

In 1941 "*Irgun Haganah*" was defined by the elected institutions of the Jewish population of Mandatory Palestine as "the military arm of the Jewish People building its political independence in Eretz Israel." The Haganah too was called into an occasional military confrontation with the British, sent into action by the duly constituted Zionist leadership. The Haganah's operations (most were entrusted to the Palmach, the mobilized branch of Haganah) were scrupulously selected and elicited some gain for overall Zionist interests. Despite several large scale operations, some of which extended even beyond the borders, there was never a case of political damage to the national struggle. Gradually the British began to appreciate the military potential of the Haganah estimating its strength at 80,000 combatants.

Despite these achievements, the historic uniqueness of the Haganah was not as a result of its armed combat with the British. It had been clear from the beginning that the real struggle against Britain would be determined through immigration and settlement. The limited military operations of the Palmach and Haganah which the political leadership had permitted against the British had helped "the army of the

Jewish people" acquire combat experience.

The military test of the Jewish community of Eretz Israel came immediately after the British army was evacuated. It came in *the war against the invading Arab armies*. It was then, as the fate of the Zionist enterprise was being determined solely on the battlefields, that the historically significant test took place. Victory was due to the Haganah which, in the very midst of the battles of the War of Liberation, changed its name to *Zahal*, "*Zava Haganah L'Israel*" (The Israel Defense Forces).

If military force determined the fate of the Jewish liberation movement, it was in the war against the Arab invasion of 1948. That terrible war was conducted solely by the Haganah, both in the hard months of the 'pre-official' invasion and later in the even harder months after the regular armies attacked. Only the Haganah could rise to repel the Arab aggression. Whether the war would have taken place later (in the 'fifties or even the 'sixties), or as in fact it did in 1948, the historic moment when the fate of Zionism was determined was in the War of Liberation, which was fought against the Arab nationalist movement. Success and victory, both, were in the Haganah's quiver.

NOTES

1. Borokhov's inverted pyramid graphically portrayed the occupational structure of Jewish masses in Eastern Europe as top-heavy with spiritual pursuits and only minimally represented in the "basic" occupations: mining, forestry and heavy industry.
2. The full name of the clandestine defense force of the organized Jewish community of Palestine was "*Irgun Haganah*". It is not to be

- confused with the much smaller "*Irgun*" (full name, *Irgun Zvai Leumi* or *Etzel*) commanded by Menachem Begin, which did not accept the discipline of the elected Zionist leadership. ed.
3. *Lehi*, acronym from "*Lohmei Herut Israel*" a splinter "dissident" group which broke off from *Etzel*.
4. *Etzel*, acronym from "*Irgun Zvai Leumi*" the larger dissident group.

The Credo of a Reform Jew in Israel

In the Babylonian Talmud, one reads: Tractate *Makkot* 23b-24a: Rabbi Shalmal expounded: 613 commandments were transmitted to Moses, 365 negative commands corresponding to the days in the solar year, and 248 positive commands corresponding to the limbs of the human body.

Later King David, the traditional author of the Book of Psalms, reduced them to 11 commands, as implied in Psalm 15: "O Lord who may dwell in Your tent, who may inhabit Your holy mountain? He who lives without blame, who does what is right, and acknowledges truth in his heart. Who has no slander on his tongue and does no harm to his fellow...."

Then the Prophet Michah reduced the Mitzvot to three: as it is written (*Mic* 6:8) "He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only

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to do justice, to love goodness, and to walk modestly with your God."

And finally, the Prophet Habakkuk reduced them to one, as written (*Hab* 2:4) "The righteous is rewarded with life for his fidelity" or in the older translation: "The righteous lives by his faith."

A similar reductionism exists among the medieval Jewish philosophers regarding the Basic Articles of Faith. These run from Maimonides' well known 13 principles, including the eternal veracity of the entire Torah, belief in the coming of the messiah and the Resurrection of the Dead in the End of Days. These 13 were ultimately pared down to three by Shimon Ben Zerah Duran and Joseph Albo, namely to God, Revelation and Retribution.

In the same spirit of reductionism, if I am to express the credo of a Reform Jew, I would say it in two rather obvious words: a belief in Judaism and a belief in Reform. We believe in our being a natural continuation of historical Judaism. We acknowledge our direct relationship

to, and dependency upon, earlier interpretations of Judaism. And, at the same time, we believe in the constant imperative to reshape and *re-form* those classical and medieval expressions and interpretations, in accordance with prevailing universal spirit and values.

The implications of this seemingly simplistic statement are far-reaching and penetrate every aspect of our practice and faith.

We study, teach and practise Jewish religion and culture, and are *a priori* favorably inclined towards every aspect of our people's heritage and civilization. Our point of reference and point of departure is the classical sources of Judaism — Bible, Mishnah, Midrash, Talmud, Jewish Philosophy and Mysticism, the Legal Codes and Responsa, our Liturgy and Poetry, our Historical works, Jewish Ethics and Hassidic writings, Jewish Art and Hebrew Literature. We are thoroughly Jewish, we are naturally Jewish — no more and no less than any other stream or interpretation of our tradition. And it is for this reason that we declined the offer by the Orthodox authorities in this country to declare ourselves a separate religious sect, like the Karaites or the Samaritans, in order to receive equal religious rights and privileges before the law. No! We are fully Jewish, and as Jews we shall continue to demand legal recognition and full legitimate rights in this first democratic Jewish society.

In June 1976, the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted a paper titled *Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective*. Although it is only a *Perspective* and not an *instructive* or a mandatory *directive* (I will return to this distinction later on), nevertheless it reflects a con-

sensus, or what might be considered a catechism of Reform Judaism today. It speaks of God, the People of Israel, Torah, and Religious Practice. I shall quote briefly from each of these rubrics:

GOD: "The affirmation of God has always been essential to our people's will to survive... The trials of our own time and the challenges of modern culture have made steady belief and clear understanding difficult for some. Nevertheless, we ground our lives, personally and communally, on God's reality and remain open to new experiences and conceptions of the Divine. Amid the mystery we call life, we affirm that human beings, created in God's image, share in God's eternity despite the mystery we call death."

PEOPLE OF ISRAEL: "Jews, by birth or conversion, constitute an uncommon union of faith and peoplehood. Born as Hebrews in the ancient near east, we are bound together like all ethnic groups by language, land, history, culture, and institutions. But the people of Israel is unique because of its involvement with God and its resulting perception of the human condition. Throughout our long history our people has been inseparable from its religion with its messianic hope that humanity will be redeemed."

TORAH: "Torah results from the relationship between God and the Jewish people. The records of our earliest confrontations are uniquely important to us. Lawgivers and prophets, historians and poets gave us a heritage whose study is a religious imperative and whose practice is our chief means to holiness... The creation of Torah has not ceased and Jewish creativity in our time is adding to the chain of tradition."

RELIGIOUS PRACTICE: "Judaism emphasizes action rather than creed as the primary expression of a religious life, the means by which we strive to achieve universal justice and peace. Reform Judaism shares this emphasis on duty and obligation... The claims made upon us begin with our ethical obligations but they extend to many other aspects of Jewish living, including: creating a Jewish home centered on family devotion; lifelong study; private prayer and public worship; daily religious observance; keeping the Sabbath and the holy days; celebrating the major events of life; involvement with the synagogue and community; and other activities which promote the survival of the Jewish people and enhance its existence."

Not all Reform rabbis or laymen subscribe to all of these principles. There are those who, in this post-Holocaust era, question the nature of God or His involvement in the daily working of this world — or even question His very existence. There are those who question human eternity — and indeed the traditional explicit prayer for the resurrection of the dead (*m'hayyeh ha-metim*) is still absent from the Reform liturgy.

The *Perspective* emphasizes the inseparability of the people of Israel from its religion. Yet many Reform Jews would see the religion as only one component of a much broader Jewish culture or civilization. And if, in some historical periods, it was the dominant component, they would view it today — and particularly after the establishment of the State of Israel — no more than on a par with other ethnic institutions, such as language, literature, and folkways.

With all due reverence for both biblical and rabbinic Torah, no Reform Jew

today would deny their composite nature — a co-mixture of eternal values and ephemeral human foible, a conglomerate of inspired holiness and misguided human frailty.

Yet for all the diversity of belief and practice within Reform Judaism, no single group would presume to exclude, or question the legitimacy of another for its deviance from the principles of the *Centenary Perspective* which leads me to the catchword: "Reform". First, allow me to dispel a common misconception. We are not dealing with a *Reformed* Judaism (past tense), but rather with *Reform* Judaism — not with a system or interpretation developed at some past point in time, but a dynamic and ongoing process. As a colleague once put it, "Reform is a verb" — it is something that is done, that happens, and not merely the description of something that already is. Or as stated in the opening paragraph of the *Perspective*: "Change has been and must continue to be a fundamental reality in Jewish life." What is meant here is not change for its own sake, but rather changes that reflect the advancement of contemporary science and critical method, modern universal values and new aesthetic forms.

Likewise, this change is not necessarily uniform throughout Reform Judaism, as already noted. There is no such uniformity in beliefs or particular practices. Individual autonomy is a basic Reform principle that derives from individual responsibility. A democratic majority of the Central Conference of American Rabbis may pass resolutions concerning beliefs, observances, liturgical formula and the like, but these resolutions have the status of learned recommendations. The ultimate responsibility, and there-

fore the ultimate choice, lies in the hands of the sincere and informed individual rabbi and layman. In this sense Reform Judaism is non-authoritarian and non-halal. In the words of Eugene Borowitz (*Reform Judaism Today* Vol. I, p. 120)

"Halaha says that, regardless of personal will, the individual must do what the Torah says. Such a doctrine is incompatible with Reform Judaism's teaching about personal autonomy."

Until now, I have dealt in generalities and abstract principles. I should like to give some concrete examples, which will both demonstrate and elucidate some of the general principles.

1. **THE VALUE OF LIFE:** The supreme value of *all* human life is a principle that overrides all other religious practices. The beginnings of this rule appear in the classical Jewish sources, where it is limited to Jewish life. Thus Maimonides writes in this Code (*Yad: Murder and Protection of Life 4:11*) regarding

"Gentiles, with whom we are not at war... though one must not directly cause their death, it is forbidden to save them if they are about to die. For example, if he sees one of them fall into the sea, he must not pull him out; for it says: Do not stand by the blood of your neighbor (*Lev 19:16*) and that (gentile) is not considered your neighbor."

And note that the same Hebrew word *re'akha* appears two verses later in the famous command "Love thy neighbor..." in parallel to "members of your people" with the same limited tribal scope. Elsewhere (*Yad: Idolatry 10:2*) Maimonides forbids Jewish doctors from healing the gentile sick — except out of self interest, so as not to arouse anti-

Jewish hostility. The *Shulhan Arukh* (*Orah Hayyim 330:1,2*) prohibits a Jew from assisting a gentile woman in birth on the Sabbath, even though she is legally considered in danger of life and death. And the 20th century halahic authority, Israel Meir HaKohen (Hafetz Hayyim) states in his commentary *Mishnah B'rurah*, that "even in weekdays, one assists them in birth (only) in order to avoid hostility." Reform Judaism refuses to accept such distinction between the value of Jewish and non-Jewish human life.

Likewise, as post-Holocaust Jews, as victims and survivors of an attempted genocide, we cannot believe, as the Bible would have us believe (*Deut 20:16,17*), that God once commanded us to serve as His instrument of genocide against other peoples — not even in our remotest history. Nor can we believe that God prescribed the death penalty for collecting twigs on the Sabbath.

2. **EQUALITY OF THE SEXES:** We believe in equality in life, in ritual and before the law. We must reject the Mishnaic ruling (*Horiyoth 3:7*) that is perpetuated in the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Yoreh De'ah 252:8*; Isserles) that if a (Jewish) man and woman are both in danger of drowning in a river, the man's life takes priority over the woman's. In Reform Judaism, women participate fully and equally in the religion. Women serve as rabbis and cantors and are called up to the Torah. And I might point out that whereas women have long been sitting in the main sanctuary and been called to the Torah, it is only by recent reform of less than 20 years, that they have been ordained to the rabbinate. Finally, in an age when women serve as doctors, professors and supreme court justices, we find it incred-

ible that they are still disqualified by the halaha along with minors, criminals and the mentally unfit, from serving as witnesses in religious ceremonies or testifying before the Rabbinic Courts (based upon Maimonides: *Yad: Testimony 9:1,2*, and *Shulhan Arukh*, *Hoshen Mishpat 35:14*).

3. **LITURGICAL REFORM.** The Mishnah (*Sotah 7:1*) lists the *Sh'ma*, the *Amidah* and the Grace After Meals among those prayers that may be recited in any language. Whereas most Reform liturgies retain a good portion of these prayers in the original Hebrew, the underlying principle of the Mishnah has been widely adopted, namely, that prayers ought to be understood by those who say them, and should therefore be in the vernacular.

Another self-evident principle reflected in Reform liturgy is that we ought not recite traditional formulae that contradict our personal convictions, or of whose truth we are doubtful. I mentioned earlier the exclusion of resurrection from the second benediction of the *Amidah*. A seemingly minor change in the first benediction is of no less significance. Here the words "and He shall bring a redeemer" (*u-mevi go'el*) has been altered to "and He shall bring redemption" (*u-mevi g'ulah*). Though we may not believe in a personal messiah of Davidic descent, we do indeed pray for, and work towards, the redemption of Israel and humanity. Still another example from the very ancient prayer, *Aleinu*: There are many Reform Jews (myself included) who cannot in good conscience utter the traditional words "who has not made us like the peoples of the earth." For them, the expression "being made different by God" smacks

of a racism that must be strongly disaffirmed. And indeed, the newly revised Reform prayerbook, *Gates of Prayer*, provides four alternative versions of *Aleinu*, three of which omit the objectionable, or at least questionable, phrase.

If prayer is to be the expression of the heart — the individual heart of every worshipper — then it cannot be prescribed in singular and immutable formulae. The *Gates of Prayer* contains four weekday morning or evening services, ten alternative Friday evening services, and six different Shabbat morning services. These run the full gamut from the traditional and particularistic to the universalistic and even the non-theistic. They are all rich in Hebrew passages and translations from our classical sources, as well as from our modern literature. It must be emphasized that none of the services, nor the entire *Gates of Prayer*, claims to be *the* or *an* authorized Reform Version. In fact, innovative and creative services are encouraged in many Reform synagogues.

4. **HONESTY:** A fundamental attitude that permeates Reform Judaism is namely, being true to one's own self. If some of the 39 talmudic categories of labor prohibited on the Sabbath are no longer applicable or meaningful, we will admit it, and alter, or totally eliminate, the laws or customs. But we will not pay lip-service to mistaken or outdated teachings. We refuse to take part in the legal fiction of the "eruv" — the wire on posts that encircles the city and supposedly transforms Jaffa Road and Dizengoff Center into a "private domain". Nor will we engage in halahic acrobatics such as the fictitious sale of chametz to a gentile at the start of Pes-

ach, knowing full well that the sale will be called off at the end of the festival. Most outrageous in our eyes is the sham sale of the land of this country to gentiles for the Sabbatical year, during which Jewish-owned land is to lie fallow (*Leviticus* 25:2-7). And we look upon the traditional practice of wearing comfortable jogging shoes on Yom Kippur as self-deceptive. Admittedly the Talmud did not include rubber soles in its prohibition — but only because they did not yet exist.

In conclusion, Reform Judaism strives to *re-form* the religious expressions and practices of our people, in a manner that will not conflict with the universal and humanistic values and truths that prevail in every generation. Moreover, Reform Judaism teaches tolerance of honest dissent by others, and amongst ourselves. While there will be Reform leaders and laymen who disagree with some of the ideas that I have expressed — none will deny my right to speak them freely and publicly.

Covenant and History: The Holocaust in the Fiction of Hugh Nissenson

Jewish existence can be understood on an elemental level as the chronicle of the conflicting, intertwining, and torturous vectors of covenant and history. The Jewish claim of covenant is an announcement of the possibility of redemption. This claim has existed in dialectical relationship with the frequent counter-evidence of historical experience. God's assertion to the prophet Amos: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," is inseparable from the divine judgment "therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (*Amos* 3:2). Covenant thinking is the red thread running throughout Jewish history. Yet the nature of Jewish understanding of the covenant has undergone significant transformations. Historical upheavals, the destruction of the Temple, the exile from Spain, brought in their wake important changes in the always ambiguous divine-human relationship. In our time, the Holocaust is the sheer mass of his-

ory's counter-evidence to the covenant and focuses with agonizing clarity on the covenantal claim. The inseparability of history and theology in Judaism is nowhere more profoundly wrenching than in the catastrophe of European Jewry. Jacob Glatstein articulates this interconnectedness:

"We received the Torah on Sinai and in Lublin we gave it back. Dead men don't praise God, the Torah was given to the living. And just as we all stood together at the giving of the Torah, so did we all die together at Lublin."

The image of God, the image of man, and the role of covenant have all undergone a profound upheaval in the aftermath of the *Shoah*.

Rabbinic witness brought exquisite testimony to the dialectic between covenant and history by acknowledging that while Jews live in history they must always strive for redemption. Refusing sovereignty to the tyranny of empirical events, the rabbis testified that the mes-