



The Joseph and Alma Gildenhorn
Institute for Israel Studies
University of Maryland

The Reform Movement in Israel: Past, Present, and Future

Laurence Wolff
January 8, 2015

Research Paper 13
January 2015





The Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies (GIIS) is proud to publish Laurence Wolff's analysis of the Reform movement in Israel. We will be making it available to all those concerned with religious pluralism in Israel today, and we hope that both its analysis and its recommendations will contribute to the broader conversation about this issue.

The GIIS is one of the largest and most active centers for the study of Israel in the United States today. Headed by Professor Yoram Peri, the Abraham S. and Jack Kay Chair in Israel Studies, the GIIS offers 15 courses each year to 500 students, which focuses on five different aspects of Israel: Israeli History, Society, Politics, Culture, and the Middle East Conflict. The GIIS also sponsors conferences, lectures, cultural events, and community forums. It hosts a number of multidisciplinary graduate students each year, and serves as the academic home of the *Israel Studies Review*, the journal of the Association for Israel Studies.

One of the important aspects of the GIIS is sponsoring, conducting, and publishing research on various aspects of Israel Studies. Our signature research project is **Israel 2023**, a series of three monographs that construct different possible scenarios for Israel as it approaches its 75th anniversary in three broad areas of major concern: Relations between Arab and Jewish Israelis, Israel's Geo-strategic position, and Religion and State in Israel. The Institute also regularly publishes on its website both original research and translations of important articles that have already appeared in Hebrew.

More information about the GIIS is available at:

THE GILDENHORN INSTITUTE FOR ISRAEL STUDIES

4137 Susquehanna Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742 U.S.A.

www.israelstudies.umd.edu

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laurence Wolff was a senior education officer at the World Bank for 22 years and has consulted for USAID, UNESCO, the Inter-American Development Bank and others. A frequent visitor to Israel, he is married to Miriam Daniel, whose family helped create the Daniel Centers for Progressive Judaism in Tel Aviv. He may be contacted at larrywolff@live.com.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
IN THE BEGINNING	1
TAKEOFF AND THE JEWISH RENAISSANCE.....	2
CURRENT STATUS OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT	4
CHALLENGES FOR THE REFORM MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL	7
BIBLIOGRAPHY, WORKS CITED, AND WEBSITES CONSULTED.....	13

* The author wishes to thank Yonatan Melamed for invaluable assistance in identifying sources of information and data. While they are in no way responsible for the content of this paper, the author would also like to thank the following persons for comments on earlier versions: Rabbi Meir Azari, James Cherney, Miriam Daniel, Gerard Daniel, Yitzhar Hess, Rabbi Naamah Kelman, Larry Ottinger, Yoram Peri, Lee Perlman, Paul Scham, and Danielle Sheldon.

Introduction

The Reform movement in Israel is growing, with more Israelis turning to it as a viable option to both Orthodoxy and secularism, and with an increasing impact on public discourse. But the story of the movement's experience in Israel has not been well told. The paper seeks to meet that need. It places the movement in a larger context, reviews its history and current status, and summarizes the challenges it and similar groups are facing.

In the Beginning

The Reform movement in Israel has broad and ambitious goals. It seeks to provide to increasing numbers of non-orthodox Israelis the opportunity to express their Jewish identity, beliefs, and practices in a modern religious context. It shares with a number of other Israeli institutions and organizations the aim of ensuring that tomorrow's Israel is a pluralistic, democratic, tolerant, and socially just country. The movement has 1.5 million adherents in North America, and a total of 2 million around the world. Yet in the first forty years of Israeli's independence, and in spite of its lofty goals, the movement had little or no impact on Israeli society.

A look at Israel's early years of independence helps to explain why this is so. The leaders of Israel's independence movement, including David Ben Gurion, Moshe Sharett, and Golda Meir, most of whom were secular,¹ established a "nation state for the Jewish people," in which Jews would be masters of their own fate. Their focus was on peoplehood and self-determination rather than religious observance. In their vision, a "new Jew" would speak Hebrew, quote from the Bible, and celebrate Jewish holidays from a nationalistic perspective.

In order to show a British committee of inquiry that there was a consensus among Israeli Jews for the establishment of an independent country, in 1947 Ben Gurion wrote a letter to the ultra-orthodox World Agudat Yisrael organization (the "status quo letter"), in which he stated that, while Israel would not be a theocratic state, it would take into account Agudat's religious concerns (Rabinovich). The new state would make every effort to keep Saturday as the Sabbath day of rest, have state institutions serve kosher food, "prevent a rift" among the Jewish people in the matter of marital affairs, respect the needs of the religiously inclined, and allow separate education systems provided that they studied the basic education subjects such as language, math and science. While the letter itself was relatively vague, subsequently legislation was passed to institutionalize an Orthodox monopoly on all matters of personal status, including life cycle events. The result is that weddings conducted by non-Orthodox rabbis are not recognized by the state. Many secular couples travel overseas (often to Cyprus) to be married in civil ceremonies. Funerals in public cemeteries must be led by Orthodox rabbis and nearly all state cemeteries are controlled by the Rabbinate. The state pays the salaries of Orthodox but not of Reform and Conservative rabbis (with recent important exceptions).

By 1967, Israel's population was 2.8 million, of which 2.4 million were Jews, 289,000 were Muslims and 110,000 were "other" (Jewish Virtual Library). Among Jews, fully 80% considered themselves "secular." "Secular" Jews live in a Jewish state and thus celebrate Jewish holidays which are also holidays of the state. Many of them are likely to light candles on Shabbat, fast on Yom Kippur, and celebrate a Seder in the home on Passover. They are "secular" because they rarely attend a synagogue service, except for life cycle events, often do not eat kosher food or observe Shabbat, and do not study Jewish texts.

¹ With the partial exception of Menachem Begin.

At the time, nearly all Jewish Israelis considered Reform and Conservative Judaism to be a purely American phenomenon, with no place in Israel, since the only genuine observance of Judaism was Orthodox. They felt that they were Jewish because they lived in a Jewish state, spoke Hebrew, knew the Hebrew Bible in words and from site visits, and lived according to the Jewish calendar. In addition, many immigrants, especially of Sephardic origin, had no previous knowledge or experience of Reform Judaism.

Before the 1960's, the Leo Baeck School in Haifa was the only Reform presence in Israel. Begun in 1937 by one of the few liberal rabbis who immigrated to Israel to serve displaced children, its high school was established in 1947 and named after Rabbi Leo Baeck, a leading German Reform educator. In 1962, the Hebrew Union College (HUC), the North American Reform institution for training rabbis, cantors and educators, opened a center in Jerusalem, and shortly thereafter established a synagogue to welcome Reform visitors. Beginning in 1970, all entering rabbinic students, and later, cantorial and Jewish education students as well, were required to spend their first year in Israel. In 1964 the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) was formed.² At the time there were only six small Reform synagogues in Israel (in greater Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa), all led by expatriate (American) Reform rabbis and with a predominantly Diaspora attendance (Hirsch), but with dreams of building an indigenous Israeli movement. Most Israelis continued to consider the Reform and Conservative movements as “alien” and vaguely “un-Jewish,” some calling it “idol worship” rather than Judaism (Sales).

Takeoff and the Jewish Renaissance

In the 1980's the movement began to have an increasing public presence. In 1981, HUC--Jerusalem ordained its first Israeli born rabbi. In 1986 the physical infrastructure in Jerusalem (Beit Shmuel) was built to offer a venue for housing, offices, and classrooms.³ A pre-school was founded on the HUC campus, leading to an elementary school and later middle and high schools. Kehilat Kol Haneshama in Jerusalem was established in 1984.⁴ The Leo Baeck Center in Haifa had become a thriving high school, synagogue, and community center. After continuing pressure from American Reform and Conservative leadership, in 1986 the United Jewish Appeal (the umbrella US Jewish philanthropic organization) decided to fund Reform and Conservative denominations in Israel on an annual basis. In 1987, the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC) was formed as the public and legal advocacy arm of the IMPJ seeking to end the Orthodox monopoly and guarantee the rights of the liberal movements.

The construction in 1991 of Beit Daniel Synagogue and Community Center in Tel Aviv was a crucial step for the Reform movement. The Tel Aviv municipality fought the construction of the building, finally settling the matter before it went to the Supreme Court. Beit Daniel pioneered the idea of an “open” community, serving not only dues-paying “members” of the congregation, but also the general public on a fee-for-service basis.

Concurrently, around 1990 secular Israeli Jews increasingly began to realize that a spiritual dimension was missing in their lives. Individuals for whom religious and Halachic principles and practices were not binding began to seek to connect with key elements of Jewish culture, ritual, history, community, and

² The word “progressive” was used since it was felt that “Reform” had a negative connotation among the Israeli public.

³ It was vastly expanded in 1991 to include conference rooms, a theater and a banquet hall (Mercaz Shimshon).

⁴ In 1987, a local orthodox rabbi and others attempted to stop Simchat Torah services and remove the Torah. Mayor Teddy Kollek, angered by this aggression, promised a piece of land to the Kehilah to build a synagogue.

beliefs, often but not always including a commitment to social justice. This change reflected a lessening of the hold on the public of what could be called a “secular religion”—the achievement of the dream of establishing a Jewish state. An amorphous movement, which has been called “Jewish renewal” or “Jewish renaissance,” arose. “Renaissance” is perhaps the better word because it is a “rebirth” of Jewish connections among those who had abandoned it. The Reform movement is part of the “Jewish renaissance,” helping to create it, benefiting from it, strengthening it, but also in competition with elements of it.

This “Jewish renaissance” took off after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, which was considered to be, in part, the result of campaigns of hatred by those who were opposed to Rabin’s commitment to a two state solution. Secular Jews, feeling that far right religious fanatics were hijacking Judaism, became concerned with the nature of Jewish tradition in Israel. Many of the leaders of the new movement were third generation Israelis, often Kibbutz-raised, who realized that they did not know what their grandparents had rejected, and began to seek answers through text study, life-cycle ritual, and, most recently, prayer. Some had gained knowledge and direction from exposure to Reform and Conservative institutions in North America.

“Jewish renaissance” groups have many of the same or similar goals as the Reform movement. They seek a state which is open to pluralistic expressions of Jewish identity, belief, and practice, in which the orthodox near monopoly of life cycle events is diminished and state financial support is extended to the non-orthodox. Many would like to see an Israel whose various population segments have a stronger understanding and tolerance of each other.

At the community level, informal and formal *havurot* celebrate Shabbat and other Jewish holidays together, using both traditional melodies and prayers along with modern Hebrew popular songs which have a liturgical basis. Municipal governments increasingly encourage Jewish experiences for their residents, such as Shabbat and holiday services open to all. Small groups may meet together to study sacred and other religious, spiritual, and cultural texts, focusing on the Jewish contexts of peace, environmentalism, social justice, art, and culture, the Israeli/Jewish attitude towards Arabs and other non-Jewish citizens, the rights of women, etc. A flourishing example of community involvement can be found in the municipality of Gan Yavneh, near Ashkelon.

There have been attempts since the 1950s to enrich Jewish knowledge and culture in “secular” Jewish schools.⁵ “Torah” has been a subject of study in secular schools for many years. The Tali school system (the Hebrew acronym for “enriched Jewish studies”) was established in 1976, with support from the US Conservative movement. Now independent and partially funded by the state, the program offers a Jewish enrichment experience in 92 elementary⁶ and 140 pre-schools (Tali). A 2011 law mandates two hours per week in junior secondary school (grades 5-8) for the study of “Jewish heritage and culture,” in order to give students “a basic knowledge of Judaism and Zionism” (Hayom). In these classes, specialized or specially trained teachers lead students to experience, contemplate and understand their Jewish heritage, including using texts from the *Tanach* as starting points for discussions. The state provides funding, and teacher training programs for this new subject have grown. The Tali organization, the Reform movement, Orthodox groups and others provide curriculum guides and textbooks.

⁵ Israel’s public school system is divided into four sub-systems—“secular” Jewish (Hebrew language) schools, orthodox Jewish schools, ultra-orthodox Jewish schools which are private but for which the state covers 70% of expenses, and Arabic language schools.

⁶ Around 10% of secular Jewish schools.

Outside of the schools, the number of Israelis who actively and regularly participate in Jewish renaissance study and worship is estimated at a modest 20,000. But, the number of people who attend these activities at least once a year is estimated to be as many as 200-300,000 individuals. Several recent studies (Goldwater and MIDOT) seek to document the phenomenon of Jewish renaissance and its implications for Israel.

The Masorti (Israeli Conservative) movement is an important player in this process. It is a partner with Reform in seeking legal and public status as a branch of Judaism on a par with Orthodoxy. It has roughly the same number of persons as Reform who self-identify with it and similar numbers of *havurot* and trained rabbis, as well as a large program for training Jewish educators.

An Annex to this report provides a summary of the major national Jewish renaissance organizations, in addition to Reform institutions. These include the Masorti movement, institutions which train educators and teachers (i.e. the Solomon Schechter Institute, the Mandel Institute for Education Leadership, the Shalom Hartman Institute, the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, and the Melton Center for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University), institutions working directly in schools (TALI, Be'eri, and Meitarim), "secular" yeshivas (e.g. BINA and ALMA), an umbrella organization (PANIM) lobbying for increased public funding and recognition, and other institutions.

Current Status of the Reform Movement

The number of those who identify with the Reform movement has grown. In 2009 and in 2013, it was estimated that between 7 and 8% of Israeli Jews, equivalent to around 500,000 people, defined themselves as Reform or Conservative⁷ (Cohen and Hermann, IDI). This is a similar percentage to that of Israeli Jews who self-identify as "Haredi," and is an increase of 50% over the 5% who self-identified as Reform or Conservative movement in 1999 (Maltz). In 2013 36% of Israeli Jews, or nearly 2 million individuals, reported that they had participated in one or more Reform or Conservative events (Rosner).

The advance of both "Jewish renaissance" and "Reform" points of view is increasingly seen in the public, in the Knesset, and on television and radio. The leader of the Yesh Atid party, Yair Lapid, said, in 2012, that he did not have a rabbi, but, if he had one, "it would be Rabbi Meir Azari of Beit Daniel" (Dornbe). In 2013 Ruth Calderon, a leader of the Jewish renaissance movement and the head of Alma, a secular "Center for Jewish Culture," was elected to the Knesset on the Yesh Atid list. During the period January-October 2014, Rabbi Gilad Kariv, Executive Director of the IMPJ, Rabbi Meir Azari, Senior Rabbi at the Daniel Centers for Progressive Judaism in Tel Aviv, and other leaders of the Reform movement, appeared on numerous talk shows on Channels 2 and 10, Israel's most widely viewed television channels, in discussions on religious issues. In a 2014 episode of the widely watched sitcom "Avodah Aravit", which chronicles the daily life of an Arab family living in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood in Jerusalem, the family is looking for a progressive pre-school for their daughter and they decide to send her to a Reform managed pre-school. It is also reported that commercial public opinion polls now include a question which allows the respondents to identify themselves as "Reform" or "Conservative" rather than simply "secular." In response to these attitudinal changes, in 2014 the IMPJ added "Reform" to its name, which is now the "Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism."

⁷ Of these Reform is estimated at 50-55% and Conservative at 45-50%.

The Tel Aviv municipality,⁸ and more recently Modi'in and Holon, have been supportive of their Reform communities.

In 2014, 41 “communities” or “*havurot*” made up Reform membership. Of this number, 33 communities have legal status as non-profits (“*amutot*”), and eight are new and relatively small groups which are considered as “initiatives” (“*meizamim*”). The total of “memberships” in all of the Reform communities is modest, with only 3500 dues-paying members/family units combined in all of the Reform communities in Israel, the largest numbers being at the Daniel Centers in Tel Aviv (420), Kol Haneshama in Jerusalem (400), Yozma in Modi'in (330), and Mevaseret Zion (250) (IMPJ). Three to four new communities are established every year, with the IMPJ aiming to reach a total of 50 communities by the year 2020, with a focus on building communities in provincial cities and towns.

The movement in fact has a much broader reach than “memberships” since most Reform communities are open to all and do not restrict their services to dues-paying members. Non-members celebrate Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, conversions, weddings, etc. on a fee-for-service basis and are welcomed at holiday celebrations. While average attendance for Shabbat evening services is usually modest, except in the three or four larger communities, attendance for holidays such as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Purim, and Shavuot in the 41 existing institutions is high, as Jews in the community seek more meaningful spiritual experiences. For example, in 2013 over 1000 people participated in Yom Kippur services at Yotzma in Modi'in, many of them standing outside the small synagogue and participating in the service through loudspeakers in an expansive meadow. Additionally, Beit Daniel in Tel Aviv reports an attendance of 1000 at its all-night *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* service in its three centers in Tel Aviv. A summer Shabbat evening service in the Tel Aviv port led by a Reform rabbi (but not associated with the Reform movement) attracted around 1000 participants (Kronish). 1200 Israelis participated in the IMPJ's two day biennial conference in Kibbutz Shefarim in June 2014 (IMPJ Newsletter). Jewish renaissance groups host a number of similarly large gatherings to celebrate holidays.

Young people are increasingly resisting marriage ceremonies led by Orthodox rabbis. Many travel overseas, often to Cyprus, for a civil marriage ceremony which is recognized by the state, and then return to Israel for an “unofficial” religious ceremony led by a Reform or Conservative rabbi.⁹ Reform rabbis officiated at an estimated 1000 weddings in the year 2013 alone. Individual Reform communities celebrate an estimated 1000 bar/bat mitzvahs every year, many by non-members. Since over 300,000 Israelis, especially those born in the former Soviet Union, are not considered to be halachically Jewish, the Reform movement has begun a program which now converts 200 people a year, a number equivalent to 10% of the reported Orthodox conversions (Wirtschafter).¹⁰ An Israeli High Court ruling requires the state (but not the Orthodox Rabbinate) to recognize these conversions and to record converts as Jews for the purposes of state records.

Reform Judaism in Israel has evolved in ways that differentiate it somewhat from the Reform movement in North America. Services are, for the most part, in Hebrew, with occasional translations for overseas

⁸ Tel Aviv provided land and a grant of \$2 million to build a Reform hostel and community center (Mishkenot Ruth Daniel) in Jaffa which opened in 2006.

⁹ Increasing numbers are forgoing any formal wedding ceremony (Bordschel-Dan).

¹⁰ The Law of Return was amended in 1970 to state that anyone who had one grandparent who was Jewish could become a citizen. This was apparently done to encourage Eastern European migration to Israel. The result has been that many immigrants to Israel do not meet the halachic requirement to be considered a Jew: having a mother who was Jewish or converted under Orthodox auspices (Jewish Virtual Library).

guests. Many but not all Reform congregations in Israel expect their congregants to wear *kipot* and *tallitot*, and *kashrut* is practiced in the synagogues. Rules regarding conversion, such as patrilineal descent, differ from North American Reform. Reform communities in Israel, as well as in North America, increasingly add modern and other "twists" to the traditional service, some focusing on more up-to-date spiritual music and prayers, others incorporating contemporary renditions of traditional prayers, some running a nearly 100% musical service, and others focusing on environmental and social issues.

Reform institutions place an important focus on social justice and "*tikkun olam*." At the national level, IRAC lobbies not only for pluralism but also for women's and minority rights and for democracy. Individual *havurot* help underprivileged children and engage with minority groups.

The IMPJ's education department, as well as individual Reform communities, increasingly places an emphasis on education activities. There are four elementary and secondary schools where the IMPJ plays a direct role: Leo Baeck in Haifa (elementary, middle, and high-school), Tali Bait V'Gan in Jerusalem, Tali Beit Hinuch in Jerusalem, Yozma in Modi'in, and Ussishkin in Tel-Aviv (primary schools). Reform synagogues and communities also manage 48 public pre-schools each with 20-30 children (IMPJ). Involvement in pre-schools is a way of reaching parents with pluralistic perspectives, some of whom may become synagogue members, and is also a source of funding for religious and social services. The IMPJ has developed Jewish studies curricula which are used in public elementary schools. A Reform Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation curriculum for sixth graders is now being run class-wide in 10 public schools in Tel Aviv and may eventually be used in most of Tel Aviv's secular elementary schools. Overall, IMPJ congregations have relationships with 100 schools through Jewish calendar and life-cycle events, including group Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, mother-daughter programs, and a ceremony of "Receiving of the Torah" for second graders, reaching an approximate total of 7000 students in Israeli public schools (Education Department, IMPJ). These programs emphasize egalitarian worship, discussions of how Jewish study and ethics impact modern life, and "*tikkun olam*" (shared responsibility to heal, repair and transform the world).

Since 2003 the Reform movement has managed a year-long state sponsored pre-army service and learning program (*mechina* in Hebrew). The army encourages these programs, of which there are now 40, as a means of getting more mature and committed conscripts. The Reform *mechina*, located in Jaffa, enrolls 50 young men and women each year, and is oversubscribed. It offers young Israelis the opportunity to intensively study their Jewish heritage and Israeli identity. The participants put Jewish values into practice by working in service projects in their community.

As noted earlier, the Hebrew Union College (HUC), which trains North American rabbis, established a campus in Jerusalem in 1963. Beginning in the 1980's, HUC began to ordain Israeli rabbis. Through 2013, a total of 85 Israelis have been ordained, with four to six new rabbis each year. Of the 85 graduates 40 continue to be directly connected to the Reform movement in Israel, either in individual synagogues or in the Movement's headquarters. 18-20 are working overseas in the US as well as in Eastern Europe and South America. An additional 20 work in related education and spiritual institutions, as free-lancers, or are retired (HUC). A few have established "un-affiliated" *havurot*. Jointly with the Melton Center of the Hebrew University, HUC offers a Master's degree in Pluralistic Jewish Education.

The Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), an arm of the IMPJ, seeks to secure state recognition, funding, and equal status for Reform and Conservative rabbis, synagogues and institutions. It opposes gender segregation and exclusion of women from the public sphere, and seeks freedom of choice in marriage and equal rights in divorce (IRAC). IRAC has achieved successful rulings from the Israeli

Supreme Court on a number of these issues. Its vocal activism has increased public awareness of the Reform movement.

Lobbying by the IMPJ, IRAC, the North American Reform Movement (URJ), and other Jewish renaissance organizations has had recent payoffs in the increased responsiveness of the Israeli government to pluralistic concerns, including finding a way to allow women and other groups to pray at the Western Wall, the startup of public financing of Reform rabbis and Reform educational and conversion activities, and discussions on ways to legally accept non-orthodox marriages. This is a result of a growing conviction by ‘secular’ Jews that the Orthodox monopoly is intolerable. For example a recent survey showed that 74% of non-Haredi Jews supported official recognition of civil and non-Orthodox marriages (*Hiddush*). Some of these gains may be lost if and when the Haredi parties rejoin the governing coalition.

Challenges for the Reform Movement in Israel

Demographic Challenges. A long term, and perhaps particularly difficult, challenge for the Reform movement and like-minded institutions is related to the impact on Israeli society of demographic trends. Currently the Haredi population accounts for 11% of Israel’s overall population and Arabs account for 20%. Because of differential birth rates compared to the rest of the population, the numbers of Haredi and Arabs in Israel will increase significantly over the next decade. This can already be seen in primary school enrollments in 2014: Haredi make up 18.8% of enrollment, Arabs 26.4%, Jews attending orthodox state schools 14.1%, and Jews¹¹ attending “secular” (Hebrew speaking) state schools 40.7% (Blass). These changes in primary school enrollments will be reflected in the overall population, with “secular” Jews eventually accounting for less than 40% of the overall population. The result could be a significant decline in the potential political clout of those with progressive Jewish values. The Reform movement will therefore need to find a way to “capture” a larger proportion of the Israeli Jews who consider themselves neither Haredi nor Orthodox.

Building Public Support and Understanding. Public acceptance, while increasingly positive, continues to be problematic. Many “secular” Jews continue to believe that the only true representation of the Jewish religion is that of Orthodox Judaism, even though they themselves have very little or nothing to do with it. Some “Jewish renaissance” supporters consider the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel to be outside of this process, due to the explicitly “religious” nature of the Movements. They may be “allergic” to identifying with a “movement” or national organization which prescribes rules from above. Some Israelis argue that the Reform movement “puts too much effort into legislation and advocacy” (Blum). Parents have sometimes complained when their schoolchildren have been exposed to Reform ceremonies, such as the offering of the Torah to second graders, or Reform pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah school studies programs. While Tel Aviv, Modi’in, and Holon are supportive of their Reform communities, leadership in some municipalities, especially the smaller ones, has been reported to be neutral or even antagonistic to the establishment and/or support of Reform efforts, some showing reluctance in inviting Reform clergy to participate in community religious celebrations.¹²

Disparaging remarks continue to be made about Reform Judaism, although they are being increasingly questioned. In February 2014, MK David Rotem accused the Reform movement as being “not Jewish . . .

¹¹ It is estimated that 5000 Arabs, mainly in mixed cities, also attend Hebrew speaking primary and secondary schools (Blass).

¹² These observations are based on discussions with those both within and outside of the Reform movement.

they are another religion.” Subsequently, after much criticism, he made a public apology for his remarks which he said were “misinterpreted” (Huffington Post). In August 2014 Shimon Ohayon, a member of Knesset from the Yisrael Beiteinu party, stated that the Reform movement is “a big sack of trouble, assimilation, and neglect of Jewish education” (Sommer). These recent public outbursts could well be a reflection of the movement’s growing impact on public opinion. In October 2014, recently elected President of Israel Reuven Rivlin, who in 1989 made disparaging remarks about Reform Judaism (Sales), met with North American Reform leadership and said “We are one family and the connection between all Jews is very important to the state of Israel” (Maltz).

The growth of “Jewish renaissance” is both an opportunity and a challenge for the Reform movement. The potential audience is rapidly increasing, but the movement must compete with organizations and groups, many of which have similar goals but for various reasons do not want to be identified as “Reform.” The Masorti movement is both an important partner as well as a competitor for congregants. Building support requires marketing the “Reform brand” as something which is not simply advocacy but which is indigenous to Israel and meets spiritual needs of today’s population without abandoning tradition.

Education Efforts. Education is a key to the growth of the Reform Movement. The IMPJ platform emphasizes the growth of educational programs to serve its own communities through pre-schools and its own elementary schools as well as to reach out to teachers, students and parents within the Israeli public school system (IMPJ).

But the Reform movement is connected to less than 5% of the 2000 Jewish elementary schools in Israel (CBS). The Reform *mechina*, while oversubscribed, is only one of 40 *mechinot*. The joint program with Hebrew University awarded only five Master’s degrees in Jewish education in 2014, compared with 86 Master’s degrees awarded by the Solomon Schechter Institute (associated with the Conservative movement) and 100 certificates as “Jewish heritage” teachers awarded by the Be’eri School for Teacher Education of the Hartman Institute.¹³

The number of Israelis ordained as Reform rabbis will need to increase significantly beyond the current four to six per year. The fact that some Israeli rabbis ordained by the HUC are working in education, as free lancers, or in other non-profits is a positive trend since it helps to extend the vision of the Reform movement to a larger audience. HUC needs to grow its leadership programs for Jewish educators and/or build cooperative programs with other institutions, as well as make its curriculum more connected to the Israeli context. Expansion of its training efforts beyond Jerusalem to Tel Aviv may offer an attractive comparative advantage.

Financial Issues. The annual budget of the IMPJ in 2012 was 18.8 million shekels (less than \$5 million). Funding comes from the Jewish Agency, the Association of Reform Zionist American (ARZA), the state of Israel, North American federations and foundations, and individual donations from overseas and Israel. Perhaps four times that amount is expended by individual Reform communities and organizations, especially by the larger communities located in Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Modi’in, and by the Leo Baeck School in Haifa. This amount is significantly more than the various unaffiliated Jewish renaissance groups. But funding shortfalls mean that many rabbis can be hired only on a part time basis.

¹³ One reason for the lack of formal Reform training courses targeted to Israelis is that HUC is n American, but not Israeli, accredited institution.

After a complex court case the state agreed to pay the salary of Rabbi Miri Gold, who is head of a regional religious council in the north (ARZA), as well as other Reform rabbis who are part of regional religious councils. The state has begun to fund some of the movement's education and conversion activities and some municipalities are helping new *havurot* to obtain land and build physical facilities.¹⁴ At the same time, funding for the Israeli Reform movement from the Jewish Agency is likely to go down as the Agency's overall income declines.

While the movement may succeed in gaining at least some state support, Reform communities will need to continue to design and implement models that are self-financing to the extent possible, through charging for pre-schools, primary and secondary schools, weddings, and bar/bat mitzvahs. Future rabbis will need to be not only spiritual and religious leaders but also entrepreneurial, opportunistic, and strongly bottom-line oriented. Given the changing political and social landscape, the Diaspora Jewish community ought to increase its financial and institutional support significantly if it wishes to see a future Israel which is pluralistic as well as democratic.

A Strategic View. Meeting the demographic as well as public perception challenges requires a multi-pronged strategy. As expressed by the Dean of the HUC Jerusalem campus, this begins with an "open tent" approach-- training religious leaders and educators who "may or may not serve Reform congregations" and welcoming a wide variety of expressions of Jewish experience serving musical, environmental, gay, traditional, and other groups (Kelman). It means reaching out to groups which have not traditionally been connected to the Reform movement, such as Jews of Sephardic and/or Mizrachi origin, as well as those of Russian/former-Soviet origin, 300,000 of whom are not halachically Jewish.

Partnerships with like-minded organizations will help to achieve economies of scale but also a critical mass that would have a significant impact on public opinion and public policy. The movement already works directly with BINA and TALI. It may wish to strengthen these connections as well as those with institutions which share some but not all of the Reform movement's objectives and principles. The possibility of joining forces with the Masorti movement could be examined more seriously. While the IMPJ is a "public, non-party-political organization" (IMPJ Platform), it could strengthen its connections with centrist and progressive political parties to achieve common goals. In the interest of building a shared society, it may also wish to expand its points of collaboration with the Orthodox and Haredim, to the extent to which these groups have liberalizing tendencies, as well as with Arab communities.

Beyond legal changes in the status of Reform and Conservative, the long term test of the viability of the Reform movement in Israel will come through grass roots expansion and commitment and participation of more Israelis. Measures of success will include increases in numbers of Reform associated schools and communities, increased attendance in Reform events, and increases in those who self-identify as Reform or Conservative from the current 7-8% to 15% within the near future.

The challenges for the Reform movement are part of a larger set of issues facing Israel. As increased numbers of Israelis seek a religious identity outside of Orthodoxy, and as Israel's Arab, Haredi, and settler populations grow, the debate over the nature of Israel's society will intensify. Respect and recognition of the validity of others' beliefs and narratives is neither a slogan nor a luxury but an essential part of the social contract in a democratic society. But there are countervailing anti-democratic forces

¹⁴ Total state funding of all "Jewish renaissance" activities is estimated at 2% of the amount provided to orthodox synagogues and communities (Goldwater).

active in Israel. Leadership and strategic planning by the Reform movement and by like-minded institutions, leaders, and individuals will be needed to ensure that pluralism, democracy, and social justice in Israel are not only preserved but strengthened.

Annex: Jewish Renaissance Institutions

“Jewish renaissance” has grown to encompass a wide variety of institutions and has been an increasing subject of interest. Several studies (Goldwater and MIDOT) undertaken in 2013 provide an overview of the field. In 2013, 530 community-level and other organizations were identified as involved in “Jewish renewal.” Of the 35% who responded to a questionnaire, at the local level, 26% were local congregations of the Reform and Conservative movement, 26% were community centers that engage to one extent or another in Jewish renewal activities, and 29% were “independent” (nonaffiliated) organizations. The remaining 9% were “parent” or affiliated organizations, pre-military programs (*mechinot*), and autonomous “projects.” Sixty-seven percent of the organizations ran both life cycle and spirituality programs. Over 50% of the programs ran programs regarding learning, leadership, culture and informal education (MIDOT).

The major national “Jewish renaissance” organizations, in addition to the Reform movement, are described below.

- Masorti (“tradition”), the arm of the Conservative movement in Israel, was established in 1976 by rabbis who made *aliyah* to Israel and initially served a mainly North American community. There are now 73 Masorti communities and “*Kehilot*,” up from 50 a few years ago, serving mainly native Israelis, many of them lay led. The Solomon Schechter Institute, an Israeli institution associated with the Jewish Theological Seminary (the US based institution which trains rabbis, cantors and educators for the Conservative movement) has ordained 65 Israeli rabbis. The Masorti youth movement (NOAM) serves 1400 youths aged 10-18. In recent surveys 200,000 to 300,000 Israelis defined themselves as Masorti. Masorti shares with the Reform movement a commitment to a “pluralistic, egalitarian, and democratic vision of Zionism” (www.masorti.org). Beyond its lobbying for pluralism, the Masorti movement does not take official positions on political issues such as settlements. It differs from the Reform Movement (as it does in the US) in its concept of adherence to *halacha*, and its adherents are more observant than those of Reform. The annual budget of the national organization is a relatively modest \$2.5 million. The movement recently established a “Jewish Pluralism Watch,” which monitors and publicizes Knesset members’ opinions and voting records on pluralism issues.
- Institutions which train educators, teachers and community leaders in Jewish values and tradition include, in addition to the Hebrew Union College (affiliated with the Reform movement), the Solomon Schechter Institute, the Mandel Institute for Education Leadership, the Shalom Hartman Institute, the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, and the Melton Center for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University. The Schechter Institute runs Master’s degree programs in Jewish education, reports that 600 students are enrolled in fourteen “tracks” (Schechter) and has a budget in excess of \$5 million.
- Several institutions teach or support the teaching of Jewish values in public schools. TALI (the Hebrew acronym for “augmented Jewish studies”) is an educational organization which seeks to strengthen the teaching of Jewish heritage in public schools. Established by the Masorti movement in 1976, it has evolved into an independent institution which provides Jewish content to secular schools. In 2014 TALI was active in 110 public elementary schools and 130 kindergartens serving around 30,000 students. This is a significant growth since 2012, when there were 86 schools and 118 pre-schools. Several of these schools are associated with the Reform movement. TALI’s educational materials are reported to be of high quality and some of them are used by the IMPJ in its own school programs. The Be’eri Initiative for

Pluralistic Jewish Education, part of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, serves 125 junior and senior high schools. It seeks to “impart to youth a brand of Judaism and Zionism that holds contemporary significance for them” (Hartman). Meitarim, the Network for Jewish Pluralistic Education, is a relatively new organization which now serves 50 schools and two post-high school Jewish leadership institutions, with approximately 5000 students. It has authorization from the Knesset to manage a new stream of non-orthodox but religiously oriented schools (Balint).

- IDF *Mechinot* are year-long pre-army preparatory programs for high school graduates. There are currently 40, about half of which are non-orthodox in orientation and study Judaism from an ethical or traditional perspective. One of these is the Reform Mechina located in Jaffa currently enrolling 50. A “Council of Pre-Army Programs” coordinates *Mechinot* activities. Most of the orthodox *Mechinot* are located in the West Bank.
- The “secular yeshiva” BINA, “The Center for Jewish identity and Hebrew Culture,” links Jewish culture with social action. It offers programs to 1000 participants and has seminars and events which reach 20,000 participants. It was established by the kibbutz movement, in response to the assassination of Rabin, and has recently initiated several joint programs with the Reform movement (BINA). ALMA (the “Home for Jewish Culture”) seeks to “revive learning classical Jewish texts, and position Hebrew culture as an essential element of pluralistic Jewish identity in Israel and abroad.” (ALMA)
- PANIM is a voluntary organization of institutions involved in Jewish renewal, the purpose of which is to share information among its members and to lobby for changes in laws and for public support of Jewish renewal organization. Currently PANIM has 88 member organizations, of which the IMPJ is one. Other smaller umbrella groups include She’arim, Nitzanim, and Mirkam (PANIM). In addition Hiddush is an NGO which promotes religious freedom and equality through advocacy, education, legal support, and information dissemination (Hiddush).

Bibliography, Works Cited, and Websites Consulted

ALMA, Home for Hebrew Culture, www.alma.org.il

ARZA, "About Rabbi Miri Gold," www.arza.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=2413

Balint Judy, "An education revolution comes to Israel," *Jewish Journal*, April 2012.
www.jewishjournal.com

BINA, The Center for Jewish Identity and Hebrew Culture, www.bina.org.il

Blass, Nachum, "Trends in the Development of the Education System," Policy Paper No. 2014.13, Taub Institute, 2014.

Blum, Brian, "Insourcing Judaism," *Jerusalem Report*, Sept 12, 2012.

Borschel-Dan, Amanda "Vote against Alternative Jewish weddings roils Diaspora," *Times of Israel*, December 5, 2014

Calderon, Ruth "Tel Aviv and the Flowering of Jewish Renewal," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Volume 85, No. 1, Winter 2010.

Cohen, Chanan, and Tamar Hermann, "Reform and Conservative Jews in Israel: A profile and Attitudes," Guttman Center for Surveys, Israel Democracy Institute 2013. www.en.idi.org.il

Dornbe, Natasha, "Yair Lapid's 'Jewish home' is a Reform synagogue in Tel Aviv," *Haaretz*, January 24, 2013.

Goldwater, Claire, "Hitchadshut Yehudit: Jewish Renewal in Israel." Greenbook: A Guide to Intelligent giving, Jewish Funders Network, New York 2014.

Hayom, "New school year to open with focus on heritage and culture," August 31, 2011

Hebrew Union College (HUC), unpublished data on employment of Israeli rabbis and data from website, www.huc.edu

Hiddush, "2014 Religion and State Index," Editor Shahar Ilan, surveyors Rafi Smith and Olga Paniel, September 2014, www.hiddush.org.il

Hirsch, Richard. *For the Sake of Zion. Reform Zionism: A Personal Mission*. URJ Press, New York, 2011

Huffington Post Religion, "David Rotem Denies Remark about Reform Jews Knesset Member Clarifies Controversial Statement," 06 February 2014

Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ), unpublished data and information from website, www.impj.org.il

IMPJ, “The Platform of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism,” <http://www.reform.org.il/Eng/About/IMPJ.asp>

Jewish Virtual Library, “Demographics of Israel: Population of Israel/Palestine,” <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/demograhics.html>

Jewish Virtual Library, “Israel’s Basic Laws: The Law of Return,” http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/Other_Law_Law_of_Return.html, published in Sefer HaChukkim (Book of Laws) No. 51, p. 159 and also Amendment No. 2 5730-1970.

Kasher David, “Between Pluralism and Secularism: Something is Happening in Israel,” www.israelseen.com February 6, 2014

Kelman, Naamah, “the Pluralism of Pluralism in Israel: A Brief History.” April 2013. www.ejewishphilanthropy.com

Kopelowitz, Ezra and Stephen Markowitz, “Furthering Pluralistic Jewish Education in Israel, An Evaluation of the Meitarim School Network,” Research Success Technologies, Jerusalem, 2010.

Knesset, “Law of Return,” 1950 and amended in 1970, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/Other_Law_Law_of_Return.html

Kronish, Ron, “A Beautiful Kabbalat Shabbat in Tel Aviv,” *Times of Israel*, August 2013.

Maltz, Judy, “Israelis shocked to discover: There is more than one Judaism,” *Haaretz*, December 11 2013, www.haaretz.com

Maltz, Judy, “President Rivlin meets high-level Reform mission, says: We are one family,” *Haaretz*, November 11, 2014.

Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel. www.masorti.org

MIDOT, “Hitchadshut Yehudit in Israel: An Analysis of the Field.” 2013 www.midot.org.il

PANIM for Jewish Renaissance, www.panim.org.il

Rabinovich, Itamar, and Jehuda Reinharz. *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present*, editors. ISBN 978-0-87451-962-4 - The Status Quo Letter <http://books.google.cz/books?id=iVJR9UZnTVAC&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Rosner, Shmuel, “Can you believe it? Israel has more Conservative and Reform Jews than Haredis,” February 2012, www.jewishjournal.com

Sales, Ben, “Reuven Rivlin Called Reform Judaism “Idol Worship,” www.blogs.forward.com May 29, 2014

Shalom Hartman Institute, Be’eri Initiative for Pluralistic Jewish Education, www.hartman.org.il

Schechter Institute Graduate School, http://schechter.edu/JM_Lib/grad2014.pdf

Sommer, Alison, “No Ceasefire in place when it comes to bashing reform Jews,” *Haaretz*, Aug 14, 2014. www.haaretz.com

Tali schools, <http://www.schechter.edu/Page.aspx?ID=109925997>

Werczberger, Rachel, Na’ama Azulay, “The Jewish Renewal Movement in Israeli Secular Society” *Contemporary Jewry* (2011) 31:107–128 DOI 10.1007

Wirtschafter, Jacob, “On Rosh Hashanah, Israelis welcome a more diverse set of Jews,” *Washington Post*, September 24, 2014.