



SCRJ Partnership with Hebrew Union College Marks Four Years of Learning and Encounter

by Rabbi Howard Berman

This spring, the Cincinnati campus of HUC-JIR and the Society for Classical Reform Judaism celebrated the fourth year of a partnership that has



Rabbi Berman meeting with first year students at Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem

enabled a new generation of future rabbis, cantors and educators to encounter the distinctive principles and traditions of their Reform Jewish heritage. In addition to the ongoing scholarship opportunities, liturgical resources, and annual seminars sponsored by the Society, this milestone was marked in Cincinnati with a special Founder's Day Conference, from March 21-23, on the theme, "Our Founders: Reclaiming and Renewing our Heritage" featuring a variety of programs exploring the legacies of leading pioneers of the Movement.

National lay and rabbinic leaders joined students and faculty, as well as representatives from regional Jewish communities, in exploring the history, values, and vision of the American liberal Jewish tradition in three days of seminars. The lives and legacies of three spiritual forbearers – Isaac Mayer

Wise (1819-1900), Stephen S. Wise (1874–1949), and David Einhorn (1809-1879) – were the focus of this year's conference. Each of these prominent rabbinic leaders played an instrumental role in the shaping of the Reform Movement in the United States.

David Einhorn was the rabbi of the Har Sinai Congregation in Baltimore, the country's first congregation founded as a Reform Temple, in 1842. He was one of the most prominent Jewish abolitionists in the Civil War period, and shaped the Movement's commitment to Prophetic values in response to social problems, and also influenced the development of

Reform's liturgical foundations.



Rabbinic students attending Conference seminar at HUC, Cincinnati

The Conference featured forums that covered such topics as the role of the Wises and Einhorn as, respectively, moderate pragmatists and radical visionaries; the integration of Reform Judaism's historic principles and practices into a contemporary setting; and the creative renewal of the



Choir of cantorial students performing at the Society's Classical Reform Service in Jerusalem

Movement's historic worship traditions. The opening session of the conference included greetings by Rabbi David Ellenson, President, HUC-JIR; Rabbi Jonathan Cohen, Dean, HUC-JIR/Cincinnati; and Rabbi Howard Berman, Executive Director, Society for Classical Reform Judaism. Seminars were presented by Dr. Ellenson, Professors Richard Sarason, David Aaron and Gary Zola, and Rabbi Lance Sussman, Senior Rabbi of the historic Congregation Keneseth Israel, Philadelphia.

Second Annual Society Institute at HUC Jerusalem Campus

The SCRJ Institute at the Jerusalem center of HUC-JIR was held during the week of April 8, and broadened the range of programs inaugurated last year. A Welcome Dinner provided the opportunity for the faculty of the College and the rabbis and leaders of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism to follow the Society's progress. Rabbi Berman and Dean Naamah Kelman reflected on the significance of sharing the Classical Reform tradition with both the American rabbinic and cantorial students during their first year of study at the Jerusalem campus, as well as the important resource that our shared heritage can provide for the Israeli Reform Movement. Rabbi Berman presented seminars for both the Israeli and American students, with lively discussion and genuine interest in the importance of linking the Israeli experience to our historic Reform roots.

A highlight of the Institute was the Festive Maariv Evening Service held in the Murstein Synagogue on campus, on Thursday, April 11. This part of our annual program has become a unique opportunity for Israelis to experience the beauty of the worship and music of the Classical Reform tradition. The Service, in Hebrew and English, using the Union Prayer Book-Sinai Edition, featured the great choral music of European, American and Israeli Reform Judaism, performed by a superb choir of students and local singers. The Synagogue was filled with people from all over Israel who wanted to share this distinctive dimension of the historic Jewish experience.

This year we also inaugurated the SCRJ Prize Essay program at the Jerusalem campus. Two Israeli and two American students submitted award winning essays on various aspects of Reform Jewish history and spirituality. This program has been a very meaningful and successful way to build interest and personal mentoring connections between students and the Society.

A Center of the Classical Reform Tradition... in Jerusalem!



Rabbi Ada Zavidov & Cantor Evan Cohen led Classical Reform Service at Kehilat Har-El in Jerusalem

One of the most exciting - and perhaps somewhat unexpected - developments in the expanding vision of the Society over the past two years has been the very special relationship that has emerged between the SCRJ and Kehilat Har-El

in Jerusalem. Founded in 1958 as Israel's first Reform synagogue, Har-El has been the major link between our international Movement's historic heritage and roots, and the development of a uniquely Israeli expression of Progressive Judaism. In its liturgy, music and worship practices, Har-El has created a paradigm for this integration of Reform tradition and Israeli culture - proudly and forthrightly nurturing a distinctive alternative experience for Israelis seeking an uplifting spiritual experience enhanced by beautiful prayers and music, intellectual inquiry and engagement in the pressing social and political issues of contemporary society. Led by the dynamic team of Rabbi Ada Zavidov and Cantor Evan Cohen, Har-El has been in the forefront of the continuing growth of the Reform Movement as a

distinctive option in a Jewish community dominated by the extremes of an Orthodox religious Establishment and the widespread alienation from religious faith among the vast majority of secular Israelis.

In 2012, during the Society's inaugural year of programs at the Jerusalem campus of Hebrew Union College, Rabbi Berman met with Rabbi Zavidov and Cantor Cohen and a deep friendship and sense of shared values immediately created a special bond. It became clear that Har-El was eager to embrace its own identity as Israel's flagship center of the Classical Reform voice. Rabbi Berman's first presentation to the congregation in March 2012, describing the vision and work of the SCRJ, led to a wonderful partnership that has deepened and grown. Through a special grant from the Ackerman Foundation of Dallas, Har-El has been empowered to promote and broaden its unique musical and liturgical program, offering monthly Shabbat Services in the Classical Reform tradition. These Services have attracted a broad range of Israelis and visitors from around the world drawn by the unique availability of this option. The success of the first year of this outreach was

celebrated on the weekend of April 12-13, 2013, when a delegation of Society members shared Shabbat with the congregation. On Friday evening, the Service featured a program of historic and contemporary highlights of the Classical Reform repertoire, accompanied by piano and harp. On behalf of the Society, Rabbi Berman was presented with an original pen and ink depiction of the "Many faces of Jerusalem" by renowned Israeli artist and Har-El member, Avraham Yakin. Afterward, the SCRJ guests were hosted for Shabbat dinner by members of the synagogue. On Sabbath Morning, following the Service, a large crowd participated in a luncheon reception and discussion on the principles of Classical Reform, and the role that our liberal Jewish tradition and its values could play in Israeli life.

We look forward to continuing this very special and mutually inspiring relationship, as Israel's pioneer Progressive Synagogue claims – and proclaims – its distinctive identity and shares the historic Reform vision of a modern, liberal, accessible and inclusive understanding of Judaism for modern Israelis!

PHOTO ALBUM 2013 SCRJ INSTITUTE, CINCINNATI



HUC President, Dr. David Ellenson, presenting opening lecture at Founders Day Service



SCRJ Board Member, Rabbi Nadia Siritsky, was awarded her Doctor of Ministry Degree at the Founders Day Service



Rabbinic students, participants in SCRJ programs, at Founders Day Festivities



Rabbi David H. Aaron, Professor of Bible, lecturing on "Bringing Classical Reform Judaism to a Contemporary Reading of the Passover Haggadah"



An Illustrated Lecture by Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

PowerPoint by Joan Myerson Strager

Rabbi Lance Sussman of Congregation Keneseth Israel, Philadelphia, reflecting on legacy of Rabbi David Einhorn

CLASSICAL REFORM MUSIC

Personal Reflections on Classical Reform Music at Sinai Congregation

by Rabbi David Levinsky,
Chicago Sinai Congregation

As a rabbi serving a congregation that preserves the musical tradition of Classical Reform Judaism, the Friday night services, and Sunday morning services that I lead include music in the classical style presented by a choir and accompanied by organ and piano. I love this music and am consistently inspired by it. The music of the Classical Reform Synagogue offers opportunities for quiet meditation and allows us to experience something higher than ourselves. For all of these reasons, I am dedicated to preserving and invigorating art music in the synagogue setting.

This music, introduced before World War II, was inspired by the great composers of nineteenth-century Europe. It was part-and-parcel of the Reform worship experience. This tradition originated in Germany with the compositional work of Solomon Sulzer and Louis Lewandowski. Sulzer and Lewandowski tried to “purify” synagogue music by eliminating medieval Eastern European and “Oriental” influences. We should not underestimate the radical elements of this musical revolution. Up until this point, synagogue music was sung by a *chazzan*, a male cantor. There was no instrumental accompaniment in most cases.

After WWII, a second and bi-partite revolution occurred in Reform Jewish music that would challenge the dominance of the choir and organ. Fomented in the summer camps by teenage baby boomers with acoustic guitars, the first element radically changed music in the Reform synagogue. The music from the summer camps drew more from American folk, pop and even show tunes than from European art music. At the same time, the movement turned in a neo-traditional direction. Choirs were replaced by cantors. Organs were replaced by pianos. Cantors brought back traditional melodies from the Eastern European synagogue. Some Reform Jews began to look back nostalgically at the traditions that their parents and grandparents left behind.

Our congregation, which has a reputation as a fortress protecting Classical Reform Judaism, has responded to these changes in a number of ways. We do integrate newer folk forms into our service. We use choral adaptations of music by Debbie Friedman and Jeff Klepper. In doing so, we are adapting these simpler folk songs to our choir and organ format. In effect, we are creating a hybrid form that mixes the first and the second revolutions.

Surely, Classical Reform musical forms will remain a central part of religious services at Sinai. So too, the acoustic guitar is likely here to stay. What’s next? What’s the next revolution? I don’t know. I do know that young people are looking for rich and authentic expressions of the Jewish tradition. They want to use elements of traditional Judaism in new ways. Whatever the next generation gives us, I hope that we support their efforts to re-form Judaism. After all, this is what has always kept Reform Judaism relevant and vital.



SPOTLIGHT ON REFORM JEWISH HISTORY

REGINA JONAS (1902-1944): First Female Reform Rabbi, Ordained in Germany, 1938

Regina Jonas, the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi, was killed in Auschwitz in October 1944. From 1942–1944 she performed rabbinical functions in Theresienstadt. She would probably have been completely forgotten, had she not left traces both in Theresienstadt and in her native city, Berlin. None of her male colleagues, among them Rabbi Leo Baeck (1873–1956) and the psychoanalyst Viktor Frankl (1905–1997), ever mentioned her after the Shoah. In 1972, when Sally Priesand was ordained at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, she was referred

to as the “first female rabbi ever”—misinformation which was never corrected by those who knew better. Only when the Berlin Wall came down and the archives in East Germany became accessible, was Regina Jonas’s legacy rediscovered. Read the complete story in this article from the Jewish Women’s Archive (www.wja.org)

2013 SCRJ PRIZE ESSAY

Sisters and Brothers in America: A Case Study of Interfaith Cooperation Founded Upon Universalist Values

by Rabbi Ari Lorge

(Ari Lorge has been a participant in the Society's programs at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, since 2011. He was ordained on June 8, 2013, and has been appointed Assistant Rabbi at New York City's famed Central Synagogue.)

This extract is taken from one of the several SCRJ Prize essays submitted by HUC rabbinic students on the Cincinnati and Jerusalem campuses this year. You can read the full annotated text of this essay as well as the other submissions on our website, under "Publications," at www.renewreform.org.

In 1893 the World's Columbian Exposition took place in Chicago, Illinois. One of the many important programmatic events that occurred in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition was the convening of the first Parliament of the World's Religions. The Parliament was one of the first, and one of the largest, gatherings of religious leaders from around the world. One of the purposes behind the Parliament was to convey the richness and fullness of religion's role in the world and in history. Another goal was to challenge the idea that religion was solely a force for division and discord in the world. The organizers also hoped to open lines of communication between religious groups and build bridges between disparate communities. Finally, it was hoped that the Parliament would be a step toward achieving the universalist dream; a world wherein all see each other as brother and sisters no matter what their faith background.

This essay will explore the relationship that was fostered between two of the participating religious leaders and how their commitment to Universalism played an important role in bringing them together. It was at the Parliament of World Religions that an improbable friendship developed between two men; Rabbi Louis Grossmann (1863-1926), a Reform rabbi serv-

ing Temple Beth El in Detroit, and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), a Hindu monk from India.

Louis Grossmann was appointed by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to be one of five rabbis to serve as liaisons between the Reform Jewish community and the Chicago committee on the Columbian Exposition project. In addition to serving as an organizer and a liaison to the leadership of the Columbian Exposition, Grossmann was also invited to deliver a paper during the gathering. Grossmann spoke on "Judaism and the Science of Comparative Religion." His lecture focused on laying out Judaism's relationship to Christianity and other faiths, as well as its engagement with the new discipline of comparative religion.



Rabbi Louis Grossmann (1863-1926)

The representative to the Parliament of the world's Hindu community was Swami Vivekananda. His road to the Parliament was vastly different from Louis Grossmann's, yet the two would become close friends. It is ironic that while Grossmann has become an obscure figure in American Jewish History, he remains a known figure in the history of Vedanta Hinduism. Swami Vivekananda is largely cited as being responsible for introducing Hinduism to the Western World in the late 19th century. Scholars have stated that in India Swami Vivekananda is seen as an important inspiration for India's nationalist struggle and one of the most authoritative voices for Hindu India. In short, Swami Vivekananda is widely considered a national hero in India.

In his early years, he studied Western logic, history, philosophy, and art. He became a follower of the Indian mystic Ramakrishna and began his monastic journey. His first visit to the United States was in 1893 in order to serve as a delegate at the Parliament of Religions at the Chicago's World Fair. He was when he arrived. His message to the Parliament was one of tolerance which condemned fanaticism. He stated in his opening remarks, "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true." This message of Universalism was central to many of his public lectures. Vivekananda quickly became a sensation in the press and at the Parliament. It was reported that upon open

ing his comments to the Parliament with the words, “Sisters and Brothers of America,” the crowd erupted in applause, which lasted several minutes and prevented him from continuing his speech. The New York Herald wrote, “Vivekananda is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.”

Vivekananda spent subsequent years traveling around the Western World speaking about Hinduism and popularizing the practice of yoga. He opened Vedanta Society in New York with chapters in other major cities. His impact on the West and on India has been widely studied and there are many works from his followers and from scholars detailing his travels. It is unclear how the rabbi and the swami met one another. At some point during the World’s Fair, however, the two struck up a friendship. In later years Grossmann wrote in the American Israelite that, “I have a friend... a Hindu monk. He had come to the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893 and he was spending a few weeks with me after that historic event.” One wonders what endeared these two men, with incredibly divergent personal histories, to one another.

Swami Vivekananda’s messages Universalism and toleration likely endeared him to Grossmann who subscribed to Reform Judaism’s commitment to universalism. In 1894 Grossmann wrote that the swami had: told us [the Western world] something of the heathen with a clearness, with a precision, with a candor, which puts to shame the confused and vehement pretension which so long has usurped an unrighteous prestige in church and religion... Let us learn from the Hindu the lesson that God lives and reigns, now and ever, that God is in every flower of the field; in every breath of the air; in every throb of our blood.” Clearly Grossmann felt an intellectual kinship to the swami. It is fair to say that the two men’s common conviction regarding Universalism was likely one of the main reasons for their close connection.

For Grossmann devotion to Universalism sprang out of his commitment to Classical Reform Judaism. The clearest expressions of Universalism in the classical Reform period can be found in the original Pittsburgh Platform of 1868. This document was the earliest statement of beliefs of Reform rabbis in America. It contains universalist statements such as, “We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite, and in every mode, source or book of revelation, held sacred by any religious system, the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man,” “We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel’s great Messianic hope for the establishment of the

kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men,” and “...we extend the hand of fellowship to all who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.” One could argue that Universalism was one foundational pillar upon which classical Reform Judaism was established.

While this commitment to Universalism may have tempered over time, in Grossmann’s lifetime it was still a strongly held conviction. Grossmann was adamantly committed to these universalist aspirations. He wrote:

Sectarianism shall bury its prejudice; bigotry will be blunted. We will respect convictions, whatever they be, if they are honest... Is there a chasm between thy belief and mine? Let us bridge it over. I stretch out my hand to thee, why wilt thou not grasp it?...When thou seest the blessings which thou has wrought, thou foldest thy hands in grateful prayer. So do I.

Grossmann’s commitment to Universalism stirred him to work on behalf of interreligious dialogue and interracial harmony throughout his career. Just as Grossmann believed Universalism was rooted in his expression of Classical Reform Judaism, Vivekananda viewed Universalism as being rooted in Hinduism. His initial speech to the Parliament of World Religions made this clear, as did many subsequent lectures. In addition to his words about tolerance quoted above, he made statements such as, “I am proud to belong to a religion which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth...Sectarianism, bigotry, and its [sic] horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth... I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.”

It is clear that the men were fervently committed to the image of a world wherein bigotry and division between religions would fade away. Both wished to see a world where religions could work together, learn from one another, and create peace. Universalism likely undergirded their friendship, and allowed them to model interreligious cooperation. The two may have also felt a kinship around the fact that their religions experienced historic persecution and attempts at proselytization. These common experiences also appear to have brought

the men together. In one speech before the Parliament Vivekananda wrote, “Three religions now stand in the world which have come down to us from time prehistoric – Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. They have all received tremendous shocks and all of them prove by their survival their internal strengths.” Vivekananda saw a kinship to these faith traditions because of their common survival. Grossmann also recorded in the periodical, *The American Israelite*, a conversation he had with Vivekananda after the Parliament wherein Vivekananda said to him, “Rabbi...you and I, we are equally of a people that is both great and small. The world oppresses us, and contemns us and hates us and the world...” If the article is to be believed, it confirms that the two men bonded over the common persecutions of both Hindus and Jews.

Between 1894 and 1896, while Swami Vivekananda toured the United States and the United Kingdom, spreading knowledge of Hinduism, he spent time in Detroit, where he and Grossmann continued their friendship. Exploring their relationship during these years provides a clear example of how important inter-religious dialogue is to strengthening faith communities. After all, because the two men engaged in dialogue and became friends they were able to promote a vision of a world wherein religious communities sought to learn from one another, respect each other, and, when needed, defend each other against intolerance.

Swami Vivekananda’s first trip to Detroit occurred in 1894. During this trip, and his second trip in 1896, swami Vivekananda was supported by the Unitarian Reverend Reed Stuart as well as Rabbi Grossmann. Grossmann was present at many of the swami’s lectures throughout his visits in Detroit and was clearly one of the swami’s staunchest allies. Aside from his support, one of the clearest examples of how the friendship between Grossmann and Vivekananda promoted the idea that two faiths can learn from and enhance one another is that during the visit Grossmann preached a sermon to his congregation called “What Vivekananda has Taught Us.” It is notable that a rabbi preached a sermon to his congregation focusing on what another religious leader and another faith background could teach Jews. Taking this action suggested that different religions need not see each other as enemies or as holding com-

peting truths. Rather religions can provide each other valuable lessons and even enhance each other.

Another example of how the two men were able to set a precedent of respect between religious communities took place during Vivekananda’s second visit to Detroit. Vivekananda returned to Detroit on March 3, 1896. On March 15, Swami Vivekananda gave one of the largest and best received lectures of any of his tours of the West. The name of the lecture was, “The Ideal of a Universal Religion.” Vivekananda was maligned by some evangelical Christians in the press. Grossmann wanted to ensure that Vivekananda had a space wherein he could continue to lecture and teach. He opened up his synagogue, Temple Beth El, for his friend and allowed him to give his address in the sanctuary. The newspapers in Detroit at the time reported that the Temple was filled to capacity. Every seat was taken and people stood in the aisles and the back of the congregation to hear the swami’s talk. Grossmann introduced him to the great crowd that had assembled to hear the lecture. The day after the swami delivered his famous lecture in Temple Beth El he departed. Though the two

men never met again in person, their friendship remains a remarkable historical episode.

Reflecting on this chapter of our history, it would appear that we as Reform Jews have moved away from our one-time unwavering commitment to Universalism. We are now more concerned about what makes us unique than what connects us to our neighbors. This appears to have been less the case for Grossmann and Vivekananda. Each was interested in maintaining their faith’s uniqueness, but having seen persecution, they knew they could build a better world by highlighting what they had in common, how they could learn from their differences, and how they could work together. It is important for us to proclaim our particularity in today’s world. We should be proud about our Judaism. However, must that come at the expense of our commitment to a Universal vision of peace between all people? While we are Jews, we are also human; while we are unique, we are also inextricably tied to all people no matter their faith, their race, or their creed. As we look to reclaim tradition, perhaps it is time to learn from Grossmann and Vivekananda and reclaim our classical belief that as brothers and sisters in America, as children of God, we can build a better future together.



Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)



The SCRJ is the national voice of advocacy for the preservation and creative renewal of the historic ideals of Classical Reform Judaism – its progressive spiritual values, rich intellectual foundations, and distinctive worship traditions. We affirm:

- a meaningful and accessible worship Service, primarily in English
- the ethical values, grounded in the timeless, universal vision of our Hebrew Prophets, that inspire our personal decision making and communal responsibility as primary expressions of our religious commitment as Jews
- the centrality of the American experience in our Jewish identity
- a warm, unconditional welcome and support for interfaith families

The integrity and inspiration of our Classical Reform heritage have continuing vitality and relevance for a new generation of Jews today.

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