EMET VE-EMUNAH

אמת ואמונה

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America
The Rabbinical Assembly
United Synagogue of America
Women's League for Conservative Judaism
Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs

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FOREWORD

Picasso once remarked about the still lifes of Cézanne: "If there were not anxiety behind those apples, Cézanne would not interest me any more than Bouguereau." What makes this first collective "statement of principles" ever issued by the Conservative Movement so admirable and intriguing is the tension that lies beneath the surface. Its sparse, dispassionate, and unequivocal prose gives only the faintest inkling of the wide-ranging differences in which the idea for a balanced commission on the philosophy of Conservative Judaism was born some three years ago. The final product reaffirms not only the will to preserve the unity of the movement but also the genuine consensus which prevails in its ranks.

Yet, for all the harmony achieved, this document deserves to be treated as a point of departure and not a definitive resolution. Judaism is quintessentially an exegetical tradition. The ultimate measure of a Jewish text is the quality of commentary it evokes. The deepest intent of the commission's labor was to unite Conservative Jews in reflection and debate, to offer a set of fundamental principles for public discourse throughout the movement. Nothing would contribute more effectively to cultivating a sense of movement consciousness even while addressing our individual perplexities than coordinated study of this noble and fertile text.

As a movement, we owe a collective debt of gratitude to the men and women — the rabbis, laypeople, and academics — who exerted themselves unsparingly to bring this effort to fruition. Their conviction in that which they believed was matched by their courage to accommodate. Above all, I wish to salute the inspired leadership of Professor Robert Gordis, whose long and distinguished public career has consistently personified the very best of Conservative Judaism.

Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor
The Jewish Theological Seminar
of America

FOREWORD: A PERSONAL VIEW

Shortly after Rabbi Alexander Shapiro became President of the Rabbinical Assembly, he broached the idea to me of establishing a Joint Commission, together with the Jewish Theological Seminary, which would formulate a Statement on Conservative Ideology. The time was propitious: the Conservative movement was preparing to celebrate the Centennial of the founding of the Jewish Theological Seminary, an event which symbolizes the formal beginning of Conservative Judaism in America. We approached Chancellor Gerson D. Cohen with the proposal that he appoint representatives of the Seminary faculty and of the Rabbinical Assembly to sit together and to prepare an official statement of the philosophy of Conservative Judaism. The word "official" must be emphasized; many scholars, and rabbis in the field, had formulated their views on the philosophy of the movement. But these were individual statements. Rabbis, in particular, were confronted frequently with the question "What does Conservative Judaism stand for?" Implied in the question was a suspicion that Conservative Judaism is simply a vague, indefinite middle ground between Orthodoxy and Reform.

For almost a century, it could be argued, this lack of definition was useful since the majority of American Jews wished to be neither Orthodox nor Reform, and therefore joined Conservative organizations. But the situation has radically changed. Orthodoxy, which has been widely considered moribund a few generations ago, has assertively come back to life, and is generally characterized by an aggressive ideology which denies the legitimacy of non-Orthodox approaches to Judaism. On the other hand, the Reform movement is also growing in size, and has been seeking to spell out its philosophy. In our day, it is no longer sufficient to define Conservative Judaism by what it is not. It is now clear that our avoidance of self-definition has resulted in a lack of self-confidence on the part of Conservative Jews, who are unable to tell others, let alone themselves, what Conservative Judaism stands for. Our goal, then, was to teach members of Conservative congregations to become Conservative Jews.

At the meeting held by Chancellor Cohen with his cabinet, members of the Rabbinical Assembly's Executive Council, Alexander Shapiro and me, it was agreed to establish a Commission on the Philosophy of Conservative Judaism. We decided that both the Rabbinical Assembly and the Seminary would appoint members who would represent the entire ideological spectrum. For the project to succeed, we needed an outstanding chairman who could command the respect of all participants. One rabbi who stood head and shoulders above others was Rabbi Robert Gordis. A distinguished academician, Dr. Gordis is a scholar and thinker, who in addition to his technical scholarly works, has written extensively about Conservative Judaism and the role of religion in the contemporary world. His many services to the movement through the years have earned the respect of those on the right, the left, and in the center. Dr. Gordis was approached, and after some initial hesitation, accepted.

At first, the Commission was seen as a forum for academicians and for rabbis with scholarly credentials. But soon after we began, we recognized that a philosophy of Conservative Judaism was not meant for rabbis and academicians alone but for all Jews, and that the input of laypeople would be essential for our statement. Representatives of the United Synagogue of America, the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs as well as the Cantors' Assembly and the Jewish Educators' Assembly were invited to join the Commission. They made many significant contributions to the work of the Commission.

For a hundred years, no such task had ever been undertaken. How do you get started? Dr. Gordis suggested that we each write brief papers outlining our own beliefs (the *Ani Ma'amin* — "I believe" — papers) setting forth our own conception of the basic elements of Judaism in general and Conservative Judaism in particular. These individual papers are being collected, and are being published in a separate volume, together with the collective Statement of Principles which appears in this pamphlet.

We all took the assignment seriously and wrote our papers. Each one of us had to summarize our papers for the Commission, answer questions and defend our positions. But

even as we discussed each individual statement, we began planning the next step, the formulation of the collective Statement of Principles. A list of topics was drawn up, and Dr. Gordis and I met to discuss the order in which we would consider them. I proposed that we begin with the less controversial subjects, so that we would gain confidence from our initial success. Dr. Gordis had the opposite view: he urged that we tackle the most difficult topics first. If we failed with those questions, there would be little point in discussing the rest. However, if we could successfully resolve the more difficult issues, the others would follow easily. In accordance with Dr. Gordis' plan, we plunged in immediately, and began with Revelation, Halakhah, and the basis of religious authority.

To better understand our situation in 1985, it should be remembered that the right-wing Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism had recently come into existence. At that time, the Seminary was grappling with the question of admitting women to its Rabbinical School and ordaining them as rabbis. Bitter debates had taken place at Rabbinical Assembly conventions, and we appeared to be a movement in danger of division. Seated on the Commission were intellectual advocates of the most extreme positions, while in between were the rest of us, reflecting the broad spectrum of opinion within the Conservative movement. Could agreement be reached between people with such different points of view?

The beginning was not auspicious. The discussions were intense and seemed to express a sense of mutual distrust. Fortunately, this meeting took place in a retreat setting, at Camp Ramah in the Poconos. It was not easy to walk out and leave. Moreover, since we were a small group, we spent our free time together. As we began to talk to each other informally, we found that "the other side" was neither as "wrong" nor as extreme as it may have appeared at Rabbinical Assembly debates. We soon discovered that not only were we all sincerely interested in producing a Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism, but that we had much more in common than we had realized. All of us, whether on the right or on the left, were Conservative Jews. We all accepted the results of modern scholarship. We agreed that historical development of the tradition had taken place, and that the tradition continues

to develop. We all agreed on the indispensability of Halakhah for Conservative Jews, but a Halakhah which responds to changing times and changing needs.

However, there *were* real differences between us and the question arose as to how to express them. We could have used the method of majority and minority reports. But we succeeded in setting forth various viewpoints in the same document without papering over our differences.

One by one, initial drafts of each section were prepared and submitted to the Commission for discussion. And there was plenty of discussion! Where there was no consensus, we found ways to include multiple opinions without indicating a preference for one view over the other, since they were all legitimate points of view in Conservative Judaism. When all of the statements had been revised and approved by the Commission, they were turned over to the Editorial Committee which met repeatedly to incorporate the individual sections into one smooth and readable document. You have the results before you in this pamphlet.

The real task begins now. Having formulated the Principles of Conservative Judaism, we must now study them and integrate them into our thinking, so that Conservative congregations will be blessed with growing numbers of "ideal Conservative Jews," whose lives will exemplify the objectives and aspirations set forth in this Statement of Principles.

Kassel Abelson, President
The Rabbinical Assembly

FOREWORD: THE LAYPERSON'S VIEW

The laity of our Conservative movement has historically supported our rabbis in fostering the growth and acceptance of the principles of Conservative Judaism. However, in the past generation, substantial areas of lay responsibility were abdicated to the rabbinate due to the competing cares and concerns — for example Israel and community Federations — on our Jewish agenda.

For the last few years, the laity of our movement has been reasserting its claim to various areas of responsibility and its equal partnership in all appropriate areas with our rabbis, scholars and teachers. Our fear is that without a committed, learned laity, Conservative Judaism will become a "rabbi religion" rather than a "people religion."

The United Synagogue of America represents the total lay/synagogal/congregational structure. Ms. Evelyn Auerbach, President of the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, and Dr. Jerome Agrest, President of the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, have also indicated their commitment to a clear and relevant philosophy for our two million Conservative Jews. They, too, join in this Foreword. Their dedication to the movement, and that of their constituencies, adds to the strength and dignity of this Statement.

In May 1985, the Commission on the Philosophy of Conservative Judaism was formed to delineate the principles that guide and inspire all who affiliate with our movement. However, the Commission's original seventeen members were all rabbis or members of the faculty of The Jewish Theological Seminary. Shortly after my assumption of the presidency of the United Synagogue on November 20, 1985, it came to my attention that The Jewish Theological Seminary and the Rabbinical Assembly had established this Commission. In the light of our strong commitment to the active role of the laity within the spectrum of our movement, the United Synagogue leadership felt an urgent need for lay involvement.

Therefore, we formally requested to be a part of this process; to help develop an ideological statement "that would be held and lived by rabbi and congregant alike." After a period of negotiation, it was agreed that there would be six lay members on the Commission: four from the United Synagogue of Amer-

ica, and one each from the Women's League for Conservative Judaism and the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs. The presidents of these three organizations would be ex-officio members of the Commission.

For years, the laity has had questions and concerns regarding life and death, family and ethics, God and Judaism. But these concepts were largely locked in books or in the minds of rabbis and scholars. Today's educated Conservative laity is demanding answers to the questions that will confront all twenty-first century human beings.

The time has come for us as Conservative Jews to stand secure and strong. As the work of the Commission has made eminently clear, we have a direction. We have a point of view. We have an approach to life that can make us better human beings. We have an approach to God that can make us better servants of the King of Kings. We have an approach to Judaism that speaks to the concerns that are on our minds and in our hearts.

We are indebted to the men and women who developed the Statement of Principles that appears in this publication. Yet at the present time, the potential embodied in this philosophy is still unrealized. Whether the potential becomes a reality depends on what we, the Conservative laity, do in partnership with our rabbis and scholars to determine our movement's destiny. A philosophy or an ideology is only a blueprint for action. We may conceive of ourselves as if we are standing on a ladder. This image is meaningful only if each one of us on the ladder is "going up" in terms of observance and commitment, rather than standing still — or worse, descending.

Our task as laypeople to conserve Judaism is a significant one, but the treasure which we have been given the legacy to conserve is also a great one. May this volume serve as the stimulus for the rabbinic, academic and lay arms of the Conservative movement to work hand in hand to translate this Statement of Principles into action. Let us join together so that this philosophy may help us develop and expand a Conservative Jewish lifestyle for twenty-first century Conservative Jews.

Franklin D. Kreutzer
International President
United Synagogue of America

INTRODUCTION: THE COMMISSION, THE STATEMENT, THE MOVEMENT

The centennial of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America celebrated in 1986-87 has focused attention on the first hundred years of the history of Conservative Judaism on this continent. Actually the movement had its inception in Germany a half century earlier. In 1845 a meeting of modern rabbis convened in Frankfurt. On the third day Rabbi Zechariah Frankel left the meeting in protest against a proposed resolution that declared that the Hebrew language was not "objectively necessary" for Jewish worship, but should be retained "in deference to the older generation". When in 1857 the Jewish Theological Seminary, the first modern institution for the training of rabbis, was founded in Breslau, Frankel was appointed its Rector. Within a few years the institution became the dominant intellectual force in the religious life of central and western European Jewry and beyond. Basically, the movement which Frankel founded was a reaction against Reform on the one hand, and Orthodoxy on the other. The Breslau Seminary was the inspiration and model for similar institutions founded in Vienna, Budapest, London and Berlin, as well as overseas on the American continent.

The Breslau Seminary became the center of the most distinguished modern research scholarship in the fields of Jewish literature, history and institutions, in a word, the meticulous study of the past. But there was little concern for Jewish theology, law and the philosophy of Judaism in the present.

Frankel himself called his outlook "positive-historical Judaism". By this term he meant that Judaism is the result of a historical process and that its adherents are called upon to take a positive attitude toward the product of this development as we encounter it today. While his opponents, both to the left and the right, challenged him to explicate his philosophy of Judaism more concretely, Frankel was rarely drawn into polemics. Having evidently little taste for theology, he concentrated upon building up Jewish learning through the medium of his own research and that of his colleagues on the Breslau faculty and by training rabbis to serve Jewish com-

munities in central Europe and beyond.

In the congregations served by these rabbis, minor innovations were introduced in the ritual. They were designed to accommodate Jewish tradition to the new conditions and insights of the modern age, while preserving intact the structure and content of traditional Jewish observance.

This pattern was largely repeated on American soil. The Jewish Theological Seminary, founded in 1886, had a difficult existence for a decade and a half. In 1902, Solomon Schechter was invited to these shores to serve as its president. He assembled a constellation of scholars of the greatest eminence. In addition to himself, it included Louis Ginzberg, Alexander Marx, Israel Friedlaender, Israel Davidson and Mordecai Kaplan, as well as a galaxy of other scholars, perhaps less well known, but highly gifted and creative. The Seminary faculty and many of its early alumni produced valuable works in the field of historical and literary scholarship.

A growing number of American Jews joined the ranks of Conservative Judaism, demonstrating that the movement met a felt need in the burgeoning American Jewish community. This numerical success strengthened the conviction among many leaders of the movement that there was little need for spelling out in detail the guiding principles and subtler nuances of the movement on such fundamentals as God and man, Israel and the world, ethics and ritual.

The practical considerations that seemed to support the wisdom of avoiding, or at least minimizing, the discussion of theological, philosophical and legal issues were reinforced by significant inner factors. The first lay in the character of Conservative Judaism. It had emerged as a reactive movement called into being to stem the tide of Reform, a task in which it has proved highly successful by demonstrating that the Jewish tradition was eminently compatible with loyalty to American life. The thousands of men and women who joined its ranks were generally emphatic in declaring what they were not. They were far less concerned with exploring the implications of what they were for.

The second motive was the desire to preserve, and if possible, enhance Jewish unity, and certainly not to increase division in Israel. In founding the United Synagogue, Schechter had

hoped to unite all congregations respectful of tradition in any degree, right, left and center, under one banner, as the name of the organization indicates. To be sure most Orthodox congregations soon began to look elsewhere for leadership, but the hope lingered among many leaders of Conservative Judaism that by avoiding clear-cut delineation of the principles of the movement, divisions could be avoided, at least within the ranks of Conservative Judaism.

Moreover Judaism had rarely sought to formulate a system of beliefs; even Maimonides had not succeeded in winning universal acceptance for his Thirteen Principles, the *Ani Ma'amin*. Judaism, perhaps unconsciously, had long acted on the principle: far better the blurring of differences than the burning of dissidents.

Finally, a third factor entered into the picture — the sheer intellectual and spiritual difficulty involved in articulating a religious outlook for Conservative Judaism as a whole. Individual Jewish scholars and thinkers, both in the academic world and in the congregational rabbinate, had written works which contained valuable insights for such a project, but they were views of individuals, often influential, but not normative for the movement as a whole.

One can understand and appreciate these factors which militated against formulating statements of ideology until now. In our own time, however, the growing self-awareness of each school of thought in Judaism and latterly, the deeper concern with religious issues among the most genuinely dedicated members of the community, demand answers to questions it earlier seemed easier to avoid.

The formulation of basic doctrine is a particularly difficult task for Conservative Judaism, far more than for its sister movements. Reform Judaism has denied the authority of Jewish law, so that each rabbi and each congregant is free to choose whatever elements of the tradition seem appealing in the name of "individual autonomy".

American Orthodoxy, divided into a dozen groups and factions, is theoretically united under the dogma that both the Written and the Oral Law were given by God to Moses on Sinai, and have remained unchanged and unchangeable through the ages. In fact, this promise of a safe harbor of absolute

certainty in a world where everything may be questioned has been the source of the attraction that Orthodoxy has possessed for many of our contemporaries. This comes at a high price, however. The results of modern scholarship that reveal a long history of development in Judaism are ignored, and the challenges presented by modern life are disregarded when possible or minimized when it is not.

It is Conservative Judaism that most directly confronts the challenge to integrate tradition with modernity. By retaining most of the tradition while yet being hospitable to the valuable aspects of modernity, it articulates a vital, meaningful vision of Judaism for our day. Difficult as this task is, there is comfort in the observation of our Sages that *lefum tzaara agra*, according to the pain involved is the reward (Avot 5:24).

The twentieth century, the most eventful in Jewish history, had made this task especially important. The establishment of the State of Israel, the horror of the Holocaust, and the extraordinary growth and creativity of the North American Jewish community all demand new synthesis and applications of the new and the old in both thought and action. Jews must also respond to several major developments affecting the human species as a whole, including especially the feminist movement, the staggering advances in technology and biomedical research, and the awesome threat of nuclear annihilation. As these pages will make clear, the Conservative community has its own distinctive view of many of these issues, one which is coherent and yet pluralistic, thoughtful and yet oriented to action, traditional and yet responsive to the present.

The Conservative philosophy has been expressed in the lives of Conservative Jews for decades. A number of Conservative rabbis and lay leaders have also articulated it, in whole or in part, in written or oral form. As the Conservative community matured, however, it increasingly felt the need to have an official statement of its principles. A decisive step was taken in 1985. The official heads of two arms of the movement, Doctor Gerson D. Cohen, then Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Rabbi Alexander Shapiro, then President of the Rabbinical Assembly, agreed to set up a Commission on the Ideology (now the Philosophy) of Conservative Judaism, con-

sisting of seven members appointed from the faculty of the Seminary and seven members from the Rabbinical Assembly. The writer, who had been a member of the Seminary faculty for thirty-seven years and also President of the Rabbinical Assembly, was invited to become Chairman of the Commission since he represented both agencies of the movement. Its membership was subsequently enlarged to include representatives of the United Synagogue of America, the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, the Cantors' Assembly and the Jewish Educators' Assembly, and a rabbinic colleague from Israel so that the Commission could speak for all segments of the Conservative community.

The following rabbis and laypersons were members of the Commission:

Robert Gordis, Chairman
Rabbi Kassel Abelson
Rabbi Howard Addison
Rabbis Jacob Agus ז"ל
Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff
Rabbi Neil Gillman
Mr. Max Goldberg
Rabbi Simon Greenberg
Ms. Evelyn Henkind
Judge Norman Krivosha
Dr. Anne Lapidus Lerner
Rabbi David Lieber
Mr. Francis Mintz
Rabbi Ludwig Nadelmann ז"ל
Rabbi David Novak
Rabbi Stanley Rabinowitz
Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal
Rabbi Benjamin Segal
Rabbi Alexander Shapiro
Dr. Miriam Klein Shapiro
Rabbi Seymour Siegel
Mr. Jacob Stein
Rabbi Gordon Tucker

The following were ex-officio members of the Commission:

Dr. Gerson D. Cohen	Chancellor, Jewish Theological Seminary (1972-86)
Dr. Ismar Schorsch	Chancellor, Jewish Theological Seminary (1986-)
Rabbi Alexander Shapiro	President, Rabbinical Assembly (1984-86)
Rabbi Kassel Abelson	President, Rabbinical Assembly (1986-)
Mr. Marshall Wolke	President, United Synagogue of America (1981-85)

Mr. Franklin Kreutzer	President, United Synagogue of America (1985 -)
Ms. Selma Weintraub	President, Women's League for Conservative Judaism (1982-86)
Ms. Evelyn Auerbach	President, Women's League for Conservative Judaism (1986 -)
Cantor Saul Z. Hammerman	President, Cantors' Assembly (1985-87)
Cantor Solomon Mendelson	President, Cantors' Assembly (1987 -)
Dr. Michael Korman	President, Jewish Educators' Assembly (1985-87)
Rabbi Marim Charry	President, Jewish Educators' Assembly (1987 -)

During the period from 1985-86 Rabbi Akiba Lubow was Secretary of the Commission. In 1987 Ms. Rebecca Jacobs served in the same capacity.

The Editorial Committee consisted of Elliot Dorff, Robert Gordis, Rebecca Jacobs, David Lieber and Gilbert S. Rosenthal.

During the course of its history the Commission sustained grievous losses in the passing of two of its most dedicated members, Rabbi Jacob B. Agus and Rabbi Ludwig Nadelmann, who were called to the Academy on High. Their presence was sorely missed, *yehi zikhram barukh.*

There were ten meetings of the full Commission, each lasting two days, from May 25-26, 1985 to November 9-10, 1987.

It is safe to say that as the Commission began its work there was considerable doubt as to the possibility of its success. First and foremost, there was the inherent difficulty of formulating in words the outlook of a movement numbering some two million men and women with hundreds of leaders. Second, there was the omnipresent danger of its producing a document that would exacerbate differences within the movement by seeking to define its position on controversial questions. On the other hand, the attempt to avoid this result might produce a bland statement that would paper over the differences by issuing an anthology of platitudes. In other

words, Conservative Judaism would stand revealed as a coalition rather than a movement, the fate that seems to pervade so many areas of contemporary society.

Whatever judgment will ultimately be passed upon the results of our labors, the members of the Commission were later profoundly gratified to find that they were achieving a far greater consensus than they had dared hope.

Our method of procedure was as follows: In order to orient the members of the Commission to the issues before them and lay the basis for a free yet friendly discussion of the points at issue, the Chairman at the opening meeting proposed that each member be invited to prepare a personal *Ani Ma'amin*, a credo of his or her fundamental beliefs and approaches to the major problems of life as a Jew and as a human being. Each paper was the subject of a detailed analysis and critique at the early meetings of the Commission. These papers, as revised on the basis of this process, will be published in a volume together with the *Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*. Over and beyond the intrinsic value of their contents, these *Ani Ma'amin* presentations will afford an insight into the individual world-views of the members of the Commission and thus add a personal and pluralistic dimension to the collective Statement. It should be added that the preparation of these individual statements was optional and not all members availed themselves of this invitation.

Following the preparation of these individual papers, the Commission decided upon the specific topics to be included in the *Statement of Principles*. Each member of the Commission was asked to prepare a preliminary draft of one or several of these sections. In some instances the same theme was presented in preliminary drafts by more than one member of the Commission. Each section was then studied by the entire membership, line by line, and discussed at succeeding meetings. The texts were revised, supplemented or contracted as a result of these detailed discussions. Virtually every section bears the marks of contributions by the entire membership. Most drafts were revised two or three times, some even more. The cooperative spirit between authors of the original drafts and their colleagues made these discussions a warm, friendly

experience as well as a stimulating intellectual encounter for the participants.

The Commission, acting as a Committee of the Whole, then formally adopted the definitive version for inclusion in the Statement. Finally, the Editorial Committee read the text and introduced stylistic revisions that did not affect the substance.

While we believe that this Statement of Principles presents a consensus of the views of the movement, it should not be necessary to point out that the *Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* is not a catechism or a test of faith. Where more than one position falls within the parameters of Conservative Judaism, that fact is reflected in the Statement. Pluralism is a characteristic not only of Judaism as a whole, but of every Jewish school of thought that is nurtured by the spirit of freedom. Acceptance of the Statement of Principles as a whole or in detail is not obligatory upon every Conservative Jew, lay or rabbinic. Nor is each member of the Commission necessarily in agreement with every position embodied in the Statement.

As our work progressed there were two major lessons we learned of far-reaching consequence for the movement. First, it is frequently proclaimed that Conservative Judaism is in decline, in danger of degenerating into a small coterie of survivors or of splitting into a number of hostile groups. During these two years of working together we have learned that, like the announcement of Mark Twain's death, the report of the imminent demise of Conservative Judaism is vastly exaggerated.

Second, we found what some might have doubted at the outset; that while there are differences regarding attitudes and procedures on some issues, there is a far greater area of agreement within our ranks. All groups within the movement accept the fundamentals of the philosophy of Conservative Judaism which find frequent expression in our Statement of Principles. These may summarily be set down as follows:

"In the beginning God. . ." Though we differ in our perceptions and experiences of reality, we affirm our faith in God as the Creator and Governor of the universe. His power called the world into being; His wisdom and goodness guide its des-

tiny. Of all the living creatures we know, humanity alone, created in His image and endowed with free will, has been singled out to be the recipient and bearer of Revelation. The product of this human-divine encounter is the Torah, the embodiment of God's will revealed pre-eminently to the Jewish people through Moses, the Prophets and the Sages, as well as to the righteous and wise of all nations. Hence, by descent and destiny, each Jew stands under the divine command to obey God's will.

Second, we recognize the authority of the Halakhah which has never been monolithic or immovable. On the contrary, as modern scholarship has abundantly demonstrated, the Halakhah has grown and developed through changing times and diverse circumstances. This life-giving attribute is doubly needed today in a world of dizzying change.

Third, though the term was unknown, pluralism has characterized Jewish life and thought through the ages. This is reflected in the variety of views and attitudes of the biblical legislators, priests, prophets, historians, psalmists and Wisdom teachers, the hundreds of controversies among the rabbis of the Talmud and in the codes and responsa of their successors. The latter-day attempt to suppress freedom of inquiry and the right to dissent is basically a foreign importation into Jewish life.

Fourth, the rich body of Halakhah and Aggadah and the later philosophic and mystical literature, all seeking to come closer to God's presence, are a precious resource for deepening the spiritual life of Israel and humankind.

Fifth, all the aspects of Jewish law and practice are designed to underscore the centrality of ethics in the life of the Jews.

Sixth, Israel is not only the Holy Land where our faith was born and developed, but it plays an essential role in our present and future. Israel is a symbol of the unity of the Jewish people the world over, the homeland for millions of Jews and a unique arena for Jewish creativity. Together with our responsibility to Israel is our obligation to strengthen and enrich the life of Jewish communities throughout the world — including, it need hardly be said, our own.

Seventh, Jewish law and tradition, properly understood

and interpreted, will enrich Jewish life and help mold the world closer to the prophetic vision of the Kingdom of God.

We hope this Statement will serve as a description of the state of belief in Conservative Judaism as a whole. We trust it will indicate to all individual Jews what is expected of them by the movement to which they give their allegiance. Above all, we pray that it will help teach each of our brothers and sisters what we must ask of ourselves as human beings and as Jews.

We also cherish the hope that many who are not now affiliated with Conservative Judaism may find that this Statement of Principles expresses their innermost convictions and ideals. We know that there are untold numbers of men and women in North America, in Israel and throughout the world who have been adherents of Conservative Judaism without being conscious of where they belong. We hope that they will be stimulated to join our movement and thus strengthen its influence for good.

May our brothers and sisters everywhere become more concerned not merely with survival but with a Judaism worthy of survival, so that the Divine promise made to Abraham may be fulfilled for his descendants: "Be thou a blessing".

For the privilege of sitting together and pondering God's ways with Israel and Israel's covenant with God, we humbly bless and hallow His name.

Robert Gordis, Chairman
Commission on the Philosophy
of Conservative Judaism

February 3, 1988
Tu Bishevat 5748
The fortieth year of Israel's independence

GOD IN THE WORLD

GOD

We believe in God. Indeed, Judaism cannot be detached from belief in, or beliefs about God. Residing always at the very heart of our self-understanding as a people, and of all Jewish literature and culture, God permeates our language, our law, our conscience, and our lore. From the opening words of Genesis, our Torah and tradition assert that God is One, that He is the Creator, and that His Providence extends through human history. Consciousness of God also pervades Jewish creativity and achievements: the sublime moral teachings of the prophets, the compassionate law of the Rabbis, the spiritual longings of our liturgists, and the logical analyses of our philosophers all reflect a sense of awe, a desire to experience God in our lives and to do His will. God is the principal figure in the story of the Jews and Judaism.

Although one cannot penetrate Jewish experience and consciousness without thinking of and speaking of Him, God is also a source of great perplexities and confusions. Doubts and uncertainties about God are inevitable; indeed, they arose even in the hearts and minds of biblical heroes such as Abraham, Moses and Job, the biblical prophets and Wisdom teachers, among the greatest masters of rabbinic *midrash*, and in the writings of renowned Jewish thinkers and poets to the present day. One can live fully and authentically as a Jew without having a single satisfactory answer to such doubts; one cannot, however, live a thoughtful Jewish life without having asked the questions.

Does God exist? If so, what sort of being is God? Does God have a plan for the universe? Does God care about me? Does He hear prayer? Does God allow the suffering of the innocent? Every one of these questions, and many others, have been the subject of discussion and debate among theologians and laypersons alike for centuries. The biblical book of Job agonizes over each of these, concluding that God and His ways cannot be comprehended fully by human beings. The

Jewish tradition continually has taught that we must live with faith even when we have no conclusive demonstrations.

Conservative Judaism affirms the critical importance of belief in God, but does not specify all the particulars of that belief. Certainly, belief in a trinitarian God, or in a capricious, amoral God can never be consistent with Jewish tradition and history. Valid differences in perspective, however, do exist.

For many of us, belief in God means faith that a supreme, supernatural being exists and has the power to command and control the world through His will. Since God is not like objects that we can readily perceive, this view relies on indirect evidence. Grounds for belief in God are many. They include: the testimony of Scripture, the fact that there is something rather than nothing, the vastness and orderliness of the universe, the sense of command that we feel in the face of moral imperatives, the experience of miraculous historical events, and the existence of phenomena which seem to go beyond physical matter, such as human consciousness and creativity. All of these perceptions are encounters that point beyond us. They reinforce one another to produce an experience of, and thus a belief in, a God who, though unperceivable, exists in the usual sense of the word. This is the conception of God that emerges from a straightforward reading of the Bible.

Some view the reality of God differently. For them, the existence of God is not a "fact" that can be checked against the evidence. Rather, God's presence is the starting point for our entire view of the world and our place in it. Where is such a God to be found and experienced? He is not a being to whom we can point. He is, instead, present when we look for meaning in the world, when we work for morality, for justice, and for future redemption. A description of God's nature is not the last line of a logical demonstration; it emerges out of our shared traditions and stories as a community. God is, in this view as well, a presence and a power that transcends us, but His nature is not completely independent of our beliefs and experiences. This is a conception of God that is closer to the God of many Jewish philosophers and mystics.

The two views broadly characterized here have deep roots in the Bible and in the rest of Jewish tradition. They are both well represented in Conservative Jewish thought, and coexist

to this day in our movement. They, in fact, have much in common. In particular, they both insist that the language and concepts traditionally used to speak of God are valid and critical parts of our way of life. Although proponents of both views use metaphors to speak of God, we all affirm the power of traditional terms (such as the kingship and fatherhood of God) to influence our lives in very positive ways. Our liturgy and our study of classical texts reflect that acknowledgment of the power of God in our lives.

That there are many questions about God which are not fully answered does not mean that our beliefs on these issues do not matter. On the contrary, they can change the world, for what an individual believes about God will both shape and reflect his or her deepest commitments about life. A belief in the unity of God, for example, creates and reinforces a belief in the unity of humanity and a commitment to standards of justice and ethics. Similarly, a people which believes in a God who "adopts orphans and defends widows" and commands us to do likewise, will construct a society vastly different from that of a community which glorifies only the autonomy of human beings.

God's elusive nature has always given us many options in deciding how we shall conceive of Him and how that will affect our lives. The human condition being what it is, some choices in these matters must inevitably be made. In our own fragile world, the tenacious belief in God that has characterized our history since Abraham and Sarah stands as instruction and inspiration, and continues to call us to pattern our lives after the God in whom we believe.

REVELATION

Conservative Judaism affirms its belief in revelation, the uncovering of an external source of truth emanating from God. This affirmation emphasizes that although truths are transmitted by humans, they are not a human invention. That is why we call the Torah *torat emet*. The Torah's truth is both theo-

retical and practical, that is, it teaches us about God and about our role in His world. As such, we reject relativism, which denies any objective source of authoritative truth. We also reject fundamentalism and literalism, which do not admit a human component in revelation, thus excluding an independent role for human experience and reason in the process.

The nature of revelation and its meaning for the Jewish people, have been understood in various ways within the Conservative community. We believe that the classical sources of Judaism provide ample precedents for these views of revelation.

The single greatest event in the history of God's revelation took place at Sinai, but was not limited to it. God's communication continued in the teaching of the Prophets and the biblical Sages, and in the activity of the Rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud, embodied in Halakhah and the Aggadah (law and lore). The process of revelation did not end there; it remains alive in the Codes and Responsa to the present day.

Some of us conceive of revelation as the personal encounter between God and human beings. Among them there are those who believe that this personal encounter has propositional content, that God communicated with us in actual words. For them, revelation's content is immediately normative, as defined by rabbinic interpretation. The commandments of the Torah themselves issue directly from God. Others, however, believe that revelation consists of an ineffable human encounter with God. The experience of revelation inspires the verbal formulation by human beings of norms and ideas, thus continuing the historical influence of this revelational encounter.

Others among us conceive of revelation as the continuing discovery, through nature and history, of truths about God and the world. These truths, although always culturally conditioned, are nevertheless seen as God's ultimate purpose for creation. Proponents of this view tend to see revelation as an ongoing process rather than as a specific event.

HALAKHAH (JEWISH LAW)

The Indispensability of Halakhah

Halakhah consists of the norms taught by the Jewish tradition; how one is to live as a Jew. Most Jewish norms are embodied in the laws of the Bible and their rabbinic interpretation and expansion over the centuries, but some take the form of customs, and others are derived from the ethical ideals which inform the laws and customs and extend beyond them *(lifnim m'shurat hadin)*. Since each age requires new interpretations and applications of the received norms, Halakhah is an ongoing process. It is thus both an ancient tradition, rooted in the experience and texts of our ancestors, and a contemporary way of life, giving value, shape, and direction to our lives.

For many Conservative Jews, Halakhah is indispensable first and foremost because it is what the Jewish community understands God's will to be. Moreover, it is a concrete expression of our ongoing encounter with God. This divine element of Jewish law is understood in varying ways within the Conservative community, but, however it is understood, it is for many the primary rationale for obeying Halakhah, the reason that undergirds all the rest.

Other considerations, however, complement the theological basis for Halakhah. It is a means of identifying and preserving the Jewish people and its traditions. It trains and sharpens the moral conscience of individuals and society by presenting cases for consideration and teaching Jews how to think about them morally. It establishes minimal standards of behavior and gives ideals concrete expression. In addition to shaping the content of moral standards in these ways, Halakhah helps to motivate obedience to them — not, as in generations past, through legal enforcement (except, in some measure, in Israel) — but by establishing a set of goals which has both divine and social authority. Halakhah thus establishes a struc-

ture of rules to govern human interactions.

Halakhah shapes our relationship to God. It affords us symbols by which we together can learn and express piety, and the study of sacred texts. The religious base of Halakhah makes it a far more comprehensive guide for life than any secular system of rules. Ultimately, as the prayerbook reminds us twice each day, Halakhah is God's gift to us, an expression of God's love. Similarly, our adherence to Halakhah is an act of love for God on our part. It is, in fact, the primary way in which God and the Jewish people exhibit their love for each other.

For all these reasons, Halakhah in its developing form is an indispensable element of a traditional Judaism which is vital and modern. Halakhah is not the entirety of our Jewish identity; Judaism includes the ethical and theological reflections embodied in its lore *(aggadah)*, a history, a commitment to a specific land and language, art, music, literature, and more. Judaism is indeed a civilization in the fullest sense of the term. But Halakhah is fundamental to that civilization.

Tradition and Development in Halakhah

The sanctity and authority of Halakhah attaches to the body of the law, not to each law separately, for throughout Jewish history Halakhah has been subject to change. Reverence for the tradition and concern for its continuity prevented rash revision of the law, but Jewish practice was modified from time to time. Most often, new interpretation or application of existing precedents produced the needed development; but sometimes new ordinances were necessary. Sometimes, as in the education of girls and the creation of the Simhat Torah festival, the changes occurred first in the conduct of the rabbis or the people and only then were confirmed in law.

The rabbis of the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Midrash recognized that changes had occurred and that they themselves were instituting them. They took pains to justify the legitimacy of rabbis in each generation applying the law in new ways to meet the demands of the time. They pointed out that the Torah itself requires such judicial activity, a mandate which they interpreted broadly to include, at times, even outright revisions of the law. Each individual cannot be empowered to

make changes in the law, for that would undermine its authority and coherence; only the rabbinic leaders of the community, because of their knowledge of the content, aims, and methods of Halakhah, are authorized by Jewish tradition to make the necessary changes, although they must keep the customs and needs of the community in mind as they deliberate.

We in the Conservative community are committed to carrying on the rabbinic tradition of preserving and enhancing Halakhah by making appropriate changes in it through rabbinic decision. This flows from our conviction that Halakhah is indispensable for each age. As in the past, the nature and number of adjustments of the law will vary with the degree of change in the environment in which Jews live. The rapid technological and social change of our time, as well as new ethical insights and goals, have required new interpretations and applications of Halakhah to keep it vital for our lives; more adjustments will undoubtedly be necessary in the future. These include additions to the received tradition to deal with new circumstances and, in some cases, modifications of the corpus of Halakhah.

While change is both a traditional and a necessary part of Halakhah, we, like our ancestors, are not committed to change for its own sake. Hence, the thrust of the Jewish tradition and the Conservative community is to maintain the law and practices of the past as much as possible, and the burden of proof is on the one who wants to alter them. Halakhah has responded and must continue to respond to changing conditions, sometimes through alteration of the law and sometimes by standing firm against passing fads and skewed values. Moreover, the necessity for change does not justify any particular proposal for revision. Each suggestion cannot be treated mechanically but must rather be judged in its own terms, a process which requires thorough knowledge of both Halakhah and the contemporary scene as well as carefully honed skills of judgment.

Following the example of our rabbinic predecessors over the ages, however, we consider instituting changes for a variety of reasons. Occasionally the integrity of the law must be maintained by adjusting it to conform to contemporary practice among observant Jews. Every legal system from time to time

must adjust what is on the books to be in line with actual practice if the law is to be taken seriously as a guide to conduct. New technological, social, economic, or political realities sometimes require legal action. Some changes in law are designed to improve the material conditions of the Jewish people or society at large. The goal of others is to foster better relations among Jews or between Jews and the larger community. In some cases changes are necessary to prevent or remove injustice, while in others they constitute a positive program to enhance the quality of Jewish life by elevating its moral standards or deepening its piety.

We affirm that the halakhic process has striven to embody the highest moral principles. Where changing conditions produce what seem to be immoral consequences and human anguish, varying approaches exist within our community to rectify the situation. Where it is deemed possible and desirable to solve the problem through the existing halakhic norms, we prefer to use them. If not, some within the Conservative community are prepared to amend the existing law by means of a formal procedure of legislation *(takkanah)*. Some are willing to make a change only when they find it justified by sources in the halakhic literature. All of us, however, are committed to the indispensability of Halakhah for authentic Jewish living.

Our dedication to Halakhah flows from our deep awareness of the divine element and the positive values inherent in it. Every effort is made to conserve and enhance it. When changes are necessary, they are made with the express goal of insuring that Halakhah remains an effective, viable, and moral guide for our lives.

Authority for Making Decisions in Halakhah

The Conservative method for arriving at halakhic decisions reflects our interest in pluralism and also exhibits the trait characteristic of Conservative Judaism, the melding of the traditional with the modern. The rich tradition which we possess depends upon the scholarship, integrity, and piety of our leadership and laity. For religious guidance, the Conservative movement looks to the scholars of the Jewish Theological

Seminary of America and other institutions of higher learning. The United Synagogue of America, the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, and the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs represent the human resources of laypeople of our community.

Authority for religious practice in each congregation resides in its rabbi (its *mara d'atra*). It derives from the rabbi's training in the Jewish tradition attested by his or her ordination as a rabbi, and by the fact the congregation has chosen that rabbi to be its religious guide. In making decisions, rabbis may consult the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, consisting of representatives of the Rabbinical Assembly, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and the United Synagogue of America. The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards issues rulings shaping the practice of the Conservative community. Parameters set by that Committee and at Rabbinical Assembly conventions govern all of the rabbis of the Rabbinical Assembly, but within those bounds there are variations of practice recognized as both legitimate and, in many cases, contributory to the richness of Jewish life. In this way the Conservative community preserves the traditional interactions between individual rabbis in their communities and the larger, central authority of the movement in making decisions in Jewish law. At the same time, Conservative Judaism responds to the needs of individual Jews and congregations. This assures us a clear sense of identity together with a vibrant, healthy pluralism.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The existence of evil has always provided the most serious impediment to faith. Given the enormity of the horror represented by Auschwitz and Hiroshima, this dilemma has taken on a new, terrifying reality in our generation. The question of how a just and powerful God could allow the annihilation of so many innocent lives haunts the religious conscience and staggers the imagination.

Despite centuries of debate, we must realize that no theology can ever justify the mass slaughter of the blameless, the death of a single child, or the seeming randomness with which natural disaster strikes. The Torah itself reflects the tension between the inscrutability of God's will and God's own assertions that He is the Author and Prime Exemplar of morality. Ultimately, we cannot judge God because we cannot discern His workings from beginning to end. A discrepancy will always exist between our finite characterizations of God and His own infinite nature.

Although we cannot always reconcile God's acts with our concept of a just God, we can seek to further our understanding of His ways. By creating human beings with free will, God, of necessity, limited His own future range of action. Without the real possibility of people making the wrong choice when confronted by good and evil, the entire concept of choice is meaningless. Endowing humankind with free will can be seen as an act of divine love which allows for our own integrity and growth, even if our decisions can also bring about great sorrow.

We must recognize that much of the world's suffering directly results from our misuse of the free will granted to us. Poverty and war are often the products of human sloth and immorality. Our own passivity or injudicious behavior can exacerbate the ravages of hunger or disease. Given the organic relationship which binds all humankind together, the cruelty or stupidity of some can have wide-ranging, hurtful effects on others, especially when such acts go unchallenged. We can honestly assert that our actions do have consequences. Even if ultimate vindication or recompense is delayed, it is true that in general, right-doing does lead to well-being while wrong-doing results in disaster.

At times, however, we are confounded and even angered when we cannot discern the purpose of suffering or the warrants of evil's targets. We deny as false and blasphemous the assertion that the Holocaust was the result of its victims' transgressions or of the sins of Jewry as a whole. But even when the causes of human evil are traceable, the justification of natural disaster or genetic disease remains a mystery to us. When words fail us, when our understanding cannot grasp the

connection between suffering and our deeds, we can still respond with our acts. Tragedy and personal suffering can spur us on to new levels of compassion, creativity, healing and liberation of the human spirit.

When caught in the throes of pain, the sufferer can find little comfort in theodicy. Thus, attempts to vindicate God by positing tragedy as a necessary condition of life, or by asserting that evil is either the mere absence of good or the work of an autonomous demonic realm, may have some philosophic value. But they cannot alleviate the immediacy and intensity of sorrow. During moments of travail, we can find solace in God who identifies compassionately with us in our struggles. When the world seems chaotic following bereavement, the traditional blessing *barukh dayan ha-emet* ("blessed is the righteous Judge") and the *kaddish* can provide a sense of stability and order. They serve as signposts on the road from mourning to consolation while affirming our belief that all is not chance, that there is a divine plan even when we cannot clearly discern its contours. The image of *olam ha-ba* (a hereafter) can offer hope that we will not be abandoned to the grave, that we will not suffer oblivion. Stripped of all illusions of self-sufficiency by the reality of death, we can gain a deeper consciousness of God who caringly grants us the fortitude to endure, and the ability to find meaning even in our loss.

We maintain our faith in God whose will it is that good triumph over evil, even if that triumph is experienced only fitfully in historical time. Humanity can delay God's plan of a world freely united in love and righteousness with Him, but it cannot prevent its ultimate fulfillment. Even if the "Kingdom of God" remains a vision of a distant future, we can attain kinship with the divine by restraining our hurtful, self-aggrandizing impulses, and by dealing justly and compassionately with one another.

ESCHATOLOGY: OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE

The Messianic Hope

The impulses to create and actualize visions of an idealized "age to come" is thoroughly rooted in individual human beings and in communities of which they are a part. For the individual, it expresses itself in the conviction that a human life, as brief and transient as it may seem to be, nevertheless has lasting significance; that death does not mark the absolute end of a person's identity; that our lives have an "afterword." For a people, it expresses itself in the dream that that community may be master of its own identity, that it may be free to express its distinctive genius, that it may find fulfillment as a people. Finally, since the fate of any one nation is inextricably bound to that of the community of peoples, the vision reaches its climax in the dream of a world order in which warfare, disease and every social evil will be banished forever and all human beings enjoy the fruits of a world at peace and a social order founded on compassion and justice.

These visions of the future, when articulated as a religious philosophical doctrine, have come to be known as "eschatology" (from the Greek *eschaton* or "last things" and *logos* or "discourse," "thought"). This goal, the Prophet called *aḥarit ha-yamim*, "the days to come" (Isaiah 2:2). The Rabbis used several terms: *olam ha-ba* (the age [not 'world'] to come), *atid la-vo* (the destined future) and *yemot ha-mashiaḥ* (the days of the Messiah [the anointed one] who is designated to usher in the redemptive era).

For each of these three dimensions — the individual, the national and the universal — the classical texts of Judaism provide a rich source of speculation. Since no one knows what will happen "in the days to come" each of us is free to fashion personal-speculative visions of the future. In no other area of Jewish thought is dogmatism less justified and hence more

hazardous. Though some of us accept these speculations as literally true, many of us understand them as elaborate metaphors generated by deep-seated human and communal needs and woven together out of Judaism's most intuitive values and commitments. Thus, if Judaism's "age to come" is an age of universal peace and social justice, it is because our Torah commands that we strive to create that kind of social order in the here and now and because our prophets railed against our ancestors' failure to do so in their own day. To refer to these doctrines as metaphors in no way diminishes their significance, their value or their impact on our lives. No human being can live without a dream. As Conservative Jews, then, we affirm the substance of classical Jewish eschatological thinking. Its central thrust is that in partnership with God, we can create an ever more perfect social order — not inevitably, not steadily, and perhaps not in our lifetimes — but eventually, and with the proviso that we strive to the extent of our ability to help bring it about.

For the world community, we dream of an age when warfare will be abolished, when justice and compassion will be the axioms of interpersonal and international relationships and when, in Isaiah's words (11:9), "...the land shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

For our people, we dream of the ingathering of all Jews to Zion where we can again be masters of our destiny and express our distinctive genius in every area of our national life. In many of the prayerbooks of Conservative Judaism, the traditional theme of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem has been reformulated to express the conviction that our regeneration as a people will spark a regeneration of our religious life as well. We affirm Isaiah's prophecy (2:3) that "...Torah shall come forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem," that the teachings of our Torah will contribute to a world at peace.

For the individual human being, we affirm that death does not mean extinction and oblivion. This conviction is articulated in our tradition in the two doctrines of the bodily resurrection of the dead and the continuing existence, after death and through eternity, of the individual soul.

In the course of our history, both of these doctrines have

been understood in widely varying ways. For some of us, they are literal truths which enable us to confront death and the death of our loved ones with courage and equanimity. Others understand these teachings in a more figurative way. The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, omnipresent in our liturgy, affirms in a striking way the value Judaism accords to our bodily existence in our concrete historical and social setting. Beyond this, we know that our genetic make-up will persist through our progeny, long after our deaths and as long as humankind survives.

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul affirms that our identities and our ability to touch other people and society does not end with the physical death of our bodies. Great personalities from the beginning of history remain potent influences in the world. On a more personal level, our friends and the members of our families who are gone are still palpably alive for us to this day.

The traditional doctrine of the "final judgment" expresses our conviction that God is just, that His justice will prevail and that virtue and evil will ultimately be requited — though, in the spirit of the High Holy Day liturgy, we affirm Judaism's distinctive emphasis that God's judgment is rarely "final"; that genuine repentance, worship and deeds of loving-kindness can avert the severity of God's decrees.

In sum, if God is truly God, if His power is the ultimate fact in the world, His ability to touch us is not cut off by the grave.

From Dream to Reality

Throughout the course of Jewish history, Jews have differed as to what can be done by human beings to bring these dreams into reality. Generally, they have spoken in two voices: a radical or revolutionary voice and a more gradualist or evolutionary voice.

Revolutionary messianists are impatient. They despair about humanity's ability to deal with its intrinsic problems in the normal course of affairs. They view themselves as responsible — even required — to take radical action to effect this transformation, to force God's hand. They are less likely to be satisfied with the baby steps that their contemporaries are tak-

ing, with the small partial redemptions that they witness. They thus become militant activists and resort to aggressive political activity and even, in the extreme, military action and violence to bring about their desired goals. They see the age to come as emerging out of a cosmic upheaval (which they will attempt to precipitate) that will destroy the familiar world of nature and history.

In contrast, messianic gradualists see the age to come as emerging slowly and imperceptibly out of the world as we know it today, restoring a pre-existing harmony. Theirs is a more patient and humanistic voice. With a basic confidence that human beings can and will work on the infinite details of their social, political and interpersonal lives, they are prepared to accept these practical redemptions as foretastes of the ultimate redemption to come. They see the eschatological scenario not as an immediate demand but as a vision which yields hope for the future and infuses all of their day-to-day activities with infinite import.

The dominant eschatological voice today is clearly revolutionary — in Islam, in American fundamentalist and evangelical Christianity and among certain groups of Jews in Israel and throughout the world. We understand the concerns that impel communities to resort to such programs. We are also convinced of their dangers: exclusivism, triumphalism, radical political action and in the extreme, militarism and even terrorism.

We therefore affirm a gradualist or evolutionary eschatological approach. We are aware that it, too, has its inherent dangers: inertia, quietism and a generalized sense that since God will send the Messiah in His good time, what we human beings do has little significance. We strive, therefore, to remind ourselves of the classical Jewish teaching that God and humanity are partners, not only in creation and revelation, but in redemption as well.

We do not know when the Messiah will come, nor whether he will be a charismatic human figure or is a symbol of the redemption of humankind from the evils of the world. Through the doctrine of a messianic figure, Judaism teaches us that every individual human being must live as if he or she, individually, has the responsibility to bring about the messianic

age. Beyond that, we echo the words of Maimonides based on the prophet Habakkuk (2:3) that though he may tarry, yet do we wait for him each day.

THE JEWISH PEOPLE

GOD'S COVENANT: THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL

Few Jewish beliefs have been subject to as much misunderstanding as the "Chosen People" doctrine. Hence, the Torah and the Prophets (Deuteronomy 7:7f; 9:6; Amos 3:2) found it necessary to insist that this doctrine does not imply any innate Jewish superiority. In the words of Amos: "You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth — that is why I will call you to account for all your iniquities." Still, the teaching has been so frequently misunderstood by Jews and gentiles alike that some modern thinkers have suggested that it be abandoned.

It is undeniable that this doctrine has been distorted into an expression of moral arrogance, an attitude that the classical sources have been at great pains to deny. However, it cannot easily be given up since it has decisive importance for Jewish self-perception and is essential to an understanding of the covenant idea. The truth is that the "election of Israel" and "the covenant of Israel" are two sides of the same coin; both are central to the classical Jewish world view.

Our ancestors believed themselves chosen to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" with obligations and duties which flowed from their willingness to accept this status. Far from being a license for special privilege, it entailed additional responsibilities not only toward God but to their fellow human beings. As expressed in the blessings at the reading of the Torah, our people always have felt it a privilege to have been selected for such a purpose. Often, however, they had to pay a bloody price for insisting on this role, enabling them to identify with Isaiah's "suffering servant" who accepted the blows and contempt of others in order to bring the truth of God to the world.

Even those who do not accept the belief in "the Chosen People" literally can appreciate its assertion that the Jews,

unlike other nations, emerged on the stage of history to be a people dedicated to the service of God. The "election of Israel," then, is the consciousness of that calling, while loyalty to the covenant suggests that its fulfillment is vital not only for Israel's continued existence, but for the well-being of all humankind.

For the modern traditional Jew, the doctrine of the election and the covenant of Israel offers a purpose for Jewish existence which transcends its narrow self-interest. It suggests that because of our special history and unique heritage we are in a position to demonstrate that a people which takes seriously the idea of being covenanted with God can not only thrive despite oppression and suffering, but be a source of blessing to its children and its neighbors. It obligates us also to build a just and compassionate society throughout the world and especially in the land of Israel, where we may teach by both personal and collective example what it means to be a "covenant people, a light of nations."

THE STATE OF ISRAEL AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION

Religious Freedom

The State of Israel is a unique phenomenon in history. On the one hand, it is and ought to be a democratic state which safeguards freedom of thought and action for all of its citizens. On the other hand, it is and ought to be a distinctively Jewish state fostering Jewish religious and cultural values. Balancing the democratic and Jewish goals in Israeli society presents a constant challenge.

We believe that freedom of the human spirit is a fundamental ideal of the Jewish tradition. We also believe that the essence of democracy is twofold: it expresses the will of the majority and scrupulously protects the rights of minorities. Therefore, the laws passed by the State of Israel, its cities, towns, or other political entities should not be used to sup-

port a single religious view or establishment to the exclusion of others. The State of Israel, founded for the entire Jewish people, must in its actions and laws provide for the pluralism of Jewish life. The State should permit all rabbis, regardless of affiliation, to perform religious functions, including officiating at marriages, divorces and conversions.

The Religious Factor

The Conservative movement affirms that the Jewish religion as reflected in the Jewish way of life constitutes the most significant factor that identifies, distinguishes, unites and preserves the Jewish people. Consequently, we believe that the State of Israel must encourage Jewish patterns of life in all of the agencies of the State and its political subdivisions. Without being a theocracy, Israel should reflect the highest religious and moral values of Judaism and be saturated with Jewish living to the fullest extent possible in a free society. Hence, we welcome the reality that Shabbat, *Yom Tov, kashrut,* and other *mitzvot* are officially upheld by the civilian and military organs of the State, and that the Jewish calendar is in general use. Even in secular schools, classical Jewish sources such as Bible and rabbinic literature are taught, and Jewish observances are at least acknowledged.

While we strongly endorse the need to maintain the Jewish character and ambience of the State of Israel, we regard it as an overriding moral principle that neither the State nor its political subdivisions or agencies employ coercion in the area of religious belief and practice. In view of the wide disparity of outlook among Jews, we believe that matters of personal status should fall under secular law, which should provide civil options for marriage and divorce for those who so prefer, while empowering each religious community to handle its own ritual requirements.

Religious Understanding

We call for maximum dialogue between religious and non-religious elements of Israeli society. The growing polarization of Israeli society along religious lines accompanied by the growth of violence and hostility must be brought to an end.

We applaud all efforts to gain insight from traditional and modern Jewish sources in meeting the challenges which Israeli society faces. We encourage continued activity in this regard and look forward to our particular contribution to that process.

The Role of Religion in a Free Society

Religion as a moral influence is a blessing; as mere political power it is a menace. Political parties, religious or secular, which seek to coerce citizens into religious conformity corrupt both religion and politics. In their drive for power, they often tend to repel Jews from God and religion. The voice of religion will be better heard both in the bastions of power and in the hearts of spiritual seekers if that voice is not suspected of employing self-serving strategies to gain power. This does not mean that religious leaders may not speak out when political policies run roughshod over moral principles. On the contrary, it is a *mitzvah,* and we would expect Israel's religious leaders to reprove political leaders who behave immorally and to denounce government policies which violate religious and ethical norms.

The Uniqueness of Israel

We hope that the State of Israel will always be a strong and secure democratic nation that will serve as a haven of refuge for Jews fleeing oppression and a welcome home for those who elect to go on *aliyah.* We do not view Israel as just another state or political entity; rather, we envision it as an exemplar of religious and moral principles, of civil, political and religious rights for all citizens regardless of race, religion, ethnic origin or sex. We believe that the litmus test of the character of a democratic Jewish state is its treatment of and attitude towards its religious and ethnic minorities. Having been the victims of oppression and discrimination in the lands of their dispersion, Jews should be particularly sensitive to the well-being of all the various ethnic and religious groups living in the State of Israel.

We are painfully aware of Israel's security needs and the intricacies and devious turns of international relations. We

recognize that Israel must steer a hazardous course in immoral international waters. Nevertheless, we recall the prophetic injunction to our people to be "a covenant people, a light of nations." Israel reborn provides a unique opportunity for the Jewish people to be a holy people and a blessing to the nations. Consequently, it behooves Israel to set an example for other nations to build their societies on the principles of social justice, righteousness, compassion, and love for all citizens of all faiths and ethnic groups.

We hope that Israel will be true to the principles cited in its Declaration of Independence so that the State will continue to maintain the moral principles of our prophets and sages who never ceased calling for morality in government and international affairs. We look forward to the day envisioned by our prophets when "nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war."

ISRAEL AND THE DIASPORA

The Central Role of Israel

We rejoice in the existence of *Medinat Yisrael* (the State of Israel) in *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel) with its capital of Jerusalem, the Holy City, the City of Peace. We view this phenomenon not just in political or military terms; rather, we consider it to be a miracle, reflecting Divine Providence in human affairs. We glory in that miracle; we celebrate the rebirth of Zion.

From time immemorial, *Eretz Yisrael* has played a central and vital role in the life and culture of world Jewry. The Bible indicates that God has promised the Land of Israel to our ancestors and to their descendants. The *brit* (covenant) between God and the Jewish people created an unbreakable bond between us and the geographic entity we call *Eretz Yisrael.* Throughout the ages, we have revered, honored, cherished, prayed for, dreamed of, and sought to settle in Jerusalem and the Land of Israel.

This zealous attachment to *Eretz Yisrael* has persisted throughout our long history as a transnational people in which we transcended borders and lived in virtually every land. Wherever we were permitted, we viewed ourselves as natives or citizens of the country of our residence and were loyal to our host nation. Our religion has been land-centered but never land-bound; it has been a portable religion so that despite our long exile *(Galut)* from our spiritual homeland, we have been able to survive creatively and spiritually even in the *tefutzot* (Diaspora).

Indeed, there have been Jewish communities in the Diaspora from the days of the Prophets. The relative importance of the Land of Israel and the Diaspora fluctuated through the centuries. Whether the Diaspora was more creative than Zion or Zion was more vital than the Diaspora is of little importance. What is important is *Eretz Yisrael* enriched world Jewry even as world Jewry enriched *Eretz Yisrael.*

Conservative Judaism and Israel

We staunchly support the Zionist ideal and take pride in the achievement of the State of Israel in the gathering of our people from the lands of our dispersion and in rebuilding a nation. The State of Israel and its well-being remain a major concern of the Conservative movement, as of all loyal Jews. To be sure, the Conservative movement has not always agreed with Israel's positions on domestic and foreign affairs. We have often suffered from discriminatory policies, but we remain firm and loving supporters of the State of Israel economically, politically, and morally. The Conservative movement is a member of the World Zionist Organization. We have undertaken major efforts in Israel such as the establishment of the Masorti movement, a growing number of congregations, a rabbinical school, a *kibbutz,* a *moshav,* a youth movement, schools, and adult education programs. Increasing numbers of Conservative rabbis and laypersons have gone on *aliyah,* and we encourage and cherish *aliyah* to Israel as a value, goal, and *mitzvah.* Each year, thousands of our teenagers visit and study in Israel to be inspired at the sources of our faith, and thousands of adults visit on pilgrimages and synagogue tours.

Conservative liturgy takes cognizance of the rebirth of Israel and *Yom Ha-atzma'ut* (Israel Independence Day) is observed joyfully in our congregations.

Various Centers of Jewish Life

We view it as both a misinterpretation of Jewish history and a threat to Jewish survival to negate the complementary roles of *Eretz Yisrael* and the Diaspora. Currently there are various important centers of Jewish life in the Diaspora. Diaspora Jewry furnishes vital economic, political and moral support to Israel; Israel imbues Diaspora Jewry with a sense of pride and self-esteem. Some see the role of *Medinat Yisrael* as the cultural and religious center of world Jewry. Others insist that since the days of the Prophets, various foci or centers of Jewish life and civilization, in both Israel and the Diaspora, have sustained the creative survival of *Am Yisrael* and *Torat Yisrael*. *Eretz Yisrael* produced most of the Bible, the Mishnah, the Talmud of *Eretz Yisrael*, the major Midrashim, liturgy, and other great works while the Diaspora gave us the Babylonian Talmud, Hebrew poetry, philosophical writings, commentaries, law codes, and other lasting creations. The various communities interacted in a continual symbiotic process of mutual enrichment.

We realize that Israel and the Diaspora enjoy different advantages while facing unique challenges. Only in Israel may a Jew lead an all-encompassing Jewish life. There, Shabbat, *Yom Tov*, and *kashrut* are officially observed in varied degrees by the civilian organs of state and by the military; there Hebrew is the nation's language and the Bible is studied in every school. Paradoxically, the very ease with which Jewish identity may be expressed in the Jewish state may give the false impression that religion is not needed in Israel for Jewish survival as it is in the Diaspora. We do not believe that Jewish identity can be replaced by Israeli identity or the ability to speak Hebrew. We are convinced that Jewish religion is essential as a source of ethical and moral values. Israeli Jewry is plagued by constant pressures to survive physically in the face of implacable foes sworn to destroy the State. Israel is also challenged to maintain, preserve and enhance Jewish moral

values and ethical standards, as well as its uniquely Jewish character. For the first time in nineteen centuries, the Jewish people is master of its affairs politically, economically and militarily and must exert sovereign power in its own nation and relate to other governments.

Diaspora Jewry confronts other dilemmas. In some lands, such as the Soviet Union and Muslim nations, Jews are subjected to religious, racial or political persecution and the survival of Jews and Judaism is in peril. Many Jews in such communities display enormous courage and fidelity in remaining loyal to Judaism against great odds. They must be helped either to emigrate, or to build a stronger cultural and religious life wherever they reside. In lands where Jews are free to practice their religion, we have yet to resolve the problem of assimilation. On the other hand, cross-fertilization with other religions and civilizations can enrich Judaism now as it has done in the past.

Both the State of Israel and Diaspora Jewry have roles to fill; each can and must aid and enrich the other in every possible way; each needs the other. It is our fervent hope that Zion will indeed be the center of Torah and Jerusalem a beacon lighting the way for the Jewish people and for humanity.

BETWEEN JEW AND FELLOW JEW

The Meaning of *K'lal Yisrael*

The Conservative Movement has always maintained the importance of safeguarding the concept of *K'lal Yisrael*, by which we mean that all Jews, irrespective of philosophical or religious persuasion, are part of one people, *Am Yisrael*. We also believe that every Jew responded differently to the revelation of Torah at Sinai. As the sages put it, each individual Jew perceived God's message according to his or her spiritual capacity or sensitivity. For us, this is the meaning of religious pluralism, and we hold this truth to be inviolate today as in the past. We do not view this as a curse or even as an unavoidable evil;

rather we consider this diversity as a blessing and a positive element that enriches and stimulates contemporary Jewish life and thought.

Conservative Judaism and Other Jewish Groups

We accept as fundamental in Judaism the principle that all Jews are one fellowship responsible for one another. Therefore, from the days of Solomon Schechter we have worked for the good of all Jews, setting aside our own interests at times because we believe that the welfare of *Am Yisrael* transcends all parochial interests. Furthermore, we deplore the lack of civility which mars cooperative efforts within the Jewish community and which tears asunder the fragile fabric of unity built so painstakingly over the years.

The Need to Strengthen Jewish Unity

We believe it important to strengthen umbrella groups, whether religious or secular, that unite Jews. We are well aware of the shortcomings of organizational Jewish life in North America today. Nevertheless, we want to strengthen such organizations which include the Synagogue Council of America, the various Boards of Rabbis, the Conference of Presidents of Major American National Jewish Organizations, the Boards of Jewish Education, the national and local Jewish Community Councils, the Federation network, the United Jewish Appeal, the Israel Bonds organization and other groups that seek to rise above religious differences in working for the welfare of all Jews. In the face of unflagging enemies and widespread anti-Semitism, Jewish unity is more vital than ever. Ways have to be found to work for a unified approach to conversion and the issuance of religious divorces *(gittin)*.

Between Jew and Fellow Jew

In the face of the widening rifts that have developed primarily among the religous groups, a fundamental concern must be the furtherance of Jewish unity. Only when Jews live in harmony and peace with each other, and our people embrace fraternal love and respect will we be worthy of messianic redemption.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER FAITHS

From the time of the earliest settlement of Israelite tribes in the land of Canaan, Jews have always lived in close proximity to and in contact with people of other faiths and nationalities. This has been equally true in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora. Historically, the attitude which a Jewish community has taken toward gentiles has generally depended on the nature of the relations which that community had with its immediate neighbors. The Iberian Jews, during their "Golden Age," had a fairly positive attitude toward the Muslims among whom they lived, while the Jews of the Rhineland, martyred during the Crusades, produced some bitter anti-gentile rhetoric. Yet throughout Jewish history, in all eras and in all lands, there has been a prodigious amount of cultural influence and borrowing, an exchange which has gone in both directions and has benefited both Jews and gentiles.

Jewish culture has been able to grow and develop — and this has been the greatest positive feature of the Diaspora — because of the recognition that our rejection of another people's faith does not entail a rejection of its entire civilization. Although we often have lived in tension with the nations of the world, our Bible developed and adapted some of their myths, our Talmud drew upon their vocabulary and institutions, our poetry used their metres, and the State of Israel has benefited from many aspects of world culture. Conversely, what we have created, in the realms of religion, philosophy, law, social institutions, the arts, and science, has been freely appropriated by the rest of the world.

The contemporary age has not departed from this historical trend. North American Jews enjoy the unprecedented blessing of full participation in the political life of free nations, and consequently their opportunities for fruitful exchange with other faiths and cultures are manifold. In the United States, Jews have a good deal in common with other religious groups, since we share a fairly recent immigrant history with many of them, and since we are all, as religious groups, set at arm's

distance from the official organs of political power in this constitutionally secular nation. Common agendas have been fairly easy to formulate in such a setting, and thus North America has seen a very healthy proliferation of programs for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. In the Land of Israel, despite the obvious tensions between Jews and Arabs, there have been mutual influences between Jewish and non-Jewish cultures in the Middle East. Its expansion into the realm of Islamic-Jewish dialogue, is devoutly be wished.

As Conservative Jews, we acknowledge without apology the many debts which Jewish religion and civilization owe to the nations of the world. We eschew triumphalism with respect to other ways of serving God. Maimonides believed that other monotheistic faiths — Christianity and Islam — serve to spread knowledge of, and devotion to, the God and the Torah of Israel throughout the world. Many modern thinkers, both Jewish and gentile, have noted that God may well have seen fit to enter covenants with many nations. Either outlook, when relating to others, is perfectly compatible with a commitment to one's own faith and pattern of religious life.

If we criticize triumphalism in our own community, then real dialogue with other faith groups requires that we criticize triumphalism and other failings in those quarters as well. In the second half of the twentieth century, no relationship between Jews and Christians can be dignified or honest without facing up frankly to the centuries of prejudice, theological anathema, and persecution that have been thrust upon Jewish communities, culminating in the horrors of the *Shoah* (Holocaust). No relationship can be nurtured between Jews and Muslims unless it acknowledges explicity and seeks to combat the terrible social and political effects of Muslim hostility, as well as the disturbing but growing reaction of Jewish anti-Arabism in the Land of Israel. But all of these relationships, properly pursued, can bring great blessing to the Jewish community and to the world. As the late Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel put it, "no religion is an island."

Theological humility requires us to recognize that although we have but one God, God has more than one nation. Our tradition explicity recognizes that God entered into a covenant with Adam and Eve, and later with Noah and his family

as well as His special covenant with Abraham and the great revelation to Israel at Sinai. It is part of our mission to understand, respect, and live with the other nations of the world, to discern those truths in their cultures from which we can learn, and to share with them the truths that we have come to know.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: BUILDING A BETTER WORLD

Universalism and Particularism

From its earliest beginnings, Judaism has sought to balance universalistic and particularistic elements. Jews were naturally concerned with Jewish needs and with the fate and the faith of the Jewish people. Our cult and ritual were important in our lives; our nation and its sovereignty were of utmost significance; Jewish interests and needs were paramount.

At the same time, we were enjoined never to turn our backs on the problems of others. The Prophets fought vigorously against any attempt to limit Jewish faith to the sacral or cultic domain. While not denying the beauty and significance of Jewish ritual, they also pointed to the world outside and to God's demand that we carry our faith beyond the Temple and incorporate it in our relationships with our fellow human beings. Our imperative was clear: "Justice, justice shall you pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20). The Prophets never tired of calling on us to loose the bonds of the oppressed, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and shelter the homeless. They cried out against those who crushed the poor into the dust; they urged justice and compassion for widows and orphans, for foreigners and the impoverished (e.g., Amos 2:7; Isaiah 10:2). Their vision was that of the just and humane society intended by God as the goal of creation.

While internal Jewish interests were the primary concern of the rabbis of the Talmud, they did not live in isolation, nor did they urge us to turn our backs on the outside world. Involvement in this world as expressed in the prayer *Aleinu* reflects

our concern for all people and our impulse "to mend and improve the world under God's Kingship." In keeping with this approach, the sages ruled that we must give charity to needy non-Jews as well as Jews. The prophetic ideal of social justice found ample expression and concretization in the corpus of the Halakhah that sought to create a society concerned with the welfare of the homeless, the impoverished, and the alien. Halakhah insisted that no human being had the right to ignore the spectacle of injustice in order to engage exclusively in a search for God. Similarly, the medieval teachers and the later Hasidic and Musar movements, while stressing piety and ritual, never failed to urge us to behave honestly and compassionately towards our fellow creatures.

Conservative Judaism and Social Justice

The Conservative movement has a long and honorable history of concern for social justice for Jews and non-Jews alike. Sabato Morais, first president of the Jewish Theological Seminary, jeopardized his own position as a rabbi in Philadelphia when he publicly preached on Yom Kippur on behalf of striking shirtmakers. In more recent times, Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel became the conscience of the nation, recognized for his concern for the aged, children, the ill and helpless, and above all for his passionate espousal of the cause of black Americans in their struggle for civil rights. Heschel denounced racisim as "an eye disease, a cancer of the soul" and he and numerous Conservative rabbis and lay people marched arm-in-arm with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in demanding basic human rights.

Over the years, the United Synagogue, the Rabbinical Assembly, and the other arms of the Conservative movement have issued significant statements on the need to deal with the injustices and tragedies of our times. These social justice pronouncements have urged our nation to work for nuclear disarmament, to eliminate poverty and homelessness, to create a national health plan as well as other measures to aid the impoverished. The Conservative movement reaffirms its commitment to social justice and freedom for men and women of all faiths and ethnic origins.

The Unfinished Agenda

An ancient Midrash suggests that the world remained unfinished during the Six Days of Creation so that we, as partners of God, might complete it. There is an unfinished agenda before us: *le-takken olam be-malkhut Shaddai*, "to mend and improve the world under God's Kingship." It is appropriate that Jews pay attention to internal issues of Jewish survival and continuity. Nevertheless, it is of the highest importance that both as a movement and as individuals we take action to fulfill the call of our tradition to advance the cause of justice, freedom and peace. Even as we speak out for Jews who are oppressed or persecuted in the Soviet Union, Arab lands, Ethiopia, and elsewhere, so must we speak out on the dangers of nuclear annihilation, racism, hunger and poverty throughout the world, as well as the threats to our environment. We must work together with our fellow citizens of all faiths and take political action if necessary to achieve these goals. We must remember that we are descendants of Abraham who demanded justice from God Himself on behalf of pagan sinners, and of Moses who turned his back on the luxury of the Egyptian court to serve his people. We must never forget that we were once strangers in the land of Egypt, and it behooves us to direct our energies to alleviating distress and helping set free those who do not yet know the blessings of liberty.

In addressing these issues, there are legitimate differences of opinion and approach. Some are willing to compromise in the interests of peace. Others are uncompromising in their demand for justice. Each approach requires both accommodation and cooperation in order to achieve its goals.

Above all, we must not succumb to apathy, cynicism or defeatism. By our active commitment to the ideals of justice found in biblical and rabbinic law and lore, we shall fulfill our obligation to be *shutafo shel ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu be-maase bereshit*, partners with God in the creation of a more perfect world.

LIVING A LIFE OF TORAH

ON WOMEN

The dignity of every human being has always been central to Judaism. This fundamental premise is derived from the biblical assertions in Genesis 1:27 and 5:11 that God created humanity, both male and female, in the divine image.

The equality of the sexes is explicity affirmed in the Conservative Prayerbook, in the blessing in which both men and women thank God for having been created in His image. Access to Jewish education for women has been a hallmark of Conservative Judaism since the days of Solomon Schechter. In almost all our synagogues, men and women are seated together. The *bat mitzvah* ceremony, now celebrated in virtually all synagogues, was originated in the Conservative movement by Professor Mordecai M. Kaplan. Over the years, our movement has encouraged women to assume roles of communal service and leadership both in a professional and in a lay capacity. In recent days, the discussion of the role of women has rekindled interest in some quarters in areas as diverse as *tohorat ha-mishpaḥah* (the system of family purity revolving around the use of the *mikveh* [ritual bath]), the creation of naming ceremonies for girls, and special women's observances of *Rosh Ḥodesh*.

We are convinced that justice and dignity for each human being can be achieved within the framework of Halakhah, thus obviating the inequalities which lead to situations like that of *agunot* (women who cannot remarry without their husbands' initiating divorce). After years of research and trial by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, the Conservative movement has provided satisfactory practical solutions to many of the knotty problems in this area.

There is a wide spectrum of opinion within our movement with regard to the role of women in Jewish ritual. Many believe that women should assume the full rights and responsibilities of ritual participation, including serving as rabbis and cantors.

Indeed, the Jewish Theological Seminary now ordains women as rabbis and certifies them as cantors, and the Rabbinical Assembly accepts women as members. On the other hand, some within the movement believe that women today can find religious fulfillment in the context of traditional practice.

All the various views on the specifics of women's roles and rights accept Halakhah as the governing framework for Jewish life.

THE JEWISH HOME

Jewish tradition sees the home as a *mikdash me'at*, a miniature sanctuary. The home is the principal center for Jewish religious life. The Conservative movement affirms the centrality of the Jewish home as a means to invest our daily lives with sanctity.

A Jewish home should be recognizable through Jewish ritual objects, books and art. A *mezuzah* on the door is not only a halakhic imperative but a sign of Jewish identity. Such ritual objects as attractive Shabbat candlesticks, *kiddush* cup, Hanukkah *menorah*, and *Havdalah* set should reflect the Jewish ideal of *hiddur mitzvah*, the esthetic that heightens our sense of the holy.

Jewish activity creates the Jewish character of the home. Ritual objects are meant to be used for the performance of *mitzvot*. Conversation in the home should evince interest in and concern with Israel and the Jewish people as well as ethical and moral issues that face all humankind *(tzedakah, gemilut hasadim)*. Jewish study, for both children and adults, should be a regular activity of the home.

The Jewish home should reflect the rhythm of the Jewish calendar, of Shabbat and *Yom Tov*, as well as the Jewish lifecycle with its attendant ceremonies, from birth to death.

The table is a religious setting at which all members of the family participate. The observance of *kashrut* and the recital of prayers, hymns and the ceremonies which surround our mealtimes all contribute to the sense that our every act can be

fraught with religious significance.

Interpersonal relations in the family should reflect Jewish values such as love, fidelity, purity, *shelom bayit* (domestic tranquility), *kibbud av ve-em* (honor for father and mother), and *kevod ha-briyot* (respect for others). The recognition that sexual relations are intrinsically holy is a fundamental postulate of the Jewish tradition.

The practice of Judaism in the home is the duty and the privilege of all Jews, whether single or married, with or without children.

TEFILLAH (PRAYER)

We translate *tefillah* as "prayer," but the English word denotes petition, and the Jewish experience of *tefillah*, while it includes petition, is much richer than that. It includes acknowledgment of God's role in our lives, praise of God, confession, return to God *(teshuwah)*, thanksgiving, the enunciation of ideals for both the Jewish people and the world, and study of our sacred literature from the Bible to this day. As the Hebrew root of *tefillah* suggests, its emphasis is not on petition, but rather on self-examination as a prelude to self-improvement.

One who sees the world as pervaded by God responds to that with *tefillah* on many occasions throughout each day. The synagogue and special seasons or events can be catalysts for prayer, but only in the soul of one who is ready to seek God.

Keva and *Kavvanah*

The Jewish tradition establishes a structure, called *keva*, for the times, content, and order of prayer. Thus, Jewish law requires that we pray at fixed times to assure our continual awareness of God and of Jewish tradition. Moreover, *keva* enables us to pray as a community; only by coordinating the times and content of prayer can we pray together. Setting a fixed time for prayer adds meaning to life by marking its special moments and endowing it with a rhythmic pattern.

Nevertheless, the ideal goes beyond *keva* and calls upon us to pray with *kavvanah*, intending and feeling our prayers. In their attempts to make prayer live for contemporary people, Conservative congregations will differ in their services, and, for that matter, a given congregation may vary the form of its worship from time to time or offer alternative services. All of these variations are part of the Jewish tradition of liturgical creativity. The *Siddur*, the traditional prayerbook, evolved over time through both addition and deletion. This creative process enabled the Jew to mix the traditional with the modern and thus to pray with more *kavvanah*. The prayerbooks and other liturgical publications of the Conservative community embody this balance between old and new, *keva* and *kavvanah*.

While there are minimum, fixed times for prayer each day, a Jew is encouraged to pray at any time he or she is moved to pray, either within or outside the usual rubric of prayer. When one is unable to perform the prescribed ritual, one should recite the prayers in private. Even communal forms of prayer begin with the individual soul of every Jew.

The Spiritual Meanings of Prayer

The many types of prayer — petition, confession, thanksgiving, praise of God, emotional expression, affirmation of ideals, and study of Torah — make it possible for every Jew to gain spiritual meaning from prayer to differing extents and in any of the following ways:

a. *Perspective, appreciation and meaning.* The many praises of God in the liturgy may seem redundant; but focusing our attention on God and His qualities enables us to transcend ourselves, to see the world from God's perspective, as it were, that our concern may extend to people beyond ourselves, and appreciate values which transcend our own needs and wants. Above all, the goal of prayer is to involve us with a sense of the holiness of God, which fills the universe.

b. Communal and historical roots. Our inescapable egocentrism presents yet another problem: we are separate and lonely. To be psychologically healthy, we must form our own individual personalities, but we must also create ties to others. Jewish liturgy helps us transcend our loneliness by indicating

a preference for worshipping with a community *(minyan)*, by the constant use of the first person plural in the Prayerbook, and by the repeated references to the Jewish people of the past, present, and future. All these factors together help produce a powerful sense of community and rootedness.

c. Knowledge of the tradition. Sometimes prayer is effective because it teaches us about our heritage. Judaism regards study as one of the highest forms of worship. This is apparent in the communal reading of the Torah, together with its exposition and discussion. Learning Torah, one reenacts the hearing and acceptance of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The *Siddur* itself is a book of theology for the Jewish people as a whole, and Jewish prayer, then, is nothing less than a continual renewal of one's attachment to the heart and mind of Judaism.

d. Esthetic and emotional impact. We Jews strive to make our experience of prayer beautiful *(hiddur mitzvah)*. In addition to the sheer beauty of the synagogue and service, worship can enable us to express our feelings and hopes. Prayer is a potent way to express our present emotions and feel new ones.

e. Moral effects. The set times for prayer remind us of our moral commitments, with the result that we are more likely to make them a part of our lives. Prayer can stimulate us to act as we should. It can help us to become holy like God: "You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2).

f. Fulfilling a mitzvah *— Prayer as a Discipline.* There are times when one is not in the mood to pray. Jewish law obligates us to pray nevertheless. This requires discipline and a sense of obligation, but it may ultimately lead us to pray with attention and feeling.

g. The efficacy of prayer — God as the hearer of our prayers. For the worshiper, prayer can be a vibrant link to God and the Jewish people. People understand this link differently. Some believe that even communal prayer remains a personal expression of the individual worshiper, albeit one heightened in its meaning by an awareness of oneself, one's people, and God. Others believe that prayer is a form of direct communication with God. That view is probably more personal and comforting, but it raises the difficult issues of the efficacy of prayer.

Can God, and does God, answer our prayers? How do we know? Sometimes our prayers are answered because we become transformed in the process and thus our goal is achieved. This is true of collective as well as individual prayer. Thus, centuries of Jewish prayer for the restoration of Zion, which kept alive the hope of return in the hearts of our people, found its fulfillment in the rebirth of the State of Israel. But, however we understand the phenomenon of prayer, much of its significance lies in its ability to give voice to our yearnings and aspirations, to refine our natures, and to create a strong link to God.

The Language and Music of Prayer

According to Jewish law, one's obligation to pray can be fulfilled in any language. Nevertheless, Conservative Jews, like Jews throughout the centuries, pray largely in Hebrew. Religion employs intellectually abstract and emotionally powerful terms to convey its message. Such terms, when translated, tend to change both in denotation and connotation. Hence we pray in Hebrew to preserve all the original nuances of meaning. Hebrew has always been the primary language of Jewish worship *leshon ha-kodesh* (the holy tongue). As a result, through Hebrew prayer we link ourselves to Jews praying in all times and places. One who learns the *Siddur* and its music develops an emotional attachment to the very sounds and rhythms of the words and music.

For all of these reasons, the Conservative movement urges contemporary Jews to master the art of traditional Jewish prayer, including its Hebrew words and its music. A variety of educational programs within the movement seek to help people learn the necessary skills so that they can participate in the largely Hebrew prayers of Conservative synagogues. At the same time, as Jews have done throughout time, we in the Conservative movement enhance Jewish liturgy and the experience of worship through new prayers in both Hebrew and the vernacular and through the use of new melodies. We thus avail ourselves of the legitimacy, immediacy, and creativity of prayer in our native tongue and we "sing a new song" while preserving the many values of singing the Hebrew prayers and melo-

dies hallowed by our tradition.

A Life Imbued and Inspired by Prayer

The Conservative movement also teaches that there are prayers and special blessings *(berakhot)* which are to be said in a variety of circumstances, both within the synagogue and without, and encourages Jews to recite them at the appropriate times. Thus we become sensitive to each occasion and learn how to respond to it. By offering thanks to God we remind ourselves that neither food nor drink nor any phenomenon of nature, indeed the gift of life itself, is to be taken for granted. The prayers that mark the milestones of the life-cycle and the Sabbaths and Festivals, endow these occasions with high significance. In this way, prayer expands our awareness of God beyond limited times and places and imparts a sacred dimension to our lives as a whole.

TALMUD TORAH (JEWISH STUDY)

Life-Long Study

Talmud Torah (study of Torah, including all classical Jewish texts) is an essential value of Judaism. Virtually alone among all religious traditions, Judaism regards study as a cardinal commandment, the highest form of the worship of God. *Talmud Torah* is the obligation and the privilege of every Jew, male and female, young and old, no matter how much or how little one knows at present. Since following the precepts of Judaism requires that one know its beliefs and practices, and since it is impossible to exhaust the Torah's meaning, each individual Jew is commanded to be a *ben* or *bat Torah*, studying Torah throughout his or her life. According to talmudic legend, God Himself spends part of His day studying Torah.

Jewish education is not supposed to be restricted to childhood. On the contrary, the education of children must be understood as a preparation for life-long Jewish study. From the outset, in the Conservative community this has applied to

females as well as males. Formal and informal patterns of Jewish education in Conservative day schools, supplementary schools, youth groups, and summer camps are all dedicated to the goal of fashioning learned and learning Jewish adults.

This goal must also pervade the home, which should both support and enhance the work of educational institutions. Without reinforcement at home, the school cannot succeed. Jewish parents are duty-bound to teach the commandments and love of God to their children: "And you shall teach them diligently to your children" (Deuteronomy 6:7). Jewish education in the home may consist of formal study, but it occurs even more pervasively and persuasively when parents demonstrate by their actions their own commitment to Jewish life. The numerous educational programs for parents, families, and other adults which are now available enable all Jews to fulfill this basic responsibility.

We of the Conservative community study the Jewish sources using the traditional mode of study at its best, utilizing methods both ancient and modern. This means that Jews must ideally study as many of the traditional sources as possible — Bible, Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud, Midrash Halakhah, Midrash Aggadah, responsa, and codes. In this process, they must apply to their study their knowledge of science, philosophy, history, archaeology, literature, and all other relevant disciplines. We should not be restricted to questions and answers internal to the tradition itself; rather, we should look, as did our greatest scholars throughout time, both inside and outside the tradition to understand its history, practice, and beliefs. The Conservative approach to study thus combines traditional exegesis with modern, historical methods. We believe this combination to be the most accurate, open, and penetrating way to understand Judaism and the Jews.

Aside from the intellectual honesty and fruitfulness of this approach, studying this way can be a genuinely spiritual experience. We are able to relate to the people of the classical texts with understanding and empathy when we come to know them in their full, historical setting. Through the combination of traditional and modern methods of study, we come to recognize the variety and growth of the Jewish tradition over time, giving us a sense of its richness and dynamism. The whole

tradition becomes more intelligible; we see the choices that we made and why our ancestors made them. We also face squarely those aspects of the tradition that are intellectually and morally problematic. By doing so, we come to appreciate even more the remarkable sensitivity, adaptability, and sheer wisdom of so much of the tradition. And we learn how our people, living in a variety of circumstances, sought and discovered God, helping us all to experience the Divine Presence in our own lives. The study of Torah offers every Jew and not merely the intellectual elite the privilege of thinking God's thoughts after Him.

An educated Jew must be at home in the religious texts of the Jewish tradition. Jewish knowledge, however, includes much more, and a learned Jew must therefore be familiar with Jewish literature, history, philosophy, and the arts. Study of these subjects enhances our understanding of Jewish history and religion. The esthetic, emotional and intellectual components of some of these subjects also help to initiate or reenforce Jewish commitment, and adds to the joy of being Jewish.

Creative Jewish Scholarship

Jewish study is not confined to a study of materials from our past; it also consists of the creative contribution to the heritage which we will pass on to the next generation. The Conservative community fosters such creativity in Jewish scholarship, literature, and the arts through the faculties of its educational institutions, its scholarly and pedagogic publications, its conferences, its museums, its artistic and theatrical productions, and its institutes and fellowships for the study of specific subjects. Creative work in all of these areas enters into the corpus of Torah to be studied by present and future generations of Jews.

No one can possibly master the entirety of the Jewish tradition. One of the goals of the Conservative movement, however, is to inspire each of its members to become a *ben Torah* or *bat Torah*, a learned and learning Jew, constantly growing in Jewish knowledge, and thus coming ever closer to the presence of God.

THE IDEAL CONSERVATIVE JEW

Throughout most of its history, Jewish life was an organic unity of home and community, synagogue and law. Since the Emancipation, however, Judaism has been marked by increasing fragmentation. Not only do we find Jewish groups pitted against one another, but the ways in which we apprehend Judaism itself have become separate and distinct. That unified platform upon which a holistic Jewish life was lived has been shattered. Participating in a majority culture whose patterns and rhythms often undermine our own, we are forced to live in two worlds, replacing whole and organic Judaism with fragments: ritual observance or Zionism, philanthropy or group defense; each necessary, none sufficient in itself.

Facing this reality, Conservative Judaism came into being to create a new synthesis in Jewish life. Rather than advocate assimilation, or yearn for the isolation of a new ghetto, Conservative Judaism is a creative force through which modernity and tradition inform and reshape each other.

During the last century and a half, we have built a host of institutions to formulate and express and embody our quest. As important as these are, they in themselves cannot create the new Jewish wholeness that we seek. In spite of the condition of modern life, we must labor zealously to cultivate wholeness in Jewish personalities.

Three characteristics mark the ideal Conservative Jew. First, he or she is a *willing* Jew, whose life echoes the dictum, "Nothing human or Jewish is alien to me." This willingness involves not only a commitment to observe the *mitzvot* and to advance Jewish concerns, but to refract all aspects of life through the prism of one's own Jewishness. That person's life pulsates with the rhythms of daily worship and Shabbat and *Yom Tov*. The moral imperatives of our tradition impel that individual to universal concern and deeds of social justice. The content of that person's professional dealings and communal involvements is shaped by the values of our faith and conditioned by the observance of *kashrut*, of Shabbat and the holi-

days. That person's home is filled with Jewish books, art, music and ritual objects. Particularly in view of the increasing instability of the modern family, the Jewish home must be sustained and guided by the ethical insights of our heritage.

The second mark of the ideal Conservative Jew is that he or she is a *learning* Jew. One who cannot read Hebrew is denied the full exaltation of our Jewish worship and literary heritage. One who is ignorant of our classics cannot be affected by their message. One who is not acquainted with contemporary Jewish thought and events will be blind to the challenges and opportunities which lie before us. Jewish learning is a lifelong quest through which we integrate Jewish and general knowledge for the sake of personal enrichment, group creativity and world transformation.

Finally, the ideal Conservative Jew is a *striving* Jew. No matter the level at which one starts, no matter the heights of piety and knowledge one attains, no one can perform all 613 *mitzvot* or acquire all Jewish knowledge. What is needed is an openness to those observances one has yet to perform and the desire to grapple with those issues and texts one has yet to confront. Complacency is the mother of stagnation and the antithesis of Conservative Judaism.

Given our changing world, finality and certainty are illusory at best, destructive at worst. Rather than claiming to have found a goal at the end of the road, the ideal Conservative Jew is a traveler walking purposefully towards "God's holy mountain."