

# The Reform Advocate

Volume II, Number 2: Spring 2010

THE SOCIETY FOR  
CLASSICAL  
REFORM  
JUDAISM

Renewing the Heritage  
of American Liberal Judaism  
for the 21st Century



This fourth issue of The Reform Advocate is being published as we mark, during this year, the bicentennial anniversary of modern Reform Judaism as a major movement in Jewish life. It was in the spring of 1810 that Israel Jacobson, the Jewish educator who had established the world's first modern, progressive Jewish school in the town of Seesen nine years earlier, was completing plans for the opening of a new chapel for the school. This synagogue would be called a "temple" – in a conscious affirmation of the new liberal Jewish principle that Jews were no longer in exile – and should call their houses of worship by same name that our sacred shrine in Jerusalem had been referred to in Biblical times. On July 17, 1810, the Jacobson School's new Temple was dedicated with its first Confirmation Service. Reform Judaism, as a distinct voice and presence within the Jewish community, was born. Within another eight years, the world's first organized Reform congregation dedicated its own Temple in Hamburg, and the Reform Movement spread throughout Europe and eventually to America.

We actually trace the spiritual roots of Reform back to the earliest development of our faith. It was the revolutionary proclamation of an "Ethical Monotheism," linking, for the first time in human history, religious belief with ethical conduct, that became the inspiration for the Reform Movement in modern times. While the earliest expression of this understanding of God's will was reflected in the Ten Commandments itself, with its focus on moral human conduct, it was the broad, universal vision of the Hebrew Prophets that represented the true emergence of a "reform" opposition to the ritualistic, legalistic strain in Jewish history. It took the transformative events of Jewish emancipation from the confines of the ghetto in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to reclaim this ancient ideal for modern times... and it was in the free, open and pluralistic society of America where an authentically liberal Judaism would flourish and become the dominant force in Jewish life.

The Society for Classical Reform Judaism proudly and reverently embraces this historic continuum. We are committed to preserving the best of our distinctive heritage as Reform Jews with the dynamic, creative renewal of our Jewish faith and life in response to the challenges of our own time and place. In this 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year of the Reform Movement, we gratefully mark our own milestone of two years of remarkable growth and progress. The enthusiastic interest and generous support for our ever expanding vision has been deeply gratifying. We have become a recognized and respected voice within the larger Reform family – working with our national institutions, cooperatively and collegially – while offering a respectful critique and alternative.

This issue of the Advocate is intended to offer a full report of our activities and programs. We hope that it amply reflects how much we have accomplished...while pointing the way toward all of the boundless opportunities and possibilities that lie ahead. Please join us as an active, member and supporter – whether you share a deep personal commitment to the distinctive principles and worship traditions of Classical Reform, or, wherever you may stand on the broad spectrum of our Movement today, you affirm the diversity of a liberal spiritual community and embrace the heritage we all share as Reform Jews!

## SCRJ Expands National Outreach to Congregations

One of the major priorities of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism is working with temples around the country to foster worship opportunities, educational programs and a renewed appreciation of the historic values and traditions of our American Reform heritage. We know that the ultimate impact of our mission is not merely the articulation of philosophical principles, but the way that we can influence synagogue life and support individual Jews in their religious experience. Our aim is to help congregations affirm the diversity within their communities, and try to serve the spiritual needs of those many temple members who remain committed to Classical Reform – as well as to raise awareness of the beauty and meaning of the heritage we all share as Reform Jews.

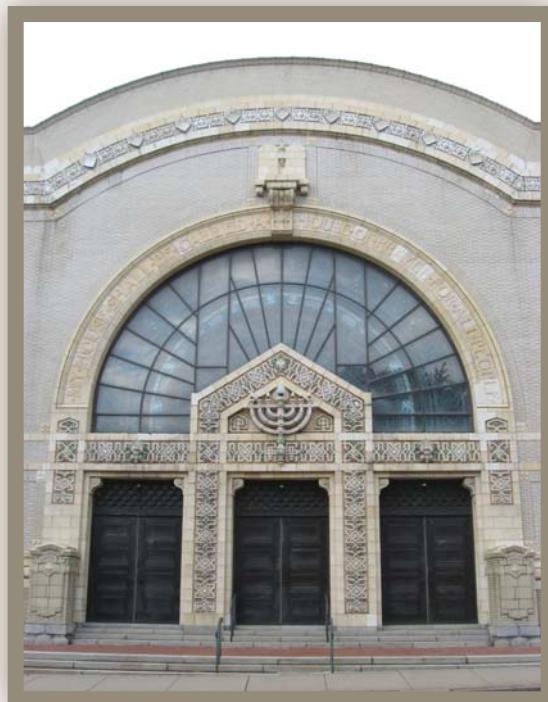
Rabbi Howard A. Berman, our Executive Director, has been invited to preach and lecture at many congregations around the country, sharing our message and encouraging the introduction of these kinds of alternative programs. Most of these are planned as weekend “Scholar-in-Residence” formats, with a complete cycle of Sabbath sermons, dinner discussion forums, teaching of Torah Study classes, meetings with temple staff and Religious School parents, and special reception gatherings with potential supporters of our work. We’d like to share some highlights from recent events.

### ATLANTA – November 20-21, 2009

With a number of members who also serve on the Board of the SCRJ, Atlanta’s major Reform congregation, “The Temple”, formally known as the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, has been an important center of our work. This congregation has a distinguished history of leadership in Southern Jewry, and maintains a strong link to its Classical Reform heritage. At the invitation of Rabbi Peter Berg, a member and supporter of the SCRJ, Rabbi Berman spoke at the Sabbath Services. He shared the Society’s vision of the renewal of our Reform tradition as an important component of the broad and diverse worship and learning opportunities offered by this kind of large, metropolitan congregation. The Temple’s pluralistic membership includes a broad representation of the many different voices and perspectives in today’s Movement, and is seeking to serve the needs of all of its people. While using the new Prayer Book, *Mishkan Tefila* in its liturgy, The Temple also draws

upon the rich tradition of Reform synagogue music, and many of its members, who are also active in the Society, are sponsoring a major restoration of its great sanctuary organ. A lively discussion followed the Service at a Sabbath dinner, with a particular focus on the SCRJ’s position of strong and warm support for interfaith families. Rabbi Berman also led the Shabbat morning Torah Study class, linking *Toledot*, the weekly reading from Genesis, recalling the early generations of Abraham and Sarah, to the preservation of our distinctive Reform inheritance.

### PITTSBURGH February 5-6, 2010



It was a distinct honor for Rabbi Berman to be invited by our member Rabbi Aaron Bisno to deliver the annual Harris Interfaith Lecture at Rodef Shalom Congregation, the great temple that is revered as a landmark in the history of Classical Reform. Rodef Shalom hosted the 1885 rabbinic conference that drafted the *Pittsburgh Platform* - the pioneer statement of American liberal Judaism. For 34 years, the Harris Institute has brought hundreds of Pittsburgh area clergy of all faiths to learn about the different dimensions of Jewish life and thought from leading scholars and rabbis. About 175 ministers, priests and rabbis gathered to hear this lecture on “Pilgrims and

Patriots: Religious Influences on our Nation's Founders." Rabbi Berman spoke of the important ways that the Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions shaped the early development of American democracy. Later, at Rodef Shalom's Sabbath Eve Service, his sermon developed the link between the weekly Torah reading from Exodus, recounting the receiving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai, with the historic Reform emphasis on ethical values and moral behavior as the essence of our faith. A dinner forum followed, as this theme was further developed with a discussion on the Classical Reform spiritual roots of our Movement's prophetic commitment to seeking justice in society.

Unfortunately, Pittsburgh's worst blizzard in a generation came roaring into the region that night, and the rest of the weekend's programs were cancelled – with our Executive Director stranded and snowbound in the Steel City! Plans are being made for a return visit in the near future to complete the ambitious schedule of additional sermons and gatherings with temple members and staff.

#### NEW ORLEANS - March 26-27, 2010

In observance of the annual commemoration of the birthday of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), the father of the major national institutions of American Reform, Rabbi Berman delivered the sermon at Sabbath Services at New Orleans' historic Temple Sinai. Rabbi Edward P. Cohn, SCRJ Board member, leader of this important center of southern Jewish life, planned a variety of activities to help spread the Society's message. The Service, which featured the Union Prayer Book and the music of Reform tradition (although regrettably, no Big Easy jazz pieces!) was followed by a lively dialogue of questions from the congregation. A special gathering of temple and community leaders, to foster interest in the Society, was held on Sabbath afternoon, hosted at the home of a prominent member of the congregation.

#### HOUSTON - April 8-10, 2010

Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism was founded in 1957 as a distinct Classical Reform alternative in the community. Our SCRJ weekend in April was a great success, reflecting the deep commitment this temple has long had to our shared ideals. With the inspiring and energetic leadership of Rabbi Steven Gross, HCRJ has grown steadily in recent years, and is today a thriving center of historic Reform principles and worship, expressed in dynamic contemporary ways. The series of events began on a Thursday evening, with Rabbi Berman presenting a forum on the development of Reform Judaism in America. The enthusiastic discussion that followed reflected the clear understanding and attachment of temple members to our cause. The Sabbath Eve Service the following night was a truly beautiful testimony of how meaningful and engaging Classical Reform worship can be for a Jews today. Incorporating the Union Prayer Book - Sinai Edition, with organ and instrumental music – both the beloved melodies of the past blended with popular current favorites – the Service was well attended by a broad range of people of all ages. Rabbi Berman spoke on the SCRJ's vision and challenged the congregation to take its rightful place nationally as a "flagship" of Classical Reform. We look forward to further cooperation with Rabbi Gross and the members of HCRJ.

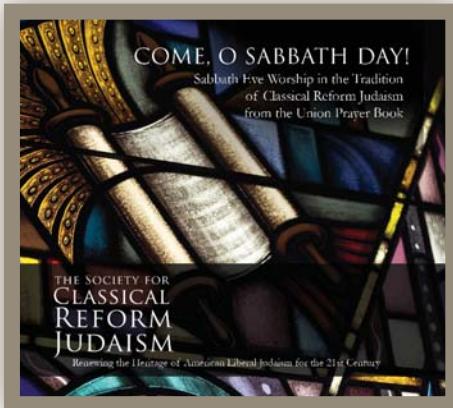
Upcoming SCRJ sermons and programs will be held in at Har Sinai Congregation in Baltimore (April 25) and Temple Emanu-El, Dallas (May 14-15). Plans are also being developed for our schedule of visits around the country for the fall season and beyond... **Please let us know if you would be interested in helping to organize such an event at your congregation!**

#### **SCRJ Takes Center Stage at Rabbis' Convention**

The Society achieved a major profile at the Convention of the National Association of Retired Reform Rabbis in Fort Myers, Florida on January 8-10. Our senior rabbinic colleagues gathered from around the country for reunion and study together, and under the auspices of SCRJ Board Member Rabbi Hillel Cohn, NAORRR's incoming President, the Society took a prominent role in the proceedings. A special introductory reception brought rabbis and spouses together with SCRJ Board Members to meet and hear about our mission and programs. For many rabbis of this gen-

eration, who have witnessed the transition away from the beloved traditions and values of Classical Reform, our message was a deep personal source of encouragement. This personal connection was heightened at the Service from the Union Prayer Book, Sinai Edition, led by Rabbi Berman and SCRJ member Rabbi (and Cantor) Jon Haddon – providing an inspirational worship experience that moved many delegates deeply. Many responded enthusiastically to the familiar liturgy that they used throughout most of their careers, rendered in faithful but fresh new language and style. A forum on “The Case for Classical Reform” packed a meeting room with rabbis eager to discuss the renewal of this dimension of our Movement. As much as our presence brought back fond memories for so many, we emphasized that our vision and mission embraces not only the preservation of the best of our past – but a creative dynamic renewal of Classical Reform values and practice for a new generation today. We hope that this Society presence will become an annual feature of NAORRR conventions!

## New CD a “Top Ten” Success!



It may not rival the Beatles' following, or the new releases of American Idol recordings, but the Society's first CD, *Come, O Sabbath Day!* has definitely made a significant impact and become a sellout!

This first production in our new series of CD's features a Sabbath Service from the Union Prayer Book – Sinai Edition, conducted by Rabbi Howard A. Berman, with music performed by Cantor Erik Conzzius accompanied by choir and organ. The beautiful musical selections include both great historic masterpieces of the Reform repertoire, as well as newly composed choral works by today's leading synagogue composers. A specially prepared booklet with the complete Prayer Book text of the program enables listeners to follow the Service as a personal worship experience. The response from individuals all over the country has been remarkable. Heartfelt letters from people of all ages have called the recording “a spiritual lifeline”...

“a new lease on my religious life”... and “proof that Classical Reform worship can be both a powerful inspiration, as well as a warm, emotional experience for Jews today...” The initial production of 500 discs was exhausted within weeks, and a second release of 1000 copies is now also almost gone. It is clear that countless people have found this program deeply meaningful and that it is enabling many people to experience the beauty and inspiration of the historic Reform worship traditions that we cherish. Plans are now being made for additional recordings featuring Services for the High Holy Days, Passover and Chanukah, and prayers for American holidays as well.

The CD and booklet are being sent to all individuals who contribute to the Society at the *Friends* level (\$50) or above. Additional copies are available for a contribution of \$10. We hope that our supporters will want to share this unique spiritual resource with their family and friends!

*To order your copy, contact us at [info@renewreform.org](mailto:info@renewreform.org) or call the Society Office at 877-326-1400.*

**HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION**  
היברו יוניביז קולג – מכון למדעי היהדות

## Society Reaches A New Generation of Reform Rabbis

The Society is building on the successes of our efforts over the past year to develop joint programs and build relationships with the faculty and students of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Reform Judaism's seminary for the training of rabbis, cantors and educators. Rabbi Berman first met with enthusiastic groups of students at the Cincinnati and New York campuses in 2008, and we have all been deeply gratified and heartened by the interest expressed in renewing the Classical Reform tradition by a new generation of young leaders.

At the SCRJ Board meeting in Dallas last June, the Society approved the inauguration of an annual Scholarship to be granted to a student at the “Mother Campus” in Cincinnati who demonstrates personal spiritual commitment, intellectual inquiry and creative reflection on the influence of historic

Reform principles and practice in their emerging professional life. The response to this opportunity, reflecting the wide interest and commitment to the Classical Reform tradition among a new generation of young Reform rabbis, exceeded our expectations. Seven students have joined the Society in the past year, and five applied for the grant, each writing a significant essay on their personal connections and interpretations of our principles. They have committed themselves to participating in our work, and representing the voice of Classical Reform in our seminary community. We in turn are offering the Society's ongoing support and mentoring as these future rabbis pursue their studies and continue to develop their own personal theological positions.

A Committee of the SCRJ Board, chaired by Rabbi Nadia Siritsky, and including Rabbis Ronald B. Sobel and Edward P. Cohn, carefully reviewed and evaluated each submission. When it became clear that a single candidate for the Scholarship would be very difficult to select, the Committee recommended that a tiered series of prizes be awarded, recognizing the serious and thoughtful efforts of each applicant. On February 21, the Committee awarded five scholarships, totaling \$6500 to the following students: Barbara Block (Class of 2010), Michal Loving ('11), Ari Plost ('11), Anne Strauss ('12) and Jordan Helfman ('12). The next issue of *The Reform Advocate* will feature their essays, offering an inspiring and immensely encouraging testimony to the enduring vitality of Classical Reform Judaism as an important voice within the diversity of today's American Reform Movement.

In addition, Rabbi Berman made the first of his visits this year to the New York campus of HUC with his participation in Senior Seminar Day on April 20. This was an important opportunity to introduce this year's Ordination Class to the Society's mission, and offer our resources to these new rabbis and cantors as they begin their new careers. Our goal in these forums with the senior classes, both in Cincinnati and New York, is to raise their consciousness of their responsibilities to serve the needs of all their congregants. We look forward to extending our outreach to include the Los Angeles and Jerusalem centers of the College-Institute, and to the HUC School of Sacred Music as well. As our Board has agreed, these con-

nnections, and the promise they represent for our future, are the single most important effort the Society has undertaken in our broad and ambitious mission.

*The Society for Classical Reform Judaism*

*Invites you to join us  
for a very special experience...*

## THE ROOTS OF REFORM JUDAISM

A PILGRIMAGE IN OBSERVANCE  
OF THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT

JULY 15 - 20, 2010



*The newly restored Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue, Berlin*

The 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Reform movement will be celebrated by the Society with a special tour to the landmark sites of Reform Jewish history in Germany this summer. Highlights of this unique opportunity will include the major restored synagogues in Berlin, along with the city's world renowned Jewish Museum and Holocaust Memorial; Commemorative Ceremony in Seesen – the site of the world's first Reform Temple opened in July 17, 1810; and a unique pilgrimage to the famed Hamburg Temple – the "Mother Congregation" of the international Reform Movement, to visit its tragically famous sanctuary built in 1931 as the last synagogue before the Shoah. The pilgrimage will be sponsored by the Society for Classical Reform Judaism in collaboration with the Abraham Geiger College, the newly established liberal rabbinical seminary in Berlin, and the European Section of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. The SCRJ delegation will be joined by members of progressive congregations in Great Britain and Europe.

This unique experience is being planned to commemorate this major milestone in our shared heritage as Reform Jews. Germany is not only the birthplace of modern liberal Judaism, but also has the fastest growing Jewish population in the world today. The continuing restoration of the great historic synagogues that were the pride of European Jewry before the Holocaust, and the reestablishment of Jewish communities throughout the country, are dramatic symbols of Jewish survival and renewal. Abraham Geiger College is training a new generation of young rabbis to foster the rebirth of Reform Judaism throughout Europe. The primary purpose of our visit is to both honor our past and to stand in solidarity with our fellow Reform Jews today.

The trip will be based in Berlin with side trips to other cities. While not its primary focus, the itinerary includes major sites related to the Holocaust. The agenda includes learning forums and tour commentary by SCRJ rabbis, with an emphasis on the heritage of Reform Judaism – Shabbat Services at Berlin's Reform congregations; dinner with leaders of the Berlin community and students of Geiger College; and a visit to the renowned Jewish Museum. Trips outside of Berlin include visits to sites in Halberstadt, Seesen, Dessau Schwerin and Hamburg that are significant in the saga of Reform Judaism.

In addition to our knowledgeable local guides drawn from the faculty of Geiger College, special commentary on the shared heritage of Reform Judaism in Germany and the United States will be presented by SCRJ Executive Director Rabbi Howard A. Berman, and our Guest Commentator, Dr. Gary P. Zola, Hebrew Union College Associate Professor of History and Executive Director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.

All individuals interested in this fundamental dimension of Jewish history are invited to join us for this virtually “once-in-a-lifetime” experience. Details on registration and a complete itinerary are available on the SCRJ website: [www.renewreform.org](http://www.renewreform.org), or through the Society office.

## Our American Jewish Heritage:

### A Personal Perspective

*Rabbi Howard A. Berman, Executive Director*

*The Society for Classical Reform Judaism*

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*This essay is published in observance of Jewish American Heritage Month, May, 2010. On April 20, 2006, President George W. Bush proclaimed the first observance of this celebration of the Jewish contribution to our national life. This commemoration was inspired by the efforts of the Jewish Museum of Florida and community leaders that resulted in resolutions introduced by Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida and Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania urging the president to proclaim a month that would recognize the more than 350-year history of Jewish contributions to American culture. The resolutions passed unanimously, first in the House of Representatives in December 2005 and later in the Senate in February 2006. Most recently, President Barack Obama issued a proclamation on May, 12, 2009 in which he stated that “The United States would not be the country we know without the achievements of Jewish Americans.”*

*Since 2006, Heritage Month programs have taken place across the country. In Washington, D.C. alone, the Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution, and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum have joined in raising national consciousness about the contributions of Jewish Americans to our country's heritage.*

*We dedicate this issue of The Reform Advocate to this important effort.*

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*One of the distinguishing perspectives of Reform Judaism has always been a central focus on the unique spiritual significance of the Jewish encounter with America. As expressed in the Statement of Principles of the SCRJ,*

*We affirm and celebrate the unique experience of Judaism in the United States. Our Hebrew Bible's ideals of liberty and justice have helped shape American democracy from its earliest beginnings. Inspired by our tradition, and responding to its ethical and social values, Jews have played a vital role in the founding and building of America. We cherish this noble heritage and are committed to the exercise of our rights and responsibilities as proud and loyal*

citizens of this nation. These obligations include prophetic dissent, expressed in the democratic process, as well as full civic engagement in our society.

The utterly unique unfolding of the Jewish experience in this land has shaped each of us in profound and complex ways. The fundamental perspectives from which we think about being Jews in contemporary America are unprecedented in the long history of our people. From the earliest colonial beginnings, the Jews of this nation perceived a virtually cosmic, Providential significance to the meaning of America for our people and faith. A new, dynamic, progressive expression of our tradition was inspired and shaped by this free, open, pluralistic society. The United States represented the rejection of the prejudices and tyrannies of traditional authority in European culture – and there emerged on these shores a spirit of freedom and liberty of conscience that threw off the shackles of entrenched authority, whether religious or political. This was a reforming spirit that influenced every religious community that settled here and nurtured the full flowering of liberal Judaism, beyond the tentative beginnings the Reform Movement had initially made in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

And yet, just as significantly, not only did America shape Judaism on these shores... the Jewish tradition, in turn, profoundly influenced the evolution of American democracy. In early America, beginning with the Pilgrim ideals of religious freedom and the rights of citizens, this spirit was consciously rooted in the ideals of the Hebrew Bible. The image of the Exodus – of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery and their journey to the Promised Land – became a primary theme in American history, inspiring generations of settlers and slaves, immigrants and refugees, seeking their own liberation. The models of civil legislation in our Torah, and the principles of justice and human rights championed by our Jewish Prophets, pervaded the culture and political philosophy of the colonies. Whether it was the Biblical and Talmudic echoes in the legal codes of the colonies or the importance of the Hebrew language in the early intellectual life of the Pilgrims and Puritans, the influence of Jewish tradition on the early evolution of American culture was indeed profound.



This formative Jewish spiritual influence on the emergence of American democracy culminated in 1776 with the Declaration of Independence and the beginning of the American Revolution. The struggle for Independence was infused with a ringing affirmation of the inherent natural rights of every individual; a notion deeply grounded in the Torah's distinctive concept of humanity created in the Divine image. This Biblical spirit was perhaps nowhere more dramatically symbolized than by the inscription on the famous Liberty Bell – the stirring words that

became the rallying cry of the struggle for independence, taken from the Book of Leviticus: "Proclaim liberty throughout the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof!" And while we are deeply conscious that these noble ideals were not fully realized at first – and remain unfulfilled for too many American citizens even today – they nevertheless heralded the birth of a new age of freedom and opportunity for the oppressed and downtrodden of the world, providing hope and promise for millions of people... none more so than the Jews.

Indeed with that arrival of the first Jewish settlers on American soil in 1654, only a few decades after the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock, an unprecedented new chapter opened in the annals of our people's history. In every other nation on the face of the earth, Jews had been considered aliens – despised outsiders – persecuted heretics. But here, from virtually the very beginning of American history, Jews have been an integral part of the founding and building of this nation – its earliest settlement...its colonial development...the struggles of the Revolution... and the building of the new democratic society. And in turn, America was the first - and for a long time - the only place in the world where Jews were able to exercise the rights and freedom of full citizens. For the first time in 2000 years, since the destruction of ancient Israel by the Roman legions, there was a place where Jews could be fully at home... with the same civil and religious rights as all others. This was a nation made up not of one dominant native ethnic or religious majority, in which we were the conspicuous outsiders but, rather, a pluralistic society composed of many different religions, races, and cultures.

The unprecedented, indeed revolutionary, experience of Jews in this new nation was most dramatically reflected in the words of none other than George Washington himself. Following the War for Independ-

dence, in 1790, our first President visited the seaside town of Newport, Rhode Island, to win support for the ratification of the new federal Constitution. During his visit, he was invited to visit Newport's famous Touro Synagogue. This congregation was then already over a century old. Its beautiful sanctuary, built in 1763, stands to this day as a national historic shrine. Washington wanted to visit the synagogue to express his gratitude to the Jewish community for its unwavering support for the Revolutionary cause during the war. When he returned to Philadelphia, he wrote a letter of appreciation to the congregation, for the warm welcome he had received. This letter is one of the great documents of American history...and the virtual charter of American Jewry...

*To the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island  
August 21, 1790*

*...The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past, is rendered the more sweet from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security.*

*If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good government, to become a great and a happy people.*

*The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy—a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike, liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship.*

*It is now no more that ‘toleration’ is spoken of - as if it were by the indulgence of one group of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should conduct themselves as good citizen, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support...*

*May you, the Children of the stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants—while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make them afraid.*

*May the Father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, upon our paths... and make us all, in our several vocations, useful here, and then, in His own due time and way, everlastingly happy.*

*Your Servant,  
George Washington*

The profound significance of this document is impossible to overstate. In every other country in the world in 1790, Jews were disenfranchised and persecuted outsiders... locked behind ghetto walls in the capitals of Europe or isolated in remote, impoverished shtetl villages. In no place did they have even the most basic civil rights. But here, in the United States, the President of the new nation became the first modern head of state to ever visit a synagogue. And in the name of the government, he pledged this remarkable commitment of liberty far beyond mere tolerance. In the broad sweep of Jewish history, this was nothing short of a miracle... indeed, this could have happened “only in America!” And in response to this miracle, on these shores there emerged the greatest, freest, most influential Jewish community the world has ever known... an integral part of American culture that has made major contributions to every aspect of our country’s life.

In our celebration of this heritage, and our grateful and proud expressions of our love and commitment to this nation, we are, of course, compelled to emphasize that we affirm the very noblest and highest ideals of America. We forthrightly recognize that there are yet many unfulfilled dreams and mandates in the continuing unfolding of our country’s destiny. There remain great injustices and inequalities in our midst, with a dark strain of extremism, bigotry and violence that are a perversion of all that America authentically stands for. The many challenges that our nation faces at this particular moment in our history are stark reminders that the American dream of liberty and justice for all is still far from reality. And yet, our love and devotion to this country must not be undermined by these daunting realities... and we dare not surrender our claims of love of country and authentic patriotism – handing them over to the dangerous mischief of extremists and fundamentalists. Rather, we must continue to labor tirelessly, as responsible citizens, in the ongoing struggle for justice and peace - in our midst and in the world. This has been the Jewish mission throughout the ages... and is the mission and destiny of America at its truest and best.

I feel compelled to share a deeply personal perspective as an example of why I, as an American Jew,

have always cherished this dimension of my identity and heritage. I will never forget an experience I had when I attended the dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. in 1993.

I recall vividly the opening ceremonies and my first tour of the Museum, with its crushing lessons of horror and tragedy. We walked through the exhibits, with their painfully vivid depictions of the death camps, gas chambers, and crematoria. We saw the heartbreaking piles of shoes taken from the store-rooms at Auschwitz and the haunting photographs of hundreds of faces – so many of them children – devastating in the realization that they represent only a tiny fraction of those who were slaughtered.

Emotionally drained, as everyone who visits the Memorial inevitably is, I left the building, and then walked a few blocks down the National Mall. I felt a particular need to stop into the National Archives building, to see, as I have done many times through the years, the original drafts of the sacred documents of our nation's heritage – the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. As I stood there in the quiet awe of that soaring, sanctuary-like space, I could not help but be overwhelmed by the counterpoint – the incredibly stark contrast – between what I was feeling at that moment and what I had just witnessed at the Holocaust Museum. There, I had just seen vivid testimony of history's worst desecration of the human spirit... here, I stood before the precious relics of the noblest heights to which the human mind and heart can aspire...

I pondered those familiar words – here, in their original, handwritten form – that we, as human beings, were “all created equal, and endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...”. I was so struck at that very moment, as perhaps never before, why July 4, 1776, must be considered one of the most sacred dates in Jewish history.

At that moment, with the impressions of the Holocaust Museum so fresh in my mind, I realized something that I had often intellectually pondered but perhaps never so emotionally comprehended before...

*if that faded piece of parchment before me had never been written...*

*had my great-grandparents not left their small villages in eastern Europe over a century ago, to come to this place of freedom and hope... created by that very document...*

*I would - by definition - be dead... indeed, I never would have been born.*

Beyond all of the political controversies and debates of any given moment, this must be the inescapable realization of every American Jew....

*Had not our grandparents or great -grandparents left all of their hundreds of towns and villages in Europe over the last three centuries, and found new life here in America, we would... every one of us... by definition... be dead.*

Standing there, before the Declaration of Independence, and realizing this truth with such force, was a moment of profound realization of the courage and faith that guided my family and so many others in making that difficult journey to a new world so long ago. I was overwhelmed with deep and humble gratitude – that of all the long ages and far places of human history and of Jewish suffering, that I was granted the blessing – and the privilege – of having been born in this time... and in this place.

Ultimately, this is why our precious heritage, as Jews and Americans, is so deeply rooted in our consciousness. Now, more than ever, this rich legacy present us with powerful spiritual challenges and moral mandates:

to join with all people of faith and good will to “proclaim liberty throughout the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof...”

to pursue justice... and healing.. and peace... in our nation, and throughout the world...

and to continue, with love and devotion, courage and dedication, to do our part, as Americans and as Jews, to build a nation true to its noblest and most sacred ideals...

“One nation”... but rich in diversity,  
“under God”... but with many different  
understandings of the Divine  
“with liberty... and justice... for all. ”

# THE SOCIETY FOR CLASSICAL REFORM JUDAISM

Renewing the Heritage  
of American Liberal Judaism  
for the 21st Century

We are committed to the preservation and creative nurturing of the historic ideals of Classical Reform Judaism - its progressive spiritual values, rich intellectual foundations, and distinctive worship traditions. We believe that Classical Reform, which embodies its own integrity and enduring significance in the midst of the many rich streams of Jewish experience through the ages, has a continuing vitality and potential to speak to a new generation of Jews today.

We believe that Judaism is religious faith with universal message for all people. We share with Jews everywhere special ties of history and destiny. The rich and varied ethnic and cultural traditions of the Jewish experience offer meaningful dimensions for our religious identity, but our faith is timeless and universal in its aspirations.

We uphold the Prophetic vision that calls us to active engagement in the struggle for peace and social justice for all people, which has always inspired our movement.

In the historic spirit of Reform Judaism, we are committed to a meaningful, participatory liturgy that appeals to both mind and heart - a primarily English language worship Service, enriched by Hebrew texts and song that link us to our past and to our fellow Jews throughout the world. We uphold the distinctive traditions of Reform synagogue worship, including its great musical heritage. While preserving the best traditions of Classical Reform, we are also committed to the dynamic development of creative, new expressions of its principles and practice.

We particularly affirm and celebrate the unique experience of Judaism in the United States. Our Hebrew Bible's ideals of liberty and justice have helped shape American democracy from its earliest beginnings. Jews have played a vital role in the founding and building of America. We cherish this noble heritage and are committed to the exercise of our rights and responsibilities as citizens of this nation. These obligations include prophetic dissent, expressed in the democratic process, as well as full civic engagement in our society.

We share with all Jews an appreciation of the significance of the State of Israel in the broad content of Jewish history. We join together in the hope and prayer for the well-being and security of Israel and its people, living in justice and peace with its neighbors.

The SCRJ affirms a broad, inclusive pluralism, which reflects the full diversity within today's changing Jewish community, and welcomes all those who share our ideals. We are particularly committed to an active embrace and warm, unconditional welcome to interfaith and multicultural families. We believe that the universal spiritual values of Classical Reform are uniquely meaningful and empowering for this ever growing number of our young people.

Our most fervent hopes and prayers are for a strong, creative, and spiritually renewed American Jewish community - and of freedom and security for Jews everywhere - as we fulfill our historic mission of working together with all of God's people to build a world of justice, love and peace.



# OUR PROGRAMS

## THE SOCIETY FOR CLASSICAL REFORM JUDAISM

Renewing the Heritage  
of American Liberal Judaism  
for the 21st Century



The Society for Classical Reform Judaism is a voice of advocacy for the preservation and nurturing of the historic values of the American Reform Movement. Our programs include an international network of resource and support for individuals and congregations that share our principles, offering worship, educational and program resources.

 Temples whose membership includes a diversity of interpretations and understandings of Reform practice, are invited to share in our work - serving the spiritual needs and offering opportunities for worship and study for those who are committed to the Classical Reform position.

 The Society includes individual supporters, partner congregations, regional chapters and groups throughout the United States and Canada. These local networks encourage the offering of regular Classical Reform Services as part of the inclusive programs of congregations and other opportunities for study and mutual support.

 The SCRJ promotes the use of the historic liturgies of American Reform Judaism, including the *Union Prayer Book*, in either its original text or the contemporary language edition published by Chicago Sinai Congregation. Matching Grants are offered to congregations purchasing the Sinai Edition for regular use in supplementary or alternative worship Services.

 Our rabbinic leaders are available to visit congregations and communities for speaking engagements and to meet with those who are interested in creating new groups.

 Our publications will include a periodic newsletter and journal of opinion, *The Reform Advocate*, as well as pamphlets, study and discussion guides, liturgical materials and music resources.

 The Society promotes the role of the great musical heritage of the Reform Synagogue, including choir, organ and cantorial works, in congregational worship today. We also encourage the composition of contemporary music, including liturgical settings and hymns for congregational singing in both Hebrew and English, with a variety of instrumental accompaniments.



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.

## THE SOCIETY FOR CLASSICAL REFORM JUDAISM

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