the mystery we call life, we affirm that human beings, created in God's image, share in God's eternity despite the mystery we call death.
2. *The People Israel* -- The Jewish people and Judaism defy precise definition because both are in the process of becoming. Jews, by birth or conversion, constitute an uncommon union of faith and peoplehood. Born as Hebrews in the ancient Near East, we are bound together like all ethnic groups by language, land, history, culture, and institutions. But the people of Israel is unique because of its involvement with God and its resulting perception of the human condition. Throughout our long history our people has been inseparable from its religion with its messianic hope that humanity will be redeemed.
3. *Torah* -- Torah results from the relationship between God and the Jewish people. The records of our earliest confrontations are uniquely important to us. Lawgivers and prophets, historians and poets gave us a heritage whose study is a religious imperative and whose practice is our chief means to holiness. Rabbis and teachers, philosophers and mystics, gifted Jews in every age amplified the Torah tradition. For millennia, the creation of Torah has not ceased and Jewish creativity in our time is adding to the chain of tradition.
4. *Our Religious Obligations: Religious Practice* -- Judaism emphasizes action rather than creed as the primary expression of a religious life, the means by which we strive to achieve universal justice and peace. Reform Judaism shares this emphasis on duty and obligation. Our founders stressed that the Jew's ethical responsibilities, personal and social, are enjoined by God. The past century has taught us that the claims made upon us may begin with our ethical obligations but they extend to many other aspects of Jewish living, including: creating a Jewish home centered on family devotion; lifelong study; private prayer and public worship; daily religious observance; keeping the Sabbath and the holy days; celebrating the major events of life; involvement with the synagogues and community; and other activities which promote the survival of the Jewish people and

enhance its existence. Within each area of Jewish observance Reform Jews are called upon to confront the claims of Jewish tradition, however differently perceived, and to exercise their individual autonomy, choosing and creating on the basis of commitment and knowledge.

5. *Our Obligations: The State of Israel and the Diaspora* -- We are privileged to live in an extraordinary time, one in which a third Jewish commonwealth has been established in our people's ancient homeland. We are bound to that land and to the newly reborn State of Israel by innumerable religious and ethnic ties. We have been enriched by its culture and ennobled by its indomitable spirit. We see it providing unique opportunities for Jewish self-expression. We have both a stake and a responsibility in building the State of Israel, assuring its security, and defining its Jewish character. We encourage aliyah for those who wish to find maximum personal fulfillment in the cause of Zion. We demand that Reform Judaism be unconditionally legitimized in the State of Israel.

At the same time that we consider the State of Israel vital to the welfare of Judaism everywhere, we reaffirm the mandate of our tradition to create strong Jewish communities wherever we live. A genuine Jewish life is possible in any land, each community developing its own particular character and determining its Jewish responsibilities. The foundation of Jewish community life is the synagogue. It leads us beyond itself to cooperate with other Jews, to share their concerns, and to assume leadership in communal affairs. We are therefore committed to the full democratization of the Jewish community and to its hallowing in terms of Jewish values.

The State of Israel and the Diaspora, in fruitful dialogue, can show how a people transcends nationalism even as it affirms it, thereby setting an example for humanity which remains largely concerned with dangerously parochial goals.

6. *Our Obligations: Survival and Service* -- Early Reform Jews, newly admitted to general society and seeing in this the evidence of a growing universalism, regularly spoke of Jewish purpose in terms of Jewry's service to humanity. In recent years we have become freshly conscious of the virtues of pluralism and the values of particularism. The Jewish people in its unique way of life validates its own worth while working toward the fulfillment of its messianic expectations.

Until the recent past our obligations to the Jewish people and to all humanity seemed congruent. At times now these two imperatives appear to conflict. We know of no simple way to resolve such tensions. We must, however, confront them without abandoning either of our commitments. A universal concern for humanity unaccompanied by a devotion to our particular people is self-destructive; a passion for our people without involvement in humankind contradicts what the prophets have meant to us. Judaism calls us simultaneously to universal and particular obligations.

Hope: Our Jewish Obligation

Previous generations of Reform Jews had unbound confidence in humanity's potential for good. We have lived through terrible tragedy and been compelled to reappropriate our tradition's realism about the human capacity for evil. Yet our people has always refused to despair. The survivors of the Holocaust, being granted life, seized it, nurtured it, and, rising above catastrophe, showed humankind that the human spirit is indomitable. The State of Israel, established and maintained by the Jewish will to live, demonstrates what a united people can accomplish in history. The existence of the Jew is an argument against despair; Jewish survival is warrant for human hope.

We remain God's witness that history is not meaningless. We affirm that with God's help people are not powerless to affect their destiny. We dedicate ourselves, as did the generations of Jews who went before us, to work and wait for that day when "They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

CCAR-Reform Judaism & Zionism: A Centenary Platform– 1997 Miami, Florida

PREAMBLE:

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

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

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

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

A century after Theodor Herzl called for the creation of a modern Jewish state and nearly fifty years since the State of Israel joined the family of modern nations, the fundamental issues addressed in the previous CCAR pronouncements continue to challenge us, making this a fitting time to re-examine and redefine the ideological and spiritual bonds that connect Am Yisrael [the People of Israel] to Eretz Yisrael [the Land of Israel] and to Medinat Yisrael [the State of Israel]. The CCAR affirms through this Platform those principles which will guide Reform Judaism into the 21st century.

I. Judaism: A Religion and a People

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

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

II. From Degradation to Sovereignty

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

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

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

III. Our Relationship to the State of Israel

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

IV. Our Obligations to Israel

To help promote the security of Medinat Yisrael and ensure the welfare of its citizens, we pledge continued political support and financial assistance.

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

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

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

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

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

V. Israel's Obligations to the Diaspora

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

VI. Redemption

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

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

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

**CCAR-A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism-
1999 Pittsburgh Convention**

Preamble

On three occasions during the last century and a half, the Reform rabbinate has adopted comprehensive statements to help guide the thought and practice of our movement. In 1885, fifteen rabbis issued the Pittsburgh Platform, a set of guidelines that defined Reform Judaism for the next fifty years. A revised statement of principles, the Columbus Platform, was adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1937. A third set of rabbinic guidelines, the Centenary Perspective, appeared in 1976 on the occasion of the centenary of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Today, when so many individuals are striving for religious meaning, moral purpose and a sense of community, we believe it is our obligation as rabbis once again to state a set of principles that define Reform Judaism in our own time.

Throughout our history, we Jews have remained firmly rooted in Jewish tradition, even as we have learned much from our encounters with other cultures. The great contribution of Reform Judaism is that it has enabled the Jewish people to introduce innovation while preserving tradition, to embrace diversity while asserting commonality, to affirm beliefs without rejecting those who doubt, and to bring faith to sacred texts without sacrificing critical scholarship.

This "Statement of Principles" affirms the central tenets of Judaism - God, Torah and Israel - even as it acknowledges the diversity of Reform Jewish beliefs and practices. It also invites all Reform Jews to engage in a dialogue with the sources of our tradition, responding out of our knowledge, our experience and our faith. Thus we hope to transform our lives through (kedushah), holiness.

God

We affirm the reality and oneness of God, even as we may differ in our understanding of the Divine presence.

We affirm that the Jewish people is bound to God by an eternal (b'rit), covenant, as reflected in our varied understandings of Creation, Revelation and Redemption.

We affirm that every human being is created (b'tzelem Elohim), in the image of God, and that therefore every human life is sacred.

We regard with reverence all of God's creation and recognize our human responsibility for its preservation and protection.

We encounter God's presence in moments of awe and wonder, in acts of justice and compassion, in loving relationships and in the experiences of everyday life.

We respond to God daily: through public and private prayer, through study and through the performance of other (mitzvot), sacred obligations -- (bein adam la Makom), to God, and (bein adam la-chaveiro), to other human beings.

We strive for a faith that fortifies us through the vicissitudes of our lives -- illness and healing, transgression and repentance, bereavement and consolation, despair and hope.

We continue to have faith that, in spite of the unspeakable evils committed against our people and the sufferings endured by others, the partnership of God and humanity will ultimately prevail.

We trust in our tradition's promise that, although God created us as finite beings, the spirit within us is eternal.

In all these ways and more, God gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

Torah

We affirm that Torah is the foundation of Jewish life.

We cherish the truths revealed in Torah, God's ongoing revelation to our people and the record of our people's ongoing relationship with God. We affirm that Torah is a manifestation of (ahavat olam), God's eternal love for the Jewish people and for all humanity.

We affirm the importance of studying Hebrew, the language of Torah and Jewish liturgy, that we may draw closer to our people's sacred texts.

We are called by Torah to lifelong study in the home, in the synagogue and in every place where Jews gather to learn and teach. Through Torah study we are called to (mitzvot), the means by which we make our lives holy.

We are committed to the ongoing study of the whole array of (mitzvot) and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community. Some of these (mitzvot), sacred obligations, have long been observed by Reform Jews; others, both ancient and modern, demand renewed attention as the result of the unique context of our own times.

We bring Torah into the world when we seek to sanctify the times and places of our lives through regular home and congregational observance. Shabbat calls us to bring the highest moral values to our daily labor and to culminate the workweek with (kedushah), holiness, (menuchah), rest and (oneg), joy. The High Holy Days call us to account for our deeds. The Festivals enable us to celebrate with joy our people's religious journey in the context of the changing seasons. The days of remembrance remind us of the tragedies and the triumphs that have shaped our people's historical experience both in ancient and modern times. And we mark the milestones of our personal journeys with traditional and creative rites that reveal the holiness in each stage of life.

We bring Torah into the world when we strive to fulfill the highest ethical mandates in our relationships with others and with all of God's creation. Partners with God in (tikkun olam), repairing the world, we are called to help bring nearer the messianic age. We seek dialogue and joint action with people of other faiths in the hope that together we can bring peace, freedom and justice to our world. We are obligated to pursue (tzedeq), justice and righteousness, and to narrow the gap between the affluent and the poor, to act against discrimination and oppression, to pursue peace, to welcome the stranger, to protect the earth's biodiversity and natural resources, and to redeem those in physical, economic and spiritual bondage. In so doing, we reaffirm social action and social justice as a central prophetic focus of traditional Reform Jewish belief and practice. We affirm the (mitzvah) of (tzedakah), setting aside portions of our earnings and our time to provide for those in need. These acts bring us closer to fulfilling the prophetic call to translate the words of Torah into the works of our hands.

In all these ways and more, Torah gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

Israel

We are Israel, a people aspiring to holiness, singled out through our ancient covenant and our unique history among the nations to be witnesses to God's presence. We are linked by that covenant and that history to all Jews in every age and place.

We are committed to the (mitzvah) of (ahavat Yisrael), love for the Jewish people, and to (k'lal Yisrael), the entirety of the community of Israel. Recognizing that (kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh), all Jews are responsible for one another, we reach out to all Jews across ideological and geographical boundaries.

We embrace religious and cultural pluralism as an expression of the vitality of Jewish communal life in Israel and the Diaspora.

We pledge to fulfill Reform Judaism's historic commitment to the complete equality of women and men in Jewish life.

We are an inclusive community, opening doors to Jewish life to people of all ages, to varied kinds of families, to all regardless of their sexual orientation, to (gerim), those who have converted to Judaism, and to all individuals and families, including the intermarried, who strive to create a Jewish home.

We believe that we must not only open doors for those ready to enter our faith, but also to actively encourage those who are seeking a spiritual home to find it in Judaism.

We are committed to strengthening the people Israel by supporting individuals and families in the creation of homes rich in Jewish learning and observance.

We are committed to strengthening the people Israel by making the synagogue central to Jewish communal life, so that it may elevate the spiritual, intellectual and cultural quality of our lives.

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.

We are committed to furthering Progressive Judaism throughout the world as a meaningful religious way of life for the Jewish people.

In all these ways and more, Israel gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

(Baruch she-amar ve-haya ha-olam).

Praised be the One through whose word all things came to be.

May our words find expression in holy actions.

May they raise us up to a life of meaning devoted to God's service

And to the redemption of our world.