

of their gentile friends or attending social gatherings at cafés. They were embarrassed, too, should neighbors accustomed to the decorum of the Protestant or Catholic church visit the synagogue and witness a spectacle of men wrapped in strange prayer shawls noisily *davening* a repetitive liturgy while children tore up and down the aisles.

Determined to bring Jewish life into the modern age, the early German-Jewish reformers of the mid-19th century emphasized the universalist ethical teachings of biblical prophets. They no longer viewed ritual observance as ordained by God and inviolate, but as a means to reinforce the prophetic ideals of justice, freedom, and peace.

In synagogue worship, they began to pray in unison and introduced a professional choir and organ to render their hymns. The rabbi led services covered in ministerial robes as bareheaded worshipers listened in solemn silence. Later in the century, when Reform Judaism spread to North America, the main Shabbat service shifted to Friday night, allowing Jews to pursue their occupations on Saturdays, in concert with many of their gentile compatriots.

Thus, in this first stage of Reform Judaism's development—a period of *adaptation* to the wider gentile community—Reform Jews abandoned codes of diet, dress, and ritual practices which set them apart from fellow citizens.

These changes in Jewish practice were accompanied by a new theology,

which also led to amendments to Reform prayer books. Traditionally, Jews had prayed for the coming of the Messiah, who would usher in a universal age of peace, resurrect the dead, and lead all Jews back to the restored Kingdom of Israel, where the Temple would be rebuilt and sacrifices once again offered upon its altars. The early reformers changed the focus of this national restoration to what they called the “Mission of Israel”: the Jews’ historic task to bring social justice to the world from within the lands where they lived. Now that the Jews of Europe or America had finally become prosperous, they had little desire to leave their “new homeland” for an uncivilized, swamp-ridden land halfway around the globe. They taught instead that “the Messianic Age,” rather than the Messiah, would come to all enlightened nations—and, better still, it was just around the corner.

Reform Jews were now able to express their particularism on their own terms and to connect with growing numbers of like-minded compatriots. The adaptations to modern culture, however, entailed sacrificing a Jewish identity that had defined the Jewish people for generations. When freed from the yoke of *halachah* (religious law), Judaism was recast from an all-encompassing way of life to simply a religion. Just as Christians worshiped in a church, Jews worshiped in a synagogue, but in all other respects Jews were just as European or American as their non-Jewish neighbors next door.

This optimistic, universalist attitude was severely shaken by the Holocaust. In the 1930s and '40s Jews came to the grim realization that, despite their having blended into the general culture, they were still regarded as other. As a result, the Reform pendulum swung away from universalism toward particularism. Reform Jews began to reconsider their opposition to Zionism, the movement calling for the creation of a Jewish state. Reform support for Zionism—which the Central Conference of American Rabbis had endorsed in the Columbus Platform of 1937 by only a single vote—continued to gain momentum in the post-Holocaust years.

When the State of Israel was born in 1948, Reform Jews worldwide celebrated its creation and rejoiced in its achievements. Still, for the first two decades of Israel's existence, the Jewish State was a world away from the daily life of Reform Jews in Manhattan or Montreal. It would take an extraordinary event to bring Israel closer to home.

Stage Two: The Six-Day War to Saving Soviet Jewry

In the 1960s, ethnic pride was on the rise throughout North America. African-Americans were asserting a proud identity with the slogan “Black is beautiful.” In Canada, French-Canadian nationalism gained momentum as the Québécois sought to become “*maîtres chez nous*” (“masters in our own house,” promoting French language and culture). Then, suddenly, Israel's lightning victory in the Six-Day War of June 1967 sparked a similar pride among Jews. The muscular, confident *sabra* erased the lingering stereotype of the spineless ghetto Jew. Hebrew school students learned Israeli pop songs along with the traditional *z'mirot* (songs). People who had never affiliated with the Jewish community suddenly joined synagogues and Jewish community centers. Jewish students flocked to newly-established Jewish studies courses on university campuses. Jewish summer camps flourished. Young adults began sporting colorful knit *kipot* and/or *chai* pendants. Jewish charitable organizations received

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1. Do you agree that “to infuse Jews with a sense of belonging, our Movement will have to develop a more flexible type of community that meets Jews wherever they happen to gather”? If so, how can this kind of outreach best be accomplished?
2. Rabbi Englander says that “Jews are seeking out the Jewish community to fulfill current needs...rather than regarding synagogue membership as a lifetime commitment.” Do you agree? If yes, what needs to happen to make affiliation more compelling?
3. Rabbi Englander counsels that the survival of Reform Judaism in a society “in which the only constant is change [requires] creating a community that stands for something timeless.” Do you agree? If so, what do we stand for that will resonate today and endure?

Visit reformjudaismmag.org/thinktank to share your ideas and have them considered by the Reform Think Tank, which is imagining the future direction of our Movement.