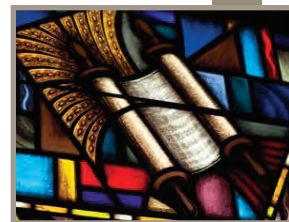


The Reform Advocate

Volume IV, Number 2: Spring 2012

THE SOCIETY FOR CLASSICAL REFORM JUDAISM

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



SECOND ANNUAL SCRJ INSTITUTE AT HEBREW UNION COLLEGE

As part of the Society's continuously developing programs at our Movement's seminary, the second annual SCRJ Institute at the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion was held on May 7 and 8. The Society built significantly on the scope of the inaugural programs held

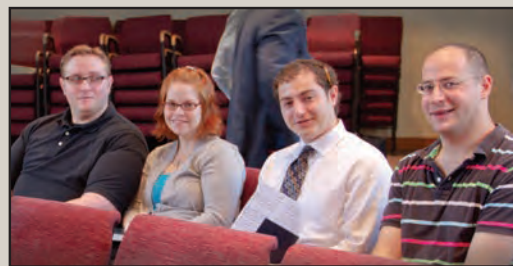


*Hebrew Union College - Cincinnati Campus
American Jewish Archives*

last year, with an expanded schedule of seminars and, for the first time, two special worship services in the College's Scheuer Chapel. At the opening session, Rabbi Howard A. Berman, our Executive Director reviewed the remarkable progress we have achieved over the past three years in our ever deepening relationship with the College and its students. Rabbi Kenneth Kanter, Director of the Rabbinic School, welcomed our visiting leaders, and Dean Jonathan Cohen spoke of the great impact that the Society has made on the spiritual and academic life of HUC.

In the first of the Institute seminars, SCRJ Rabbis Devon Lerner (C'79) and Nadia Siritsky (NY '02) spoke on "Discovering and Embracing the Classical Reform Tradition: Two Women's Perspectives." They shared their personal spiritual journeys that inspired them to embrace the historic values and observances of the Reform Movement. Common themes in both perspectives included the discovery of the deep spiritual power of the Union Prayer Book's majestic language, as well as the centrality of the Prophetic foundation of religious responses to ethical and social challenges.

Other programs included lectures by Dr. Gary P. Zola, Executive Director, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, on "Chicago Sinai Congregation: An Historical Case Study of a Classical Reform Temple," based on the new documentary, "Chicago Sinai: 150 Years of Inspiring Reform"; and Professor Richard Sarason on "The Union Prayer Book and its Antecedents."



*Hebrew Union College - Cincinnati Campus
Rabbinaical Students:*

The Worship Services for the Institute were planned and led by Cantor Yvon Shore, Director of Liturgical Arts at the Cincinnati campus, and SCRJ Board Member Cantor Aaron Kaplan, and featured

highlights from the great musical repertoire of the Classical Reform heritage. Cantor Shore introduced the program with the observation that “The mid 20th

theology and liturgy. These projects, linked to the curriculum, are supervised by the Faculty, and receive full academic credit.



SCRJ leaders Benjamin Levy, Margie Levy and Vicki Woolner Samuels are welcomed to Jerusalem by Cantor Evan Cohen of Har-El Congregation, on the steps of the College.

century gave rise to a glorious modern Reform Jewish repertoire. Spurred on by deep aesthetic values and sensibilities, American masters of composition emerged. Their standards and goals sought to envelop each worshipper in musical brilliance through authenticity, innovation, and artistic integrity. Three pioneers of this Movement : Isadore Freed, Abraham Wolf Binder and Gershon Ephros served as great models.”

Services were led from the Union Prayer Book, Sinai Edition, by students Ari Lorge and Jason Levine, both of whom have participated in the Society’s ongoing programs. Of particular gratification to our Society Board Members who were present, were the many sincere and reflective comments from students attending these Services, sharing how meaningful and inspiring they found the beauty of Classical Reform worship to be for them personally. The Institute concluded with the program that has become the centerpiece of this annual event – the presentation of the SCRJ Prize Essays by rabbinic students who researched a broad range of topics on Reform Jewish history,

Loving (2012), “The Concept of Good and Evil Impulses in Humanity in the Liturgy of the Union Prayer Book.”; and P.J.Schwartz (2013) “An Analysis and Comparison of the Shofar Service for Rosh Hashanah in Major American Reform Prayer Books.”

The broadening outreach of the Society to Hebrew Union College, both with our programs in Cincinnati and Jerusa-

This year’s Prizes were awarded to: Erin Bost (Class of 2012), Israel in Contemporary Reform Liturgy; Maura H. Linzer (2012), The Holocaust and the Message of Hope in Rabbinic Homilies, 1933–1942 and Messages of Hope in the Union Prayer Book (1922) “; Jason Levine (2013), “Being ‘Religious’: The Beliefs and Leadership of Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch”; Ari Lorge (2013), “Rabbi Louis Grossmann: Redefining Our Conceptions of Classical Reform Judaism”; Michal



Rabbi Berman addresses the gathering of local leaders at the SCRJ Institute Opening Dinner reception

lem and through the personal mentoring relationships we are building with the students, are truly the “jewel in the crown” of the SCRJ’s mission of “reclaiming and renewing the heritage of Reform Judaism for the 21st century.”

SPECIAL GRANT ENABLES SOCIETY TO DISTRIBUTE PRAYER BOOKS



Rabbi Berman and the students at one of our seminars at the Institute

The Society for Classical Reform Judaism is pleased to announce that a special grant has been received from the Wallach Family Foundation of Seabrook, Texas, in memory of their beloved husband and father, Rabbi Benno M Wallach. Rabbi Wallach, who was ordained in 1950 by Hebrew Union College, was a passionate advocate of the Classical Reform tradition, and a generous supporter of the Society from its inception. Following his death last year, his devoted wife, Madeline, approached the SCRJ to explore a memorial tribute that would continue his legacy of commitment to the broad intellectual and spiritual values of historic Reform. We are very gratified that this gift will be used to sponsor the distribution of the Society’s new publication of *The Union Prayer Book- Sinai Edition, Revised* to every rabbinic and cantorial student at the four campuses of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. This is a unique outreach to our Movement’s future spiritual leaders, and will enable us to further our efforts to introduce them to the great heritage of which they are the heirs, and experience the rich diversity of Reform practice and thought. The Society is deeply grateful to the Wallach family for this particularly fitting memorial tribute.

Being Religious: Based on the Beliefs and Leadership of Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch

by Jason Levine

What does it mean to be religious? How does one live a religious life? Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, along with the other great luminaries of the Classical Reform Movement wrestled with the concept of individual religious living, and in addition, with the challenge of being a religious leader. Hirsch was already an extremely well known figure in the Reform Movement. While Hirsch’s abilities as an oratory and a promoter of social justice are well documented, let us consider the fundamental question that frames the approach of most rabbis – what does it mean for an individual to be religious and for the rabbi to be a religious leader?

It is no surprise that Hirsch’s approach to being religious was much more focused on the individual and stayed away from larger theological concerns. For Hirsch, God was secondary to human behaviors and actions. The religious person sees God as a means to find purpose and responsibility in this world. Our commitment to religion offers us a greater sense of belonging. Also, it pushes us to consider what it means to be human. For Hirsch being religious is the inspiration that makes us more committed to the help and assistance of all others. Without religion as part of our lives, we would be cold, heartless, and lacking compassion. Being religious adds that extra spark to push us to that higher level of holiness.

For Rabbi Hirsch, the obvious way to express one’s higher religious commitment to humanity as through ethical living and acting to benefit your community through your deeds, i.e. social action. One declares their religious commitment by a firm commitment to morality and ethics. When one has this commitment, they act with righteousness and towards social justice. Being religious and being a socially responsible citizen are one and the same. Rabbi Hirsch cared deeply about this man-centered and morality-centered approach to reli-

gion. As such, it was necessary for him to properly convey the importance of his message to his congregants. Hirsch was never satisfied with his congregants and he certainly let them know it. This sort of blunt approach is rarely seen in today's rabbinate. However, Hirsch's approach to being a religious leader was tre-



HUC Cantorial students joined the Hallel Choir of Jerusalem for the SCRJ Service

mendously inspirational. Emil Hirsch was a rabbi deeply concerned with leading his flock into a religious life of higher worth and greater purpose.

Hirsch's understanding about what it means to be religious and how to serve as a religious leader was deeply connected the larger picture of Classical Reform Judaism, specifically with the Mission of Israel, the idea that our values and morals connects us in history, in beliefs, and in community. These lessons were powerful generations ago, but are still not lost today. Hirsch's messages of a morally centered life, an effort to seek the deeper connections to humanity, and commitment to social justice appear in the Classical Reform liturgy, both past and present. Many passages in the recent Sinai Edition Union Prayer Book speak of Hirsch's themes of one's commitment to helping others and a larger humanity, as well as the belief that moral behavior is central in one's religious identity. Also included in our current prayers is Hirsch's dedication to social justice and how ethical living is the true way to serve God. Hirsch's view lives on in the prayers, beliefs, and community of current Reform Judaism.

Returning to the initial questions, we ask again: what does it mean to be religious? How does one live a religious life? As we struggle with the questions about

being religious and living a religious life, we seek help from our history and from Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, a truly great scholar and leader in the Reform Movement in American Judaism. Modern Jews today continue to struggle with the religious nature of our spiritual lives, and it would behoove us to gain wisdom from Hirsch's teaching. Being religious is a concept we can be proud of and strive for fondly. Hopefully, Rabbi Hirsch's legacy of religious living continues in our communities and our prayers for many more generations to come.

The Holocaust and the Message of Hope in Rabbinic Homilies, 1933–1942 and Messages of Hope in the Union Prayerbook (1922)

by Maura Linzer

My thesis examined homilies delivered by four Reform rabbis in the United States —David Philipson, Julian Feibelman, Max Nussbaum, and Harold Saperstein—from 1933 through 1942. It documented how their definitions of hope and their calls to action changed in relationship to the deteriorating circumstances of European Jewry. Additionally, these four rabbis represented different generations, locales, backgrounds, and ideologies that influenced the messages that they delivered to their congregants. They struggled to preach sermons that both met the needs of their membership and maintained the integrity of their own beliefs. My thesis argued that variations in these homilies were largely the result of the individual background and ideologies of the rabbi and the most striking observation was the lack of calls to political or military action that stands in contrast to the personal actions of the rabbis themselves.

As the thesis argued that the individual interests and ideologies of the rabbis were influential in determining the messages delivered in their sermons, one may wonder the influence of Classical Reform tenets of hope upon the optimistic messages of David Philipson. The presence of a consistent thematic message contained in both his sermons and other Classical primary source documents might be interpreted to mean that this value of hope, espoused in several of Philipson's sermons, was not an isolated event, elicited by a given moment in history or the needs of a specific congregation, but rather that its presence could be attributed to the broader



HUC First Year Cantorial student ensemble “making a joyful noise”!

ideological orientation of the movement. As a magnate of Classical Reform Judaism, it is likely that Philipson’s own optimistic views would have influenced those of the movement.

The addendum drew a comparison between the messages of hope found in Philipson’s sermons and Erev Shabbat services in the Revised Edition of The Union Prayerbook for Jewish Worship (1922). The presence or absence of messages of hope in this prayer book, revised by Philipson during World War One, served as a worthwhile point of comparison to messages of hope in Philipson’s sermons during the rise of Nazism (1933), as both were periods of turmoil. However, it was important to note that an exact comparison could not be made between these two historical time periods as the former was a period of international war, with American involvement occurring during the end of the prayer book revision process (1917-1918) and the latter was the beginning of the deterioration of Jewish life in Germany (1933). Additionally, the function of these two primary source documents was different, which would also prevent an exact comparison from being drawn. Nevertheless, a comparison was made since both time periods were ones of chaos and both reflect the influence of David Philipson.

It was argued that similar messages of hope were found in Philipson’s prayer book and his sermons and therefore its presence in both primary sources may have resulted from the optimistic orientation of Classical Reform Judaism. Evening Services for Shabbat in The Union Prayerbook (1922) demonstrated that hope is achieved and sustained through two different venues: hope/faith in God as the guarantor of the future and the ultimate source of strength and hope in the gift of Shabbat. God was viewed

as the source of all suffering and therefore, was also the source of hope. Shabbat provided the other source of hope and comfort for those in need. Similarly, God featured prominently as a source of hope in Philipson’s sermons in 1933, but Shabbat was not mentioned. Although both Philipson’s sermons and the prayer book featured God as the source of hope, the sermons also included calls to action.

The centrality of God as a source of hope in both Philipson’s sermons and the prayer book were not a coincidence and are representative of the centrality of God within Classical Reform thinking, expressed best in the Principles of the Society. “We believe that Judaism is a



An enthusiastic congregation filled the HUC Synagogue

religious faith with a universal message for all people. While the search for faith and encounter with God is at the heart of this commitment, we recognize the many different ways in which individuals define and experience their religious belief as Jews.” Therefore, one may argue that the messages of hope found in Philipson’s sermons and the prayer book are part and parcel of his broader identity as a Classical Reform Jew.



Kehilat Har-El, the founding congregation of Israeli Reform Judaism

The Journey Unfolds

In retrospect, every one of our ambitious and, many would argue – improbable – goals was realized far beyond our fondest expectations. For many months, the staff, administration and faculty of the Jerusalem campus devoted great effort to planning this series of events, and laying the groundwork for the incredible success we achieved. When our delegation arrived in Jerusalem on March 19, the promise and potential of the historic mission that we were embarking upon was dramatically symbolized as we approached the entrance to the campus on King David Street, and was greeted by our SCRJ banner hanging across the front doors – proclaiming the Society’s presence and message to the city on its main thoroughfare! I could never have imagined that such a public endorsement

would have been made in such a powerful way, and it was quite an emotional realization of the magnitude of what we had undertaken – and of the College’s commitment to this development. That evening, our SCRJ representatives hosted a dinner for the HUC administration and faculty, and local Reform rabbis and lay leaders, in the campus’s impressive Museum of Biblical Archeology. This was a very warm and personal way to become acquainted, and to share our

vision of what we hoped our visit would accomplish – the expansion of our SCRJ/HUC partnership, and the Society’s commitment to serving our entire Movement as the voice for the preservation and the creative renewal of our shared historic Classical Reform heritage.

Dean Kelman reflected upon her own American Classical Reform roots, as the descendant of a number of prominent rabbis, including early HUC graduate, Felix Levy. I spoke about our progress over the past four years since our founding, our emergence as a recognized and respected part of American Reform Judaism, and the many programs we have developed with the national institutions and congregations of our Movement.

We reflected on our distinctive principles, and began the conversation – despite the many obvious differences between the American and Israeli context – of how Classical Reform had a vital role to play in providing inspiration and grounding for the emerging liberal Jewish presence in Israel. This was also the first opportunity I had to personally meet the leaders of Har-El, the “mother Reform congregation” in Israel, founded in 1958 – among them, Cantor Evan Cohen and the pillars of the synagogue’s founding leaders, Werner and Pamela Loyal.

The Institute Program

Our major program highlights were held on March 20. Our first seminar was presented for the American first year students. While most of these young people come from Reform backgrounds, they, like their Cincinnati counterparts, have had very little personal

knowledge of Classical Reform. Our main focus was to introduce them to the history and principles of our heritage in a contemporary context. I was determined to place this conversation within the broader context of their current experience in Israel – being exposed to and experimenting with a broad range of approaches and expressions of Jewish tradition. I challenged them to reflect on the reality that in the midst of the literally hundreds of distinctive streams of Jewish practice, national cultures and interpretations that create the richness and depth of the Jerusalem experience – their own heritage as Reform Jews, with its distinctive principles, liturgy, music and values – represents an equally major voice. I tried to impress upon them that in the midst of this diversity, Classical Reform is yet another beautiful, meaningful, *minhag* – a unique set of traditions – and stands on its own as a distinctive *nusach* – an historic complex of worship and musical customs, alongside the numerous other European, Sephardic, Hasidic, eastern and African Jewish practices that converge in Israel today. I encouraged them to ground themselves in their own heritage as American Reform Jews even as they experience all of these many other voices...and to understand their encounter with Israel as a means of strengthening their spiritual resources to return and serve the American Jewish community. I also charged them to consider that every moral principle and spiritual value that inspired their decisions to become Reform rabbis – the enduring legacy of Classical Reform's courageous Prophetic vision – our belief in the centrality of the spiritual essence of Jewish identity...our commitment to individual freedom and equality...and our determination to respond as faithful Jews to the challenges of modernity – these are indeed the very values that most define Reform as a distinctive alternative both to the dominant Orthodox fundamentalism and the pervasive secularism that

are currently the two major options in Israeli society. The conversations that ensued were enthusiastic and clearly positive in their response. The students expressed great interest and enthusiasm as they learned about the option that the Society offers – and I truly believe that many of them will become involved our work when they continue their studies here at home.

Israeli Students Encounter Classical Reform

The second seminar was focused on the Israeli students. This audience obviously posed a special challenge, since the indigenous styles and priorities that define Reform Judaism in Israel are very different than those in the United States. The importance of the Classical Reform values of vernacular prayer, a positive engagement with a predominantly non-Jewish pluralistic society, and our focus on outreach to interfaith families, are simply not relevant to the Israeli setting. However, Reform Judaism's historic spiritual and moral values do represent a vital and clear alternative. These ideals are not merely recent permissive innovations – the conventional Israeli perception – but are rather grounded in a two-centuries old stream of Jewish history, that in turn is rooted in the timeless, universal values of Judaism going back to the Torah and the Prophets. This is the Classical Reform connection that I argued could give the Israeli Progressive Movement a sense of its own authenticity as it seeks to offer an alternative to countless Israelis searching for a meaningful, modern religious experience in their lives. Another important theme that I proactively wanted to raise, was a confrontation with the common misconceptions regarding the complex relationship between historic Reform and Zionism. While I firmly maintained that for Classical Reform in America, there has always been – and still is – a broad range of opinion on the role of Jewish nationalism and political Zionist ideology in our own identity and commitments, I did want to at least confront the usual charges of anti-Zionism as a characteristic of Classical Reform in the past. I pointed out that the leading Zionist heroes in American Jewish history – Rabbis Judah Leon Magnes, Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen S. Wise – were all fervently Classical Reform in their religious practice. This dramatic example of the breadth of interpretation on this critical issue seemed to be particularly enlightening for these Israel students...who revere these famous personalities as major champions of the founding and building of the State. I was further encouraged by subsequent meetings with individual Israeli students, who seemed genuinely intrigued by our message and its viability as an option for Israeli Progressive Judaism. Particularly significant was the special meeting I had with the recipient of the Society's scholarship for an Israeli rabbinic student, Noa Sattath. Noa is a brilliant young woman who is one of the rising stars of Israeli Reform. A multi-generation Sabra,

granddaughter of a hero of the 1948 War for Independence, she came to Progressive Judaism out of her own spiritual search for a religious grounding for her deep commitment to equality and justice issues. She is currently a second-year student in the rabbinic program, and also serves as the Director of the Israel Religious Action Center – widely known as a major spokesperson for religious, racial and gender equality in Israel. She personally identifies herself in the Classical Reform tradition, and is very knowledgeable about the history and values of our position. We had a deep and warm conversation, and I am sure she will become a very effective advocate for our message.

***An Historic Milestone:
Our Worship Service and Concert***

Certainly one of the major highlights of our entire visit was the wonderful Classical Reform Service that the College presented as a public community event on Tuesday evening, March 20. We had requested some kind of modest initial way to share the Society's presence in Jerusalem, and had proposed a musical program that might attract cultural as well as religious interest. The faculty of the HUC music department, coordinated by Cantors David Berger and Eliyahu Schliefer, a world renowned musician and scholar, planned and organized a memorable experience that far surpassed any "modest" experiment. Announced as a "Festive *Maariv* (Evening) Service", and entitled *B'hadrat Kodesh: In the Majesty of Holiness*, the Service was a celebration of both the Classical Reform tradition and the great musical heritage of the Reform Synagogue in Germany, the United States and contemporary Israel, from the 19th-21st centuries. A large choir of HUC students and members of local congregations performed a memorable program of the great choral and cantorial masterpieces that are rarely



A Message From Dr. David Ellenson

President, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Dear Howard,

Thank you for this brilliant and complete letter. I found it highly moving – every single word and description. I am so delighted that this initiative is moving ahead so beautifully and am equally delighted that Dean Kelman, Rabbi Zavidov at Har-El, my class-

mate Rabbi Shelly Donnell and my student and colleague Rabbi Dalia Marx, among so many others, all interacted with you and the programs so positively. Thank you again for this report and I hope the partnership between the Society and the College-Institute will continue to grow.

David



היברו יוניון קולג' - מכון למדעי היהדות
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION



heard in Israel – many of them probably never presented there before.

It was a particularly profound statement and symbol that this program was not presented as a concert, but was a full worship Service – interspersing passages and readings from the Union Prayer Book with the Hebrew liturgical compositions. This may well have been the first time that such a Service has ever been held in the country. The program had been extensively advertised, including a major announcement in the prior weekend's issue of the *Jerusalem Post*, with the Society's sponsorship prominently stated. The beautiful printed program included background information about the SCRJ and HUC. The College chapel, the Murstein Synagogue, was filled – and the College leaders were both thrilled and surprised by the degree of interest. I offered the words of welcome for the SCRJ, and described our mission and programs, and also conducted the Service, along with Dean Kelman. The clearly joyful spirit of the singers, particularly the cantorial students, for whom such artistically rich music was a revelation, was electrifying. Many of the major choral works reached heights of power matching any of the great American temples...again, a form of Jewish music that few Israelis have ever been exposed to.

The response of the assembled congregation was very enthusiastic and for many, deeply emotional. One detail that caught my personal attention...a number of the male students who performed did so without wearing a *kippah*...virtually unheard of in Israeli synagogue settings, Reform or Orthodox. I, who felt compelled to observe local practice by wearing a kippah for this Service (and as unaccustomed as I am to this, sensed a physical – and symbolic – weight on my head all evening), was very proud of their forthright assertion of their American Reform identity!

Building Personal Connections

The rest of the time in Jerusalem was taken up with various individual appointments with interested students and faculty, many of whom wanted to discuss Classical Reform and the Society's work in further detail. The professors I met with, particularly Rabbis Shelton Donnell and Dalia Marx, were very interested in our mission, and particularly in the idea of broadening their incorporation of Classical Reform sources in their teaching. This is highly significant – and will assure that our American students receive positive exposure to our worship approach from the outset of their studies. I had lively and spirited talks with a number of students, and I believe that the entire experience of our visit made a major impact on them. We were able to broaden their horizons and understanding, and most importantly, helped them to connect their American Reform identity with their experience in Israel. No other generation of HUC students, over the past forty years, experiencing their first year in Israel, has ever had this opportunity. Many would argue that the emotional impact of the Jerusalem experience, in a vacu-

The SCRJ extends special appreciation to Dean Kelman's assistant, Iris Ben-Zvi, for her devoted help in arranging our visit and programs.

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Reform heritage in HUC teaching and culture in the past four decades. If we have achieved anything with this visit, it is the beginning of a new era of greater integration of these two dimensions in the education of our rabbis.

A New Congregational Partner

The week of wonderful and gratifying successes and meaningful personal encounters culminated in appropriate Jerusalem fashion, with the celebration of the Sabbath. Our SCRJ group attended the Shabbat Evening Service at Jerusalem's pioneer Reform congregation, Kehilat Har-El, founded in 1958 as the first progressive synagogue in Israel. It is led by its dynamic Rabbi, Ada Zavidov, a gifted younger woman who is widely respected throughout Israel as one of the most articulate and forceful advocates of Reform Judaism. She is joined by another very energetic and talented colleague, Cantor Evan Cohen, an American immigrant, with a deep appreciation and love of the Classical Reform musical heritage which he preserves beautifully at Har-El. It is very significant that as the Israeli Movement has grown, with over 25 congregations and additional schools and educational groups throughout the country, that Har-El is explicitly considered – and proudly describes itself – as the center of Classical Reform in Israel. I had already met with leaders of the congregation, who had expressed great interest in developing a relationship with the Society to help connect them to the renewal that Classical



Reform is achieving in America. We mutually acknowledged that in some ways, this has different expressions and implications for the Israeli scene. The hallmarks of our practice in America – particularly a primarily English Service, the use of choir and organ, an absence of such ritual practices as kippah and tallit, are not part of the Israeli context. In many ways, Reform/Progressive Judaism in Israel reflects the more traditionalist pre-War German influence, further shaped by the dominant cultural vocabulary of an overwhelmingly Jewish society. However, there are clear principles and practices that define what Classical Reform means at Har-El. Obviously, the entire Service is in Hebrew – which, arguably, makes it purely Classical Reform in spirit, since the entire worship is in the vernacular language of the country! However, that Hebrew liturgy reflects the coherent flow and textual principles of other Reform Prayer Books around the world, and most particularly, the Union Prayer Book. The traditional Hebrew texts are edited to reflect a distinctively universal and inclusive theology, and are supplemented by contemporary poetry and prayers. Har-El is unusual among Israeli synagogues in its extensive use of responsive readings, as opposed to chanting – reflecting its adherence to historic Reform practice. Men and women have totally equal roles – which, in the Orthodox dominated Israeli setting, is itself a major distinguishing statement. The Service is enhanced by beautiful choir music that includes many of the melodies of the German and American synagogue repertoire. The importance of the sermon, emphasizing the contemporary spiritual and ethical values of the weekly Torah Reading, is another characteristically “Classical” element. While the common style of other Progressive congregations in Israel is to adopt more “traditional” melodies and rituals in their Services, including an anomalous Hasidic style, Har-El strongly adheres to a distinctively Reform worship approach. Our SCRJ group was warmly welcomed to the Shabbat Evening Service, and

I was invited to speak from the pulpit about the Society, our ideals and our efforts. I expressed our deep appreciation for both the pioneering role that Har-El has played, and for its continuing commitment to providing a distinctive alternative for Israelis to experience the traditions and ideals of liberal Judaism. I shared our hope that the Society could be a partner and a source of support in enhancing and furthering these efforts. The following day, at the Sabbath Morning Service, I was given the honor of being called up to the Torah for an *aliyah*, offering the benedictions for the Torah Reading. Following the reading, Rabbi Zavidov offered a special blessing on the work of the Society, and presented me with “Friends of Har-El” commemorative lapel pins for each member of our group. This was a particularly emotional moment – reflecting both our kinship and a deep spirituality that pervaded the Service...it was a very profound personal highlight for me.

Building for the Future

I cannot state strongly enough how transforming this entire experience was for me personally and how historic the implications are for the Society’s vision. There is no question in my mind and heart that our principles of the centrality of the American Jewish experience as a core value of our understanding of Classical Reform Judaism, is and must always remain a primary focus for us. However, this visit gave me a renewed personal sense of connection with the history and destiny that Israel represents for us as American Jews. And even more important, the importance of nurturing and supporting the Classical Reform voice in Israel, whose influence on American Jewish life and the Reform Movement is so dominant – represents a unique opportunity and responsibility for the Society. Deepening our connection and impact on our American rabbinic students during this major experience in the formation of their identities and commitments, is critical for our success and influence as they continue their studies and development. And the particular relationship that we can build with Har-El Congregation gives us a special way to offer our collegial and moral support for an outpost of Classical Reform that is subject to the same kinds of resistance, criticisms and even lonely idealism that we of the SCRJ know all too well.

We are thrilled to announce that, inspired by the major success of these efforts, the Society Board, at its meeting at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati on May 6, endorsed our plans to continue our partnerships with both the Jerusalem campus and with Kehilat Har-El on an annual basis. The Edward and Wilhelmina Ackerman Foundation has continued its extraordinary support for our work with a commitment of additional funds to sponsor the Society Institute at the College for the coming four years, as well as a five year grant to Har-El, for the expansion of its musical programming and the public outreach of its distinctive Classical Reform alternative.

A concluding reflection...during our stay in Jerusalem, our SCRJ group visited the Western Wall together. As always, it is a moving and emotional moment...even for a group of staunchly loyal American Jews, whose homeland is proudly and forthrightly the United States of America. We stood at the *Kotel* as Reform Jews who embrace our Movement’s early proclamation that our gathering for worship *wherever* we dwell is as sacred as that of the ancient Sanctuary whose outer ramparts these stones represent – and who consequently have called our synagogues by the name of *temple*. We stood at that special place...made holy primarily by the numberless generations of our people whose prayers and yearnings were directed to that sacred spot. At the same time, we were deeply conscious that this place dramatically symbolizes the critical need for a modern, inclusive Judaism for the people of Israel – where we must struggle so that Judaism is not only perceived as the purview of extreme Orthodoxy...and where women are not isolated, segregated and prevented from full worship privileges. Following the beloved

custom, I offered a special prayer for God's continued blessing on our sacred work, written on our SCRJ business card, which I then inserted within the spaces between the ancient stones. Remembering the words of the Union Prayer Book, that our prayers are made fruitful both by God's love and mercy and by our own commitment and efforts, we look forward to all of us of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism working together to build on these great beginnings, as we aspire to new horizons in our mission of preserving and renewing the Reform Jewish tradition we all so deeply cherish.

April 2012

To: The Society for Classical Reform Judaism
From: Rabbi Naamah Kelman, Dean

Dear Friends;

A little over a year ago B.H. Levy Jr. met with us in Jerusalem to initiate what has now truly blossomed into a meaningful partnership. From the onset we shared our hopes and concerns how we might best make time and room for the Society in what is a very pressured year for our incoming first year Rabbinic, Cantorial, and Education students. In addition, we discussed how we would best introduce our Israeli rabbinic students to Classical Reform Judaism. Rabbi Howard Berman worked closely with us to create the right balance of programming.

Israel Religious Action Center | For pluralism, tolerance and equality

Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism



Thank You

Noa Sattath

Director, Israel Religious Action Center

I am writing to express my deep gratitude to the Society for Classical Reform Judaism for awarding me with a scholarship for my Rabbinic studies this year.

My path to the Israeli Rabbinic program at HUC was guided by my commitment to engaging in the challenges of social justice and religious and cultural pluralism facing Israeli society.

Prior to beginning my studies at Hebrew Union College, I worked at the Jerusalem Open House, which advocates for civil rights and equality for Israeli citizens of all genders and sexual orientations, and later, for an organization that brought together outstanding Palestinian and Israeli high-school students from the Jerusalem and Ramallah area for a computer science and business program. One of the main challenges for

me as the director of the program was the inability and unwillingness of the Israeli youth in the program to communicate with their Palestinian peers. While the Israeli teens were friendly amongst themselves they found it incredibly difficult to carry even a simple conversation with the Palestinian teens. The barrier was their different senses of identity: The Palestinian teens came with a strong sense of identity, both religiously and nationally. The Israeli teens (who were all secular) couldn't articulate any dimension of their identity – they (like most Israelis) had little knowledge of Jewish values or traditions, and their only connection to the Jewish past was around the experience of the Holocaust. I got to experience how people need to build tall walls around themselves when they lack confidence in their own identity.

The need for Israelis to better understand their Jewish identity and the commitment it entails drew me to Rabbinic studies, and to my work in the Israel Religious Action Center: the social justice arm of the Reform Movement in Israel. To realize the vision of Progressive Zionism, we need to speak of social justice not only in politically democratic terms, but also in religiously Jewish terms. As we are working to create the language for Jewish social justice that would be relevant in Israel today, I am profoundly inspired by the pioneering tradition of Classical Reform Judaism. I believe that we can draw from this religious tradition that was grounded in an evolving interpretation of the ethical teachings of the Hebrew prophets.

This spring I had the privilege to learn more about Classical Reform Judaism during the visit of leaders of the Society in the Jerusalem campus of HUC. I found that the work of the Society bears a striking resemblance to the mission of the Reform Movement in Israel: while the SCRJ is working to connect Reform Jews in the US to their liberal tradition, the Israeli Reform Movement is working to make Judaism accessible to secular Jews who are completely disconnected from their heritage. We share the conviction that a vital connection to our past makes us stronger, relevant and ensures our sustainability in future generations.

As part of my Rabbinic training I have been interning at Har-El congregation this year. I have been impressed by the liturgical practice at Har-El: the commitment to Classical Reform tradition. The focus on creating a beautiful, thoughtful and meaningful Service and music, that the clergy, as well as the members, are devoted to, is unique and inspiring. I am thankful to the members of the society not only for your generosity in providing me with assistance in my studies, but mostly for the work that you do for the Jewish people – preserving our tradition and ensuring that it is accessible to all of us.

Toda Raba, “Thank You”

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Announcing the publication of THE UNION PRAYER BOOK A NEW REVISION OF THE UPB - SINAI EDITION

The Union Prayer Book: Sinai Edition, was published in 2000 by Chicago Sinai Congregation as a contemporary language, gender-neutral liturgy for Reform congregations wishing to maintain the historic worship traditions of our Movement's heritage.

Preserving the beloved texts and cadences of the 1940 *Union Prayer Book*, the *Sinai Edition* also embraced the newest developments in Jewish liturgical responses to the realities of our time – a heightened awareness of inclusive language and a recognition of the spiritual challenges of the transforming events of Jewish history in this generation.

Originally conceived as the liturgy for Chicago's historic Sinai Congregation, and edited by its rabbis, Michael P. Sternfield and Howard A. Berman, the "Sinai UPB" has been adopted by many other temples throughout the country over the past decade.

We are proud to announce the publication of a new revision of this important work—a true *Union Prayer Book* for the twenty-first century, prepared by Chicago Sinai Congregation in collaboration with the Society for Classical Reform Judaism, where Rabbi Berman serves as Executive Director. This new edition builds upon the principles of the original version, offering:

- The renewed availability of prayers and meditations that have inspired generations of American Reform Jews with a deep personal faith and an ethically motivating spirituality
- New texts and translations, drawn from a variety of sources, including original compositions, that broaden the perspectives of worship
- Supplemental readings for special occasions, home observance and personal reflection and study, with the texts of the most popular Hebrew and English hymns and songs used in contemporary Reform worship
- Transliterations of Hebrew texts on each page
- Attractive design that preserves the distinctive appearance of the historic Union Prayer Book from "blue cover to red ribbon..." with striking new graphic embellishments

The new Union Prayer Book is conceived to be used in a broad variety of ways—as a congregation's major liturgy or as an alternative resource for worship services reflecting the traditions of our distinctive Reform heritage—made available once again for those who cherish this tradition, as well as for a new generation seeking an accessible, embracing spiritual experience.



For further information and ordering information, please contact:

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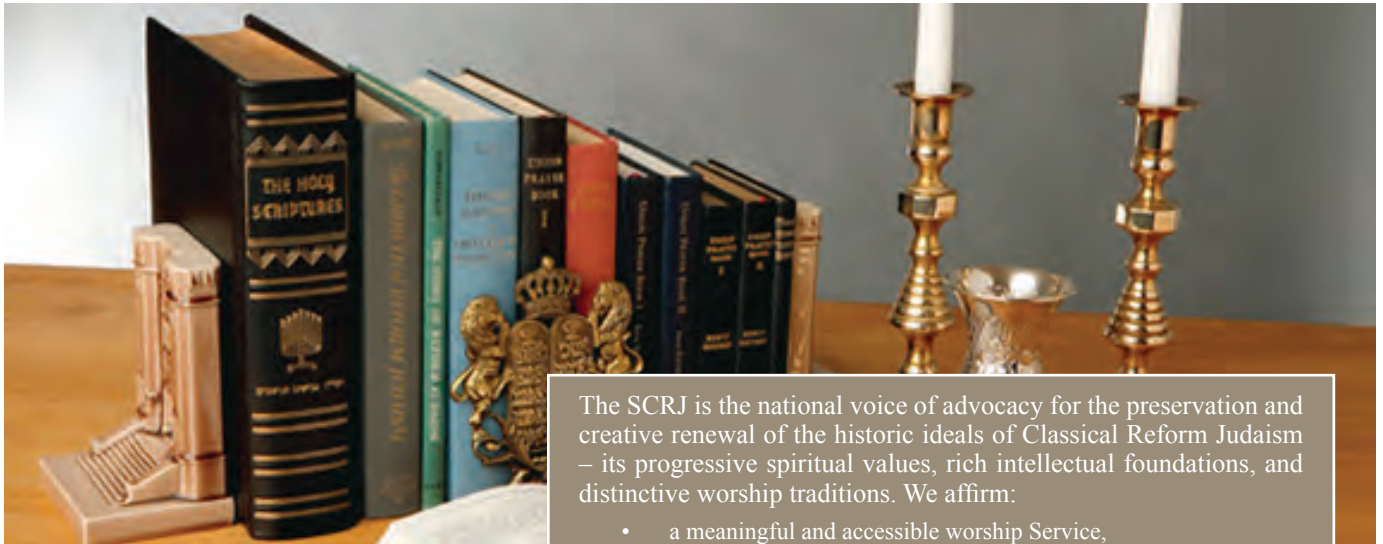
A Message to our Readers

We hope that you have been inspired and gratified by the extraordinary progress that the Society has made in the short four years since its founding...so dramatically reflected in this issue of *The Reform Advocate*.

We have previously communicated with all of our devoted and loyal supporters, throughout the year, with messages requesting your continuing participation in our work. As you can clearly see, this past year has been another great period of growth in our mission to preserve and renew the heritage of American Reform Judaism as a vital option for many Jews of all ages today. Our many programs of outreach and resources for congregations throughout the country, and the significant impact we are making on a new generation of rabbinic students at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, both here in America and now in Israel as well, have all been spectacularly successful. Classical Reform is now once again recognized and honored as an important voice in the broader Movement – and many people who have been disenfranchised and alienated by the shifts in worship in their own congregations, have been able to find new meaning and connection as temples turn to the Society for creative ways of incorporating the liturgy and music that so many of us cherish.

Enclosed in this issue of the Advocate is a contribution envelope. Please consider sharing your own support for our great efforts by sending a gift at this time. Whether you are a regular contributor or an occasional reader of this journal... whether you have already given this year or are planning a Year-End gift... we hope that you will demonstrate your appreciation for the triumphs recounted in this issue by making an additional donation to the Society now. This is your investment in the future of American Reform Judaism, and in the renewal of our heritage throughout the world. Your expression of support in response to this special report on the historic developments of the past months will be a great source of encouragement to us...

Thank you!



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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The Reform Advocate

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