

# Whatever Happened to Jewish Pluralism?

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*Rabbi Irwin Groner, Moderator (Southfield, Michigan):* Last fall, it became apparent that the Jewish people was a house divided against itself. As a result of the close elections in Israel, the Likud party attempted to form a coalition with the religious parties. The latter then demanded amending the Law of Return, and imposing their definition of "Who is a Jew," whose purpose was the delegitimization of non-Orthodox rabbis, both in Israel and in the Diaspora. This precipitated a world-wide conflict whose fury only now has begun to dissipate, although it has not disappeared.

We encounter today a mood of discord in Jewish religious life. All camps believe in Jewish unity and in *ahavat yisrael*, but the moment the focus shifts to the specific, our concern about and our commitment to unity seem to disappear. A perceptible meanness and abrasiveness are often expressed in the conduct and discourse of Jewish religious movements and leaders towards those with whom they disagree. Denunciation is the opposite of dialogue.

We need to lower the decibel level of our internal arguments, and to diminish the name calling that takes place in both public and private forums. The traditional Jewish virtue of *derekh erez* is in short

supply today. I refer not to surface politeness, but rather to that inner respect for the personalities and beliefs of those who differ with us. According to the Talmud, the Temple was destroyed because of causeless, baseless hatred. To be sure, if we had interviewed a first-century Jerusalemite as to the cause of the bitter intra-Jewish antagonism that prevailed then, he would have rattled off a large number of major and critical issues, but they were all less important than the preservation of the Jewish people.

The issue is even deeper than respect. It has to do with the fact that Judaism is more than any of its ideological or institutional components. It is more than the sum of its parts. As Rabbi Harold Schulweis has pointed out, Jews need each other's uniqueness. We need to hear each other's voice. Right or wrong, we are people of multiple temperaments, and we need a diversity that allows us to find our path on the way that leads to Jewish loyalty and affirmation.

**Dr. Cohen:**

To me, the title of tonight's session raises the implicit assumption that denominational conflict within American Jewry has been particularly severe of late.

In contrast with this perspective, I want to suggest that by any reasonable historical standard we are in fact living through one of the most peaceful and harmonious periods in modern Jewish history. American Jewish denominational conflicts are conducted primarily by rabbis, not by entire communities. In other words, contrary to the connotation embodied in tonight's session title, pluralism in Jewish America is very much alive and well. The inter-denominational conflicts we experience today mobilize far less passion and engage far fewer actors than those that punctuated our not too distant American and European past. In this regard, we need only recall the instances of Orthodox secessionism in central Europe, the class conflicts embodied in the rise of East European Bundists, and the numerous intra-communal clashes over the alleged danger Zionism posed to Jews in several Western countries. Not more than two generations ago, American Jewry was sharply divided along class lines with different fraternal organizations, philanthropic societies, and denominational movements for workers, business people, and the wealthy elite. Today, all that has changed. Few status differences separate the denominations or communal institutions. In fact, the vast majority of American Jews inhabit the middle and upper-middle class, live in many of the same types of comfortable neighborhoods, attend many of the same colleges, read many of the same periodicals,

and share many of the same leisure interests. In most important ways, American Jewry is probably more united and less divided than it has ever been since before the massive East European migration, and it is certainly far less conflict-ridden than Israeli Jewry.

Of course, it would be disingenuous of me to suggest that nothing connected to the state of American Jewish pluralism has changed over the last two decades. On the traditional right, both Orthodox rabbis and communities have diminished their interaction with non-Orthodox counterparts. On the modernist left, the Reform movement has advanced its often controversial positions on patrilineal descent, on Israel, and on other issues with greater vigor than it may have not long ago.

To me, these divisive developments are not so much evidence of a decline in pluralism, but are a direct consequence of changes in American Jewish denominational power that took place in the 1970s. In 1970, about fifty-six percent of American Jews called themselves Conservative. By the late seventies, that figure had dropped to about thirty-five percent, where it has remained ever since. Today, about ten percent are Orthodox and roughly thirty percent call themselves Reform. The decline in Conservative affiliation took place in conjunction with the rise in self-assurance in the other two major denominations. Undoubtedly, these developments were related. As a younger Orthodox generation attained higher levels of secular and Jewish education, and acquired greater affluence and more influence, Orthodoxy came to see itself as more self-sufficient. As Reform congregations acquired thousands of members through intermarriage and conversion, and as they built the most powerful and financially secure central congregational organization on the American Jewish scene, Reform leaders also came to enjoy a greater sense of confidence. The perception of declining pluralism, then, is in part the result of a new assertiveness among the Orthodox and the Reform, and the decline of Conservative hegemony in American Jewish life, as well as one other factor that I have time only to mention and not elaborate upon. Specifically I refer to the shift of power within Orthodoxy from the Modern Orthodox to the more insular and sectarian right wing, be it Hassidic or Misnagdic.

To simplify matters greatly, what we have seen over the last decade is the expression of a newly discovered confidence by official Reform and by right-wing Orthodox leaders. In the struggle between these vastly separated poles, the Masorti movement in Israel has aligned itself with Reform, against Orthodoxy's position on Who is a Jew and other matters in Israel, while in the U.S. we have sided with

Orthodoxy, against the Reform position on patrilineality. The Modern Orthodox, meanwhile, have found themselves in an acutely difficult position. They honestly feel deeply attached to Jews on both their traditional right and ideological left. Central to their *raison d'être* is the conviction that they can remain faithfully Orthodox while fully involving themselves in the affairs of the modern world and of modern Jewry. For them, the prospect of a severe rupture between the traditional Orthodox and major non-Orthodox movements strikes at the very heart of the Modern Orthodox view of the world. Perhaps more than anyone, therefore, they have been most keen on ameliorating the denominational conflict so as to preserve their involvement with the wider Jewish community while retaining their position within the Orthodox community.

This re-alignment of forces is at the root of the last several years of conflict over patrilineal descent, "Who is a Jew" and related matters. Some alarmists have portrayed these conflicts as endangering the very unity of the Jewish people, if not now, then in the near future. They believe that more and more traditional American Jews will refuse to marry those from more liberal backgrounds lest they marry someone Jewishly defective according to *halakhah*. It is unfortunate for Judaism, but fortunate for the prospects of Jewish unity, that very few American Jews take *halakhah* so seriously that they would exclude from the Jewish community halakhically problematic Jews. In a recent survey I found that two-thirds of Conservative synagogue members say they would be upset if their child were to marry the Jewishly identifying child of a Jewish father and Gentile mother. While eighty percent of Orthodox respondents are upset with the Reform rabbinate for advancing patrilineality, only nineteen percent of Conservative synagogue members share the same critical view. Of Conservative synagogue members, more accept the Reform definition of a Jew than reject it.

Lest I be misunderstood, I am not suggesting that our Law Committee legislate according to the wishes and practices of the laity. If it did so, then kashrut, Shabbat, and Torah learning as principles of Conservative life would fall into serious jeopardy.

The point I am making is that even the questions of intermarriage, conversion and patrilineality—the questions that have been cast as the most threatening to Jewish unity—stand little chance of rending American Jewry asunder. Most Orthodox Jews already have only a very slim chance of marrying non-Orthodox. Their additional concern over personal status issues does little to change that. At the same time, I see neither creeping *mamzerut* nor patrilineal prolifera-

tion as striking terror in the hearts of even the more traditionally oriented Conservative Jews.

Having rejected the notion that pluralism—by which I mean friendly relations and tolerance across ideological lines—is at a low ebb, and having rejected the argument that even the worst of denominational problems threaten the unity of the Jewish people, I now want to advance my most controversial proposition: Ideological conflict is good for American Jews, and it is especially helpful for the Conservative movement. Conventional wisdom holds that intra-communal conflict weakens Jewish unity. As such, conflict is to be avoided or suppressed, lest we present an indecorous image to the Gentiles, or play into the hands of the anti-Semites, or damage the ever-present philanthropic campaign. Conventional emotions find conflicts threatening and unsettling.

I take a very different view of conflict. Conflict strengthens group loyalties. Conflict advances inspirational leadership—such as rabbis and intellectuals—at the expense of the managerialist variety that prevails in more harmonious times. Conflict brings out the masses to commune with one another, to learn together, and to defend what they collectively hold dear. Conflict is stimulating, even exciting. To me, the absence of conflict indicates not the presence of unity but the absence of passion.

To their credit, the Orthodox are the most passionate about their Judaism; but, of all major camps in Jewish life, they are also the most conflict-ridden. Nothing that American Jews say about each other in English compares to what the Orthodox say about each other in Yiddish or Hebrew. Conflict is at the heart of our tradition and, in the modern age, it is a valuable instrument of public education. The “Who is a Jew” controversy did much to educate lay leaders as to the true nature and orientation of Israel’s right-wing Orthodox; and its ultimate outcome strengthened the norms of Jewish pluralism. The debates between hawks and doves in community centers and synagogues serve to enhance and elevate American Jews’ ties with Israel.

Why do I say that Conservative Judaism needs conflict more than other movements? Because, of the three major denominational movements, ours is the most poorly understood. Most Conservative Jews are Conservative only by default, for want of a better alternative. Many congregants join Conservative synagogues because they feel Orthodoxy is too *frum*, Reform is too “goyish,” but Conservatism, in Goldilocks’ words, is “just right”. I know that most of us

believe there is more to Conservative Judaism than serving as a way station between Orthodoxy and Reform. Our message is more complicated than those of Orthodoxy and Reform, and it suffers because of its centrist quality. But whatever the source of the problem, we are plagued by a laity that generally has a very poor understanding of the meaning or virtues of Conservatism.

I want to suggest that one potentially effective mechanism to teach and breed allegiance to Conservative Judaism is to seek out both tactical alliances and public ideological conflicts with Orthodoxy and Reform. Where possible, we need to cooperate with Orthodox and Reform counterparts; but where fruitful, we need to debate and argue with them as well. To take one example, our commitment to Jewish feminism contrasts with Orthodoxy's reluctance to move in an area that many Orthodox leaders regard as a harbinger of assimilation. Our differences over the place of women in Jewish life can help us teach a broader message about the adaptability of Conservative Judaism. Feminism is the Achilles' heel of Modern Orthodoxy, perhaps the one place where in their hearts they know we're right. Our commitment to women's participation may be one of our few differences in practice with Orthodoxy where we can readily refute the standard Orthodox accusation of weakness with a sincere and genuine appeal to a competing positive principle.

But our critique of Orthodoxy must extend, of course, beyond feminism. In public speeches, newspapers, and community forums, we ought to publicly criticize the Orthodox for their shortcomings that so deeply offend us. We ought to attack their rejection of the better aspects of modernity and universal concerns, their intolerance of and lack of respect for Judaic interpretations different from their own, and especially their excessive Jewish particularism that inevitably fosters, exalts, supports and defends the likes of Meir Kahane and the Jewish terrorists.

But when we criticize what Rabbi Shlomo Riskin has called the "dark side" of Orthodoxy, we need to very clearly and sharply differentiate the Modern Orthodox from right-wing Orthodoxy. Let us recall that during the "Who is a Jew" controversy, itself an example of American Jewish commitment to pluralism, the Rabbinical Council of America—no hotbed of liberalism—sided with the so-called American or pluralist position rather than that of their Orthodox colleagues in Israel. Let us also recall that our feelings toward Orthodoxy are two-sided. Yes, there is much that repels us; but there is also much that we admire: The cohesiveness of their communities; their high levels of observance; their low rates of intermarriage and

divorce; their commitment to life-long learning; and their involvement with Israel. The Modern Orthodox share many of these positive attributes of Jewish involvement that we so admire, while generally eschewing many of the shortcomings we so dislike. In fact, in many ways, the Modern Orthodox are more chagrined, more outraged and more threatened than we are by the objectionable statements and behavior of their right-wing counterparts.

Committed Conservative and Modern Orthodox Jews already share a tacit alliance around certain principles and institutions. In smaller communities, outside the major centers of Jewish population, we often share the same schools, the same neighborhoods, and, sometimes, even the same restaurants (the kind that serve excellent pasta and fish dishes). Some Conservative day schools draw upon an Orthodox population, just as more serious Conservative families often send their children to Modern Orthodox institutions. *Shomer Shabbes* Jews, be they Conservative or Orthodox, need to live in the same parts of town and may well form strong friendships around the Shabbat table or study circle, even if they *daven* in different shuls. Modern Orthodox women and their families may, on occasion, be drawn to Conservative synagogues.

We share with the Orthodox left a common interest in promoting Judaic maximalism. In Federation circles, we ought to be working together to further support for Jewish day schools, for adult Jewish education, for educationally oriented travel to Israel, and for a serious Jewish ambience to our camps, Jewish community centers, and social service agencies. Committed Conservative Jews need the Modern Orthodox as active allies in the community not only to advance this Judaic agenda, but also to avoid being cast in the role of Judaic extremists rather than centrists.

But just as we alternately criticize and ally ourselves with selective aspects of Orthodoxy, we must do likewise with Reform. Unfortunately, we have done far too little to differentiate ourselves from Reform Judaism. Fortunately, the Reform have helped maintain the boundary between us and them by serving as the most open doorway to the Jewish community for mixed married couples and converts to Judaism. But our differences with Reform certainly extend beyond their openness to the mixed married or their lower standards for conversion, some of the things that now stand out in the public mind. We need to find some way to present and clarify the truly significant distinctions between Conservative and Reform Judaism, perhaps to the benefit of both movements.

Some Conservative leaders have suggested the tactic of focusing

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on our rabbis' stance on patrilineal descent as a way of driving home what they believe to be the fundamental distinction between the two movements. Patrilineality becomes a vehicle to illustrate the alleged central point of distinction, namely, that Conservatism is halakhic, and Reform is not. I claim no particular expertise in this area, but it does seem to me that we make a mistake when we stake our differences with Reform to the claim that we are halakhic. One reason for my hesitancy is that both our own rabbinic right wing and our rabbinic left wing deny that we are halakhic. The right says we used to be halakhic and ought to be, but we are not. The left says we were never halakhic, we shouldn't be, and shouldn't pretend to be. But more critically than the disagreements among the rabbis is the absence of tangible evidence of broad-based halakhic commitment in the movement. Even if we restrict the definition of the movement to its most active adults—the members of synagogue boards, the parents of Schechter students, the alumni of Camp Ramah, the regular worshipers in our synagogues—we would have to stretch definitions quite a bit to call them halakhic. Vast segments of even this group of lay activists fail to keep kashrut or Shabbat with a great degree of seriousness; most probably could not define *halakhah*; most rarely ask a *shailah*; few rely on their rabbi as a *posek*; and hardly any apply halakhic standards in selecting their friends or congregational leaders. Most Conservative rabbis, leading educators, and their institutions may well be halakhic; but Conservative communities—which are, in fact the movement—have a long way to go to qualify as such.

Having said all that, are there no significant ways in which contemporary Conservative and Reform Judaism differ? The answer can be found in the very significant minority of Conservative Jews who, though non-halakhic, do maintain some attachment to Jewish tradition. In contrast, such individuals are nearly absent in Reform temples. A mere hint of the differing distributions emerges from just a few examples from a recent national survey of mine. Comparing synagogue members from the two movements, a third of Conservative Jews claim to use two sets of dishes for meat and dairy versus just four percent of Reform Jews. A quarter of Conservative Jews claim they can understand a very simple Hebrew sentence as compared with half as many Reform Jews. Almost half the Conservative Jews would want their children to spend a year of more in Israel, as compared with just twenty-eight percent of the Reform respondents. Proportionally twice as many Conservative Jews claim to attend services monthly as do their Reform counterparts. Just two percent of



Conservative members have Christmas trees in their homes as against nine percent of Reform families (and the Reform number should be growing far more rapidly than the Conservative proportion).

These figures are not the whole story. They are but indicators of a very fundamental difference in the ambience of Reform and Conservative congregations. With all our shortcomings, the more serious Jew seeking like-minded counterparts with a commitment to ritual practice, learning, and Israel involvement is far more likely to find a good number of such people in a Conservative rather than a Reform synagogue. This being a fair and accurate characterization of one of our crucial differences, we need to exploit it so as to accentuate the strength of Conservatism relative to Reform.

To do so, we need, not treat the Reform with disdain. Rather we need to project a well-founded pride in our commitment to learning, to day schools, to standards of observance, and to Israel. We need to tell our people that standards—be they of observance, of learning, of kashrut, or even of hours per week of Talmud Torah—do matter. I, for one, remain deeply perplexed by the tendency of Reform rabbis to emphasize what they call freedom of conscience, and what I call lack of standards, as a virtue of their movement. And Conservative leaders need to convey our optimism for the future of a movement that holds up the standard of Jewish maximalism coupled with full participation in modern society. During the height of the patrilineal debates a few years ago, Reform spokesmen were saying that Conservatism eventually will adopt Reform's position, as our evolution on women's participation would seem to indicate. I read the flow of history quite differently. Frankly, I see Reform quite often following Conservatism, rather than the other way around. Let us recall that they, and not we, had to reverse and overcome a non-Zionist and anti-Zionist legacy. They, and not we, felt compelled to restore a good measure of Hebrew prayers to the Siddur that they had eliminated decades ago. They, and not we, made a long overdue commitment to Jewish day schools and to a Jewishly intensive camping system. From all this and more, I think it is Conservative Judaism that can more rightly claim to be the progressive, *avante-garde* movement. The Reform movement has only recently discovered what the Historical School and its successor in the United States has known all along: commitment to Jewish living in modernity does not necessitate the rejection of all that is traditional. Conservative leaders and thinkers need to emphasize this message to the laity: Conservative Judaism is right when it makes demands upon the modern Jew that

other movements do not. In doing so, our critique of Reform may at times be subdued and only implicit, but it will be clear nonetheless.

In preparing this talk, I deliberately chose to cover more ground rather than less, even if that meant some sacrifice of depth and substantiation. For that I apologize. Before I close, I only wish to review the main points developed in this talk.

First, I reject the view that the state of American Jewish pluralism is at a low ebb; rather, I contend, we are living through a period of relative ideological harmony and absence of conflict.

Second, I reject the view that ideological conflict is generally bad for the Jews. Rather, I suggest that conflict both reflects and stimulates Judaic passion and that, as a corollary, the Conservative movement in particular needs more rather than less ideological conflict.

Third, I advocate that we magnify and multiply our critique of the Orthodox, but that we focus that critique on its right-wing elements. In contrast, I believe we should strengthen the tacit alliance that already connects many serious Conservative Jews with many of the more progressive Modern Orthodox Jews.

Fourth, we need to sharpen our differences with Reform. In this regard, I don't view the patrilineal issue specifically, or the claim to halakhic fidelity generally as tactically helpful. Rather, I suggest we accentuate the more readily understood distinction between our communities, one that lies in our vastly higher levels of observance, learning, and commitment to Israel.

I truly believe that by engaging Reform and Orthodox counterparts in serious and respectful debates, controversies and dialogues, those who lead the Conservative movement will contribute not only to the strength of Conservative Judaism. In so doing, they will contribute to the vitality of the other branches as well, and thereby to the collective enterprise we know as American Judaism.

**Rabbi Lipman:**

I talked to Steve Cohen briefly on the telephone last *erev shabbos*. I got his paper as I sat down here. If I sound a bit defensive about that it is because I am, and what I am going to say will be very impressionistic and in no particularly well organized order, except insofar as Steve's paper was well organized. I am going to go through it and react.

At the outset Professor Cohen said he does not believe that pluralism is identical with peaceful and harmonious relationships. I agree,

but what he spoke about as pluralism sounded more like peace and harmony than what I believe pluralism is. In my own view of American Jewish history and the inter-relationships among the *z'ramim*, we never have had pluralism in our lives, past or present. We don't have it today and I don't anticipate having it in the foreseeable future. When the members of the Rabbinical Council will accept the fact that my *hatarat hora'ah* is as *kasher* as theirs, then we will have pluralism. When they accept the fact that your *hatarat hora'ah* is as *kasher* as theirs, then we will have pluralism.

We don't have it. Do we want it? I don't know. That is another subject. But I can't talk about what has happened to something we never had. In my childhood, while I was growing up, there was such a complete separation among us, such a total lack of communication among us, that we didn't have the conflicts that we have now. I grew up in a Conservative shul. (I think it is known that I still *daven* often at a Conservative shul.) In Pittsburgh, where I grew up, I entered Rodef Shalom Temple, the only Reform Temple in town, once before my sixteenth birthday. Our next door neighbor, a very attractive young woman, was being confirmed. I had a yen for her, so I went to her confirmation. I next entered the Temple when I went to see Solomon Freehof about going to Hebrew Union College, not as a Reform Jew. Far from it.

The only shul I never entered in Pittsburgh aside from the Reform Temple was the Hasidic *shtiebel* down the street. My Zayda said that if he ever caught me in there he would beat the hell out of me. And if you knew my Zayda, you know that he would have.

How were we able to have a Kehillah in New York organized between 1910 and the end of the First World War? Believe me, it wasn't pluralistic. It was political and it functioned after a fashion, but not very long.

I agree with Haskel Lookstein that not only rabbis are in conflict today. Lay people are too. My most recent example is a *hassoneh* in my family a week and a half ago in Far Rockaway. The *m'sadder kiddushin* was no problem. He and I were able to sit for a time and have a *schmoos*. I enjoyed him thoroughly. But my place card for the luncheon read "Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Lipman". My poor sister's new *mahteniste* made her position absolutely clear, and not just in that way. She found a dozen ways to make clear that although there was no way for her to stop these two kids from marrying, she had no intention of enjoying it. I do not anticipate a warm and chummy relationship with that side of my *mishpoheh*.

In the world I inhabit, we even have *more* open conflict today

between Conservative and Reform lay people than we used to have; a lot more. More of our people are having to come to terms with the fact that Conservative people with whom they may work, or who live in the same neighborhood, won't come for dinner. I don't understand that. Our people are prepared to make the accommodations that are wished, but they aren't wished. We have tensions and we have open conflict on some issues—on both sides. I think that I take both Reform and Conservative lay people more seriously than Professor Cohen does.

Then there is lineal descent, patri- and matri-, the whole lineal descent business. It is one of the few times in my forty-five years of friendship with him that Alex Schindler was dead wrong. He said that it was not going to cause much of a fuss in the relationship between Conservative and Reform rabbis and some lay people as it has between us and all the branches of Orthodoxy.

That one is not going to go away. I am fascinated by the fact that in the last two years, since I have been wandering the country and talking not only with hundreds of Reform rabbis but with many Conservative rabbis as well, I don't know how many of the latter innocently have said to me: "Why can't you change that resolution? Do away with it already!" I will tell you the answer to the question. If that identical resolution were to come to the Central Conference of American Rabbis today, it would pass by approximately the same majority as it achieved in 1983. The majority then was three-and-one-half to one. And, as my beloved friend Jane Evans always says, make no mistake about it; that is not changing. I am not interested in the history of this fact. I am not interested in the whys and wherefores. It is a fact. If you and we are going to work together on serious issues, it is going to be with lineality sitting there between us, and we just have to live with it.

But we have paid a price for it. Institutionally, we of the CCAR and you of the RA are more uncomfortable than we have ever been in my lifetime. As you may or may not know, there are some dozens of members of the Central Conference who are also members of the Rabbinical Assembly. That has been true for a long time, and nobody ever paid much attention to it. Now, however, that cannot happen anymore. Those who are already in have been grandparented in, but I, who might like to be a member of both the RA and the CCAR, can't do it. After several years of negotiations we have reached an agreement about which I am very reluctant, but it is the best that we can get for now. Those members of either organization who wish to do so can pay an annual fee to the other organi-

zation and become "correspondents". That is, we will send you material, you will be on the mailing list, but not even the associate membership that some of us talked about is now possible.

We were willing. There has been a hardening of feeling within the R.A. I will attribute its beginning to lineality, but it has other implications. I was amused by Dr. Cohen's statement that there is a deep lack of understanding about Conservative Judaism among Conservative laity. Don't think for a moment that you are alone in this. If you think that Reform Jews know what Reform Judaism is about...!

There are more serious Reform Jews than Steve thinks. I can't prove this, but Steve can't prove his view either. Of course, we haven't defined "serious Reform Jews". He used a couple of criteria that I won't use. I am not sure that two sets of dishes constitute a serious concern for dietary laws. And I know a lot of Reform Jews who, like my shul, don't have two sets of dishes but who won't have *hazir* at home. That is a consciousness and they are very serious about it. Don't underestimate it. Don't deny it.

I am fascinated that Steve thinks that the Christmas tree is still with us. I haven't seen a Christmas tree in a Jewish home in forty years. I guess that there are some, but I'd be willing to bet that they are geographically centered, in the Deep South and the Southwest, and that the people who have them are probably over the age of fifty. I think that has been a very clear trend in Reform. In the homes of my congregants I have never seen a Christmas tree. That is just a fact.

I think that there are more Reform Jews who take Shabbos seriously—their way, but seriously. There are many more Reform Jews who are conscious of the responsibility that they have with their kids and Jewish education. Secular school being the primary sanctity in their lives, their kids don't often go to Day Schools. But they do go to our congregational schools, and the parents are involved.

Still, I don't think that fifteen Reform Day Schools, with more coming, are to be tossed off casually. We had a terrible time getting the first resolution favoring Day Schools through our UAHC General Assembly. In the Central Conference we had no problem, but in the General Assembly we did. After all, one of the great sanctities of American Jewish life for four generations has been the public school and we had to face very carefully the fact that the public school no longer has that sanctity for our people, and the Jewish Day School is terribly important.

I have seen an amazing evolution in the number of Reform congregations that do not have a lunch break on Yom Kippur. Fasting

on Yom Kippur among Reform Jews is a much more frequent phenomenon in my unscientific, unstudied, non-statistical view.

I think that the trends in Reform should not be set aside as "they are not very important because they happened after Conservative Jews did them". I have never teased a Conservative Jew, rabbi or lay person, about the fact that the Reform Commission on Social Action founded and worked closely with the Commission on Social Action of the Conservative movement in its first years. We were in business already, we were staffed already. I was the staff. And I was delighted. I was delighted when the UOJCA set up some kind of an office, because then we three together had clout. And we still do. It is my fervent hope that the Israel Religious Action Center which we set up last year will be cooperated with fully by the Masorti movement in *Eretz Yisrael*. Any time you want to pay half the bills and become full partners, we will certainly let you.

We Reform Jews have a problem that is very hard for anybody else to understand, but you are going to have to understand it, and you are going to have to live with it. The concept of radical autonomy is at the core of Reform Jewish life. It is radical autonomy for each rabbi. It is radical autonomy for each congregation. It is radical autonomy for each Jew. And anybody who thinks that it is going to break down easily in the name of anything is, I think, deluded. I would love to see standards on *ishut*, but we are not going to have them if you expect the Central Conference of American Rabbis to pass a resolution binding on its members. We don't do that. I think that we can have common standards on *giyur*, if we keep them out of a couple of institutions we could name, one of them being the CCAR.

I had a concern ten years ago that the intermarried couples coming back into our congregations that Professor Cohen talked about were going to dilute our observances. My congregation is a relatively right-of-center congregation. And I was worried, because all of these couples were coming in and all the problems of ritual observance were going to plague us, the problems of the role a non-Jew could play in the congregation. I thought that these problems were going to drive us crazy. It has not happened to any degree. It is no great *hokhmoh* or cleverness on our part. It just hasn't happened, and I am delighted. But I'm still concerned.

One more thing and I will quit. I would agree with Professor Cohen that ideological conflict among us openly expressed and with *derekh eretz* would be good for all of us, but only if the issues on which we can work together transcend the conflict.

Let me stop here. I will not indulge in a peroration. You don't need it. Besides, I want to hear what Wolfe has to say.

**Rabbi Kelman:**

First I want to tell you how delighted I am that, unaccustomed as I have been to speaking at this Convention, I have been given this additional opportunity, particularly because I am speaking in the company of three people who are very dear to me. Rabbi Lookstein, like his father, of blessed memory, has been a dear colleague and a good neighbor. I cannot recall a time when I asked him or his father to do a Jew a personal favor when they did not respond enthusiastically, graciously, and generously. I have known Gene from way back in the days when he was a Chaplain at the DP camps in Europe to his years at the UAHC to the present time when, as Rabbi Emeritus, he has proven to me that retired rabbis do not have to fade away. They can become Presidents of their rabbinic organizations! I have known and admired Steve Cohen for many years. He has been able to find the facts which confirm what I have said without knowing the facts.

Allow me to tell you one story. The two hundredth anniversary of the death of the Besht, as you all know, was in 1960. He was born in 1700 and died in 1760. Those were the days when American Jews associated Hasidism with Martin Buber, who was kind of glamorous and esoteric. So, in 1960, the Jewish Welfare Board sent out directives to all synagogues and rabbis and cultural committees urging them to observe the anniversary, suggesting that they all read Martin Buber and organize appropriate programs. One congregation in Washington, Sinai, whose rabbi then was Balfour Brickner and whose rabbi until recently was Gene, took the directive very seriously. Balfour decided not only to read about Hasidism. He would find the nearest authentic living Hasidic rebbe and invite him to give a lecture at his congregation. After a thorough search he discovered that the nearest living authentic Hasidic rebbe was living in Baltimore, and his name was Rabbi Hertzberg, the father of my cousin Arthur Hertzberg. Bal called up Rabbi Hertzberg and asked him to lecture at Temple Sinai. "You can tell us about Hasidism, and we will give you an honorarium". My cousin, who was a wonderful, really saintly Jew, said, "No, I don't go out lecturing. If you like, you can bring your congregation here." Bal organized several buses of congregants. They arrived. Rabbi Hertzberg greeted them, welcomed them, said a few words, and then he asked for questions.

One lady said, "Rabbi Hertzberg, I have read in Martin Buber

that the *tzaddik* was capable of performing miracles. Is it true? Do you believe that?" And Rabbi Hertzberg said, "Of course. The Talmud says, *tzaddik gozer v'hakadosh barukh hu m'kayem*." Then she said, "Rabbi, you are a Hasidic rebbe. Do you perform miracles?" And he looked at her and said, "Yes, Madam. You are all here, aren't you!"

The fact that we on this platform are all here is *not* a miracle. We have appeared together before. What would be a miracle? If I were invited to preach in the pulpit of Kehillath Jeshurun, Rabbi Lookstein's synagogue. *That* would be a miracle. Then I would know that we have achieved Jewish unity, real pluralism. I am not saying this to extort an invitation, but to me that is an indication of the differences between our groups which in many ways are unbridgeable, not necessarily because of hostility but because of the different views we have.

What is the meaning of religious pluralism? When Levi Eshkol would address groups he often would say, "I may not have time to give you the whole lecture, so let me begin at the end." So let *me* begin at the end here. First I want to address what Rabbi Lookstein said. Then, if I still have time, I want to tell you what I would like to say. There are two areas in which we differ, with all due respect.

The uproar, the spiritual intifada which took place in North America and Western Europe over the threatened "Who is a Jew" legislation in Israel was not motivated by the fact that some leaders of the American and English and French Jewish communities are intermarried or have intermarried grandchildren. They had heard about the "Who is a Jew" proposal before, without getting so upset. The crisis actually goes back to 1970 and 1977, and it never caused such an uproar then. What caused this absolutely uncontrollable, spontaneous uprising against the leadership of all the movements, who really didn't want it? We tried to dampen it down. I would like to suggest what really happened. It was a watershed in the perception of American Jews of Israeli Jews, in the perception of the nature of the Israeli experiment and the Israeli dream. For years we had thought of Israel, and most Israelis have thought of Israel, as the paradigm of a humane, liberal, loving, caring, sharing kibbutz society. There were art galleries, and Israelis went to them. And there were philharmonic orchestras that played classical music. It was a kind of fantasy, to which there was a great deal of reality. There was a marvelous reality. And much of it was true. It was based on real things that were happening. The religious community, insofar as



they were dominant, were represented by nice people like Joseph Burg, telling wonderful stories. This was the kind of world to which we knew how to relate. And all of a sudden, because of the last elections in Israel, because the Agudah became involved with Lubavitch and together got involved with all kinds of new religious groups, all of a sudden the leadership that emerged seemed to be setting the tone and determining what the future of the government of Israel would be. These were people very much unlike Burg and the nice Orthodox rabbis we were used to. They threatened to deny and to stifle this humane, caring, sharing, cultural, pluralistic society. We saw them on television every day. And, just as seeing the riots on the West Bank on television made us conscious of Palestinians, so seeing the Agudah and Shas on television day after day bargaining with Peres and Shamir created a frenzy, and a fear that the kind of Israel which we had hoped to see was being splintered by the emergence of what we had thought would never happen there—a fundamentalist, separatist, uncooperative government whose members do not even want to have their children serve in the army. That is really what created the near hysteria and finally forced what never could have happened otherwise—Shamir and Peres getting together. It was not because they wanted to get together, but because they realized that the alternative was worse, for American Jews had made it clear that they could not relate to that kind of Israel. I think that it is unfair for us to say that it happened because ten Jews or ten thousand Jews or a million Jews felt that their Jewish status was being questioned. I am not convinced that most American Jews who are intermarried or whose children are intermarried are terribly worried that their children will not be admitted to Israel on *aliyah*. How many are involved? Altogether, five or six. Even *one* is too many if there is a question, but that was not the issue.

I think that the same is true about what has happened to the UJA campaign. It was suffering *before* November 1988. I am not an authority on UJA campaigns. But there has been a general flattening or a lessening in the past few years, before November of 1988. The stock market crash of 1987 had a *bigger* affect on the UJA campaign than any assumed disenchantment with Israel.

There is another matter that I want to deal with now. Rabbi Lookstein, with magnanimity and graciousness, hopes for the day when we can sit down together. But he and Rabbi David Lincoln and the Reform rabbi nearest to them, Ronnie Sobel, down the street on Fifth Avenue, could sit down together *now* and try to work out some arrangement whereby there would be a universal standard for *giyur*

and *gittin*. This is an illusion. This holy grail, if I could use that term, I began pursuing in 1953. I somehow lost interest in the mid-seventies. It almost happened in 1954, when we came very close, when the Conservative movement was ready to participate in a Joint Beth Din with the other movements. Even *that* was torpedoed. When it came to the moment of truth, our moderate Orthodox colleagues withdrew because the Orthodox feared that by agreeing to join a Joint Beth Din they were giving legitimacy to a Ketubah drafted by Saul Lieberman, who happened to be at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, which made him automatically disqualified.

Today, forty years later, to talk about the possibility of a Joint Beth Din is illusory. It is not going to happen. And, insofar as Shamir says you have to solve the problem in America, what he really is saying is that he does not want to have a political hunchback. He is telling us that it is *our* hunchback. This way he can go to his Keneset and say, "I have done my best. The Americans are talking about it. Let them talk forever." To imagine, or to hold out the promise, that there is good will, which somehow will create one universally recognized method of *giyur* is self-deluding, and it doesn't really help resolve the tensions.

Now let me present a few comments that I would like to make about Jewish unity. I fully agree with Steve, as I do on most issues, that talking about the demise of Jewish unity or about how wonderful it was in the good old days presents myths that we should explode. You know, even nostalgia isn't what it used to be, and the good old days weren't all that good. I remember, while growing up, that when you wanted to see a real fight you went to the local *shtiebel*. And the Yiddish press was marvelous, full of vituperation and venom. It was a pleasure to read. When you insult somebody in Yiddish it sounds like a compliment, but when you do it in English it sounds like an insult. So let's not talk about how the good old days were better. They were not. And I agree that there never was Jewish unity, going back to the time of Moshe Rabbienu, when he was asked *mi samkha* when he tried to stop two Jews fighting. I remember sitting down with Gerson Cohen some years ago, when we figured out that all the parties from the Zealots to the doves that existed in the year seventy exist now in Israel. It has kept us going, as Steve said. So I think that it is a misleading illusion to pretend that there once was great Jewish unity which somehow was broken because we admitted women rabbis, to imply that if we had no women rabbis we would be invited to preach in Orthodox synagogues. To think that Gene Lipman would be invited to sit next to the Lubavitcher Rebbe if the Reform had

not adopted patrilineality is also an illusion. Suppose that Gene had a magic wand and that he could get the CCAR to rescind their decision on patrilineality, insisting that every non-Jewish woman must be converted by a Reform rabbi before that rabbi officiates at her marriage to a Jew. Would the Orthodox rabbis accept that those women and their children are Jewish, and admit them to marriage in their own families? Whether we agree with patrilineal status or not is a separate issue, but to hold it up as something that suddenly has breached Jewish unity, something that is going to bring about a cataclysm, is unduly alarmist.

What do I see happening in the short term, if I can exercise my gifts of prophecy? The fact of the matter is that if I were to write a book, one which I would like to write would be a very thin book called *Issues on which I Changed My Mind*. When I began as a minor official in the Rabbinical Assembly, I, like so many of my peers, my contemporaries who came from Orthodox backgrounds, had some guilt about leaving Orthodoxy, guilt because of our living parents and memories of our parents, the yeshivas we had abandoned or had been expelled from, or guilt for other reasons. We invested enormous energies in the quest for Jewish unity. I know that I did, and so many of you who are my contemporaries did too, in fighting for kashrut in all Jewish communal institutions, among other examples. It was the pressure, mostly of Conservative rabbis, and of some Orthodox rabbis, that finally forced every major national Jewish organization to have only kosher food at public functions.

Since children born of a mother who had been divorced before marrying their father might eventually want to marry a child of Orthodox parents, we argued that we must make certain, even at great effort and great cost, that every one of our people who needs a *get* has one. Since we could participate in a public prayer service where men and women are separated, and Orthodox Jews could not pray at a public service where men and women sit together, we argued that all public services should be in the Orthodox style. That meant making concession after concession to make it possible for our Orthodox brothers and sisters and parents and their descendants to be a full part of UJA and Israel Bonds, and Federation and the American Jewish Committee, and all the other organizations. I think that we may take great pride in doing it, since we will get no thanks for it from others.

There is a growing awareness now that the traditionalist conscience is not the only conscience that exists. There is a traditional Jew who says, "I cannot pray in a synagogue where men and women

sit together." And there is also a liberal conscience which says, "I cannot pray in a synagogue where women are segregated." My daughter Naamy first raised my consciousness on this matter. Slowly and surely there has been a growing realization, especially once the Orthodox communities here and in Israel became self-sufficient, more affluent, more assertive, more aggressive, that we ought to be more concerned about cultivating our own ideology, establishing our own institutions, our own schools, training our own *mohelim* (for years, a number of our colleagues have already been so trained since they go to communities where they may be the only *mohelim* available), and building our own *mikvaot*, primarily because the militant right in some cities does not allow us to use community *mikvaot*. One of my friends has reminded me that the moderate Orthodox defy the laws of physics. When pushed from the right, they move further right.

Therefore, more and more we are developing our own ritual functionaries, our own institutions, our own dialect, our own ideology. Unfortunately, part of this means that a growing number of R.A. members do not want to allow Reform rabbis to join the R.A. as equal members. This is part of a trend, perhaps within Reform too. Within the Conservative movement this certainly has been the trend, not only because we have been discriminated against. Many of our Orthodox colleagues have pushed us out of some areas, and have tried to delegitimize us. We are developing out of a growing sense of self-confidence, of self-assertion, out of the realization that a self-respecting movement cannot be dependent upon others for its functionaries, for its ideology, for its religious needs. Does this mean that there will be greater separatism than that which has existed until now? I don't think so. As Steve has pointed out, the fraction of Jews who are scrupulous about not letting their children marry the children of those who are less observant than they have always been with us. But ninety percent or more of Jews of all persuasions are not going to allow institutional differences to separate them, or to prevent them or their children from "intermarrying". I believe that those who, in speeches and books, spread hysteria about the coming cataclysm, about our becoming two separate Jewish communities, are doing the Jewish people a great deal of harm, because what they say can become self-fulfilling. And I maintain that Jewish experience has proven to us that, no matter how violent the debates, most Jews have not been prevented from feeling responsible for each other, or from retaining a fundamental unity, when it comes to matters of the health, the welfare, the security, and the future of the

Jewish people.

One of the prayers that Jules Harlow has included in our prayer book *Siddur Sim Shalom* was adapted from a speech given at the Union Theological Seminary by Professor Heschel. It is entitled "No Religion is an Island." I wish that I had more time to elaborate on it. It declares that no religion has a monopoly on holiness. As Professor Heschel said elsewhere, it is God's will that there be pluralism. God knew how to create a world in which everyone would be like me, God forbid. But He chose pluralism. I think that we must continue to affirm what has been central to the Conservative movement; we must continue to be bound by certain halakhic parameters, and we must continue our commitment to pluralism. We must continue to fight what has been perhaps the most basic ideological battle of the twentieth century, the battle between the fundamentalists and the pluralists. It is true in Judaism, it is true in Christianity, and it is beginning to be true in Islam. We must fight for a world in which those of us who differ from each other religiously must learn to accept the legitimacy of the faith and the practice of the other, as we define it, not as it is defined by those who differ with us. And we must accept our integrity as a religiously legitimate community which differs, and not live in a world that is fundamentalist, where others are tolerated as future candidates for conversion to the true faith. This has been our faith. This has been what we have fought for, and I believe that we will continue to stand for the benefit of the greater vitality of the Jewish people and the Jewish tradition.

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