Reform Judaism

Reform Judaism (also known as Liberal Judaism or Progressive Judaism) is a major Jewish denomination that emphasizes the evolving nature of the faith, the superiority of its ethical aspects to the ceremonial ones, and a belief in a continuous revelation not centered on the theophany at Mount Sinai. A liberal strand of Judaism, it is characterized by a lesser stress on ritual and personal observance, regarding Jewish Law as non-binding and the individual Jew as autonomous, and openness to external influences and progressive values. The origins of Reform Judaism lay in 19th-century Germany, where its early principles were formulated by Rabbi Abraham Geiger and his associates; since the 1970s, the movement adopted a policy of inclusiveness and acceptance, inviting as many as possible to partake in its communities, rather than strict theoretical clarity. Its greatest center today is in North America.

The various regional branches sharing these beliefs, including the American Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), the Movement for Reform Judaism (MRJ) and Liberal Judaism in Britain, and the Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism, are all united within the international World Union for Progressive Judaism. Founded in 1926, the WUPJ estimates it represents at least 1.8 million people in 50 countries: close to a million registered adult congregants as well as numerous unaffiliated individuals who identify with it.

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Its inherent pluralism and great importance placed on individual autonomy impede any simplistic definition of Reform Judaism; its various strands regard Judaism throughout the ages as derived from a process of constant evolution. They warrant and obligate further modification and reject any fixed, permanent set of beliefs, laws or practices. A clear description became particularly challenging since the turn toward a policy favouring inclusiveness (“Big Tent” in the United States) over a coherent theology in the 1970s. This largely overlapped with what researchers termed as the transition from “Classical” to “New” Reform in America, paralleled in the other, smaller branches across the world. The movement ceased stressing principles and core beliefs, focusing more on the personal spiritual experience and communal participation. This shift was not accompanied by a distinct new doctrine or by the abandonment of the former, but rather with ambiguity. The leadership allowed and encouraged a wide variety of positions, from selective adoption of halakhic observance to elements approaching religious humanism.

The declining importance of the theoretical foundation, in favour of pluralism and equivocalness, did draw large crowds of newcomers. It also diversified Reform to a degree that made it hard to formulate a clear definition of it. Early and “Classical” Reform were characterized by a move away from traditional forms of Judaism combined with a coherent theology; “New Reform” sought, to a certain level, the reincorporation of many formerly discarded elements within the framework established during the “Classical” stage, though this very doctrinal basis became increasingly obfuscated. Critics, like Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan, warned that Reform became more of a Jewish activities club, a means to demonstrate some affinity to one’s heritage in which even rabbinical students do not have to believe in any specific theology or engage in any particular practice; rather than a defined belief system.

In regard to God, while some voices among the spiritual leadership approached religious and even secular humanism – a tendency that grew increasingly from the mid-20th century, both among clergy and constituents, leading to broader, dimmer definitions of the concept – the movement had always officially maintained a theistic stance, affirming the belief in a personal God. Early Reform thinkers in Germany clung to this precept; the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform described the “One God... The God-Idea as taught in our sacred Scripture” as consecrating the Jewish people to be its priests. It was grounded on a wholly theistic understanding, although the term “God-idea” was excoriated by outside critics. So was the 1937 Columbus Declaration of Principles, which spoke of a “One, living God who rules the world”. Even the 1976 San Francisco Centenary Perspective, drafted at a time of great discord among Reform theologians, upheld “the affirmation of God... Challenges of modern culture have made steady belief difficult for some. Nevertheless, we ground our lives, personally and communally, on God's reality.” The 1999 Pittsburgh Statement of Principles declared the “reality and oneness of God”. British Liberal Judaism affirms the “Jewish conception of God: One and indivisible, transcendent and immanent, Creator and Sustainer”.

The basic tenet of Reform theology is a belief in a continuous, or progressive, revelation occurring continuously and not limited to the theophany at Sinai, the defining event in traditional interpretation. According to this view, all holy scripture of Judaism, including the Pentateuch, were authored by human beings who, though under divine inspiration, inserted their understanding and
reflected the spirit of their consecutive ages. All the People Israel are a further link in the chain of revelation, capable of reaching new insights: religion can be renewed without necessarily being dependent on past conventions. The chief promulgator of this concept was Abraham Geiger, generally considered founder of the movement. After critical research led him to regard scripture as a human creation, bearing the marks of historical circumstances, he abandoned the belief in the unbroken perpetuity of tradition derived from Sinai and gradually replaced it with the idea of progressive revelation.

As in other liberal denominations, this notion offered a conceptual framework for reconciling the acceptance of critical research with the maintenance of a belief in some form of divine communication, thus preventing a rupture among those who could no longer accept a literal understanding of revelation. No less importantly, it provided the clergy with a rationale for adapting, changing and excising traditional mores and bypassing the accepted conventions of Jewish Law, rooted in the orthodox concept of the explicit transmission of both scripture and its oral interpretation. While also subject to change and new understanding, the basic premise of progressive revelation endures in Reform thought.[2][10]

In its early days, this notion was greatly influenced by the philosophy of German idealism, from which its founders drew much inspiration: belief in humanity marching toward a full understanding of itself and the divine, manifested in moral progress toward perfection. This highly rationalistic view virtually identified human reason and intellect with divine action, leaving little room for direct influence by God. Geiger conceived revelation as occurring via the inherent "genius" of the People Israel, and his close ally Solomon Formstecher described it as the awakening of oneself into full consciousness of one's religious understanding. The American theologian Kaufmann Kohler also spoke of the "special insight" of Israel, almost fully independent from direct divine participation, and English thinker Claude Montefiore, founder of Liberal Judaism, reduced revelation to "inspiration", according intrinsic value only to the worth of its content, while "it is not the place where they are found that makes them inspired". Common to all these notions was the assertion that present generations have a higher and better understanding of divine will, and they can and should unwaveringly change and refashion religious precepts[2].

In the decades around World War II, this rationalistic and optimistic theology was challenged and questioned. It was gradually replaced, mainly by the Jewish existentialism of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, centered on a complex, personal relationship with the creator, and a more sober and disillusioned outlook.[11] The identification of human reason with Godly inspiration was rejected in favor of views such as Rosenzweig's, who emphasized that the only content of revelation is it in itself, while all derivations of it are subjective, limited human understanding. However, while granting higher status to historical and traditional understanding, both insisted that "revelation is certainly not Law giving" and that it did not contain any "finished statements about God", but, rather, that human subjectivity shaped the unfathomable content of the Encounter and interpreted it under its own limitations. The senior representative of postwar Reform theology, Eugene Borowitz, regarded theophany in postmodern terms and closely linked it with quotidian human experience and interpersonal contact. He rejected the notion of "progressive revelation" in the meaning of comparing human betterment with divine inspiration, stressing that past experiences were "unique" and of everlasting importance. Yet he stated that his ideas by no means negated the concept of ongoing, individually experienced revelation by all[9].

Ritual, autonomy and law

Reform Judaism emphasizes the ethical facets of the faith as its central attribute, superseding the ceremonial ones. Reform thinkers often cited the Prophets' condemnations of ceremonial acts, lacking true intention and performed by the morally corrupt, as testimony that rites have no inherent quality. Geiger centered his philosophy on the Prophets' teachings (He named his ideology "Prophetic Judaism" already in 1838), regarding morality and ethics as the stable core of a religion in which ritual observance transformed radically through the ages. However, practices were seen as a means to elation and a link to the heritage of the past, and Reform generally argued that rituals should be maintained, discarded or modified based on whether they served these higher purposes. This stance allowed a great variety of practice both in the past and the present. In "Classical" times, personal observance was reduced to little beyond nothing. The postwar "New Reform" lent renewed importance to practical, regular action as a means to engage congregants, abandoning the sanitized forms of the "Classical".

Another key aspect of Reform doctrine is the personal autonomy of each adherent, who may formulate his own understanding and expression of his religiosity. Reform is unique among all Jewish denominations in placing the individual as the authorized interpreter of Judaism.[12] This position was originally influenced by Kantian philosophy and the great weight it lent to personal judgement and
free will. This highly individualistic stance also proved one of the movement's great challenges, for it impeded the creation of clear
guidelines and standards for positive participation in religious life and definition of what was expected from members.

The notion of autonomy coincided with the gradual abandonment of traditional practice (largely neglected by most members, and the
Jewish public in general, before and during the rise of Reform) in the early stages of the movement. It was a major characteristic
during the "Classical" period, when Reform closely resembled Protestant surroundings. Later, it was applied to encourage adherents
to seek their own means of engaging Judaism. "New Reform" embraced the criticism levied by Rosenzweig and other thinkers at
extreme individualism, laying a greater stress on community and tradition. Though by no means declaring that members were bound
by a compelling authority of some sort – the notion of an intervening, commanding God remained foreign to denominational thought.
The "New Reform" approach to the question is characterized by an attempt to strike a mean between autonomy and some degree of
conformity, focusing on a dialectic relationship between both.[13]

The movement never entirely abandoned halakhic (traditional jurisprudence) argumentation, both due to the need for precedent to
counter external accusations and the continuity of heritage, but had largely made ethical considerations or the spirit of the age the
decisive factor in determining its course. The German founding fathers undermined the principles behind the legalistic process, which
was based on a belief in an unbroken tradition through the ages merely elaborated and applied to novel circumstances, rather than
subject to change. Rabbi Samuel Holdheim advocated a particularly radical stance, arguing that the halakhic Law of the Land is Law
principle must be universally applied and subject virtually everything to current norms and needs, far beyond its weight in
conventional Jewish Law.

While Reform rabbis in 19th-century Germany had to accommodate conservative elements in their communities, at the height of
"Classical Reform" in the United States, halakhic considerations could be virtually ignored and Holdheim's approach embraced. In the
1930s and onwards, Rabbi Solomon Freehof and his supporters reintroduced such elements, but they too regarded Jewish Law as
too rigid a system. Instead, they recommended that selected features will be readopted and new observances established in a
piecemeal fashion, as spontaneous minhag (custom) emerging by trial and error and becoming widespread if it appealed to the
masses. The advocates of this approach also stress that their responsa are of non-binding nature, and their recipients may adapt them
as they see fit.[14] Freehof's successors, such as Rabbis Walter Jacob and Moshe Zemer, further elaborated the notion of "Progressive
Halakha" along the same lines.

**Messianic age and Election**

Reform sought to accentuate and greatly augment the universalist traits in Judaism, turning it into a faith befitting the Enlightenment
ideals ubiquitous at the time it emerged. The tension between universalism and the imperative to maintain uniqueness characterized
the movement throughout its entire history. Its earliest proponents rejected Deism and the belief that all religions would unite into
one, and it later faced the challenges of the Ethical movement and Unitarianism. Parallel to that, it sought to diminish all components
of Judaism that it regarded as overly particularist and self-centered: petitions expressing hostility towards gentiles were toned down
or excised, and practices were often streamlined to resemble surrounding society. "New Reform" laid a renewed stress on Jewish
particular identity regarding it as better suiting popular sentiment and need for preservation.

One major expression of that, which is the first clear Reform doctrine to have been formulated, is the idea of universal Messianism.
The belief in redemption was unhinged from the traditional elements of return to Zion and restoration of the Temple and the
sacrificial cult therein, and turned into a general hope for salvation. This was later refined when the notion of a personal Messiah who
would reign over Israel was officially abolished and replaced by the concept of a Messianic Age, of universal harmony and
perfection. The considerable loss of faith in human progress around World War II greatly shook this ideal, but it endures as a precept
of Reform.[15]

Another key example is the reinterpretation of the Election of Israel. The movement maintained the idea of the Chosen People of
God, but recast it in a more universal fashion: it isolated and accentuated the notion (already present in traditional sources) that the
mission of Israel was to spread among all nations and teach them divinely-inspired ethical monotheism, bringing them all closer to
the Creator. One extreme "Classical" promulgator of this approach, Rabbi David Einhorn, substituted the lamentation on the Ninth of
Av for a celebration, regarding the destruction of Jerusalem as fulfilling God's scheme to bring His Word, via His people, to all
corners of the earth. Highly self-centered affirmations of Jewish exceptionalism were moderated, though the general notion of “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” retained. On the other hand, while embracing a less strict interpretation compared to the traditional one, Reform also held to this tenet against those who sought to deny it. When secularist thinkers like Ahad Ha’am and Mordecai Kaplan forwarded the view of Judaism as a civilization, portraying it as a culture created by the Jewish people, rather than a God-given faith defining them, Reform theologians decidedly rejected their position – although it became popular and even dominant among rank-and-file members. Like the Orthodox, they insisted that the People Israel was created by divine election alone, and existed solely as such. The 1999 Pittsburgh Platform and other official statements affirmed that the “Jewish people is bound to God by an eternal B’rit, covenant”.

Soul and afterlife

As part of its philosophy, Reform anchored reason in divine influence, accepted scientific criticism of hallowed texts and sought to adapt Judaism to modern notions of rationalism. In addition to the other traditional precepts its founders rejected, they also denied the belief in the future bodily Resurrection of the dead. It was viewed both as irrational and an import from ancient middle-eastern pagans. Notions of afterlife were reduced merely to the Immortality of the Soul. While the founding thinkers, like Montefiore, all shared this belief, the existence of a soul became harder to cling to with the passing of time. In the 1980s, Borowitz could state that the movement had nothing coherent to declare in the matter. The various streams of Reform still largely, though not always or strictly, upheld the idea. The 1999 Pittsburgh Statement of Principles, for example, used the somewhat ambiguous formula “the spirit within us is eternal”.

Along these lines, the concept of Reward and Punishment in the World to Come was abolished as well. The only perceived form of retribution for the wicked, if any, was the anguish of their soul after death, and vice versa, bliss was the single accolade for the spirits of the righteous. Angels and Heavenly Hosts were also deemed a foreign superstitious influence, especially from early Zoroastrian sources, and denied.

Practice

Liturgy

The first and primary field in which Reform convictions were expressed was that of prayer forms. From its beginning, Reform Judaism attempted to harmonize the language of petitions with modern sensibilities and what the constituents actually believed in. Jakob Josef Petuchowski in his extensive survey of Progressive liturgy, listed several key principles that defined it through the years and many transformations it underwent. The prayers were abridged, whether by omitting repetitions, excising passages or reintroducing the ancient triennial cycle for reading the Torah; vernacular segments were added alongside or instead of the Hebrew and Aramaic text, to ensure the congregants understood the petitions they expressed; and some new prayers were composed to reflect the spirit of changing times. But chiefly, liturgists sought to reformulate the prayerbooks and have them express the movement’s theology. Blessings and passages referring to the coming of the Messiah, Return to Zion, renewal of the sacrificial cult, Resurrection of the Dead, Reward and Punishment and overt particularism of the People Israel were replaced, recast or excised altogether.

In its early stages, when Reform Judaism was more a tendency within unified communities in Central Europe than an independent movement, its advocates had to practice considerable moderation, lest they provoke conservative animosity. German prayerbooks often relegated the more contentious issues to the vernacular translation, treating the original text with great care and sometimes having problematic passages in small print and untranslated. When institutionalized and free of such constraints, it was able to pursue a more radical course. In American “Classical” or British Liberal prayerbooks, a far larger vernacular component was added and liturgy was drastically shortened, and petitions in discord with denominational theology eliminated.

"New Reform", both in the United States and in Britain and the rest of the world, is characterized by larger affinity to traditional forms and diminished emphasis on harmonizing them with prevalent beliefs. Concurrently, it is also more inclusive and accommodating, even towards beliefs that are officially rejected by Reform theologians, sometimes allowing alternative differing rites for each congregation to choose from. Thus, prayerbooks from the mid–20th Century onwards incorporated more Hebrew, and
restored such elements as blessing on phylacteries. More profound changes included restoration of the Gevorot benediction in the 2007 Mishkan T'filah, with the optional "give life to all/revive the dead" formula. The CCAR stated this passage did not reflect a belief in Resurrection, but Jewish heritage. On the other extreme, the 1975 Gates of Prayer substituted "the Eternal One" for "God" in the English translation (though not in the original), a measure that was condemned by several Reform rabbis as a step toward religious humanism[21].

Observance

During its formative era, Reform was oriented toward lesser ceremonial obligations. In 1846, the Breslau rabbinical conference abolished the second day of festivals during the same years, the Berlin Reform congregation held prayers without blowing the Ram's Horn, phylacteries, mantles or head covering, and held its Sabbath services on Sunday. In the late 19th and early 20th Century, American "Classical Reform" often emulated Berlin on a mass scale, with many communities conducting prayers along the same style and having additional services on Sunday. An official rescheduling of Sabbath to Sunday was advocated by Kaufmann Kohler for some time, though he retracted it eventually. Religious divorce was declared redundant and the civil one recognized as sufficient by American Reform in 1869, and in Germany by 1912; the laws concerning dietary and personal purity, the priestly prerogatives, marital ordinances and so forth were dispensed with, and openly revoked by the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, which declared all ceremonial acts binding only if they served to enhance religious experience. From 1890, converts were no longer obligated to be circumcised. Similar policy was pursued by Claude Montefiore's Jewish Religious Union, established at Britain in 1902. The Vereinigung für das Liberale Judentum in Germany, which was more moderate, declared virtually all personal observance voluntary in its 1912 guidelines.

"New Reform" saw the establishment and membership lay greater emphasis on the ceremonial aspects, after the former sterile and minimalist approach was condemned as offering little to engage in religion and encouraging apathy. Numerous rituals became popular again, often after being recast or reinterpreted, though as a matter of personal choice for the individual and not an authoritative obligation. Circumcision or Letting of Blood for converts and newborn babies became virtually mandated in the 1980s; ablution for menstruating women gained great grassroots popularity at the turn of the century, and some synagogues built specialized baths. A renewed interest in dietary laws (though by no means in the strict sense) also surfaced at the same decades, as were phylacteries, prayer shawls and head coverings. Reform is still characterized by having the least engaged public on average:[22] for example, of those polled by Pew in 2013, only 34% of registered synagogue members (and only 17% of all those who state affinity) attend services once a month and more[23]

While defined mainly by their progress away from ritual, proto-Reform also pioneered new ones. In the 1810s and 1820s, the circles (Israel Jacobson, Eduard Kley and others) that gave rise to the movement introduced confirmation ceremonies for boys and girls, in emulation of parallel Christian initiation rite. These soon spread outside the movement, though many of a more traditional leaning rejected the name "confirmation". In the "New Reform", Bar Mitzvah largely replaced it as part of the re-traditionalization, but many young congregants in the United States still perform one, often at the Feast of Weeks. Confirmation for girls eventually developed into the Bat Mitzvah, now popular among all except strictly Orthodox Jews.

Some branches of Reform, while subscribing to its differentiation between ritual and ethics, chose to maintain a considerable degree of practical observance, especially in areas where a conservative Jewish majority had to be accommodated. Most Liberal communities in Germany maintained dietary standards and the like in the public sphere, both due to the moderation of their congregants and threats of Orthodox secession. A similar pattern characterizes the Movement for Reform Judaism in Britain, which attempted to appeal to newcomers from the United Synagogue or to the IMPJ in Israel.

Openness

Its philosophy made Progressive Judaism, in all its variants, much more able to embrace change and new trends than any of the major denominations. It was the first to adopt innovations such as gender equality in religious life. As early as 1846, the Breslau conference announced that women must enjoy identical obligations and prerogatives in worship and communal affairs, though this decision had virtually no effect in practice. Lily Montagu, who served as a driving force behind British Liberal Judaism and WUPJ, was the first woman in recorded history to deliver a sermon at a synagogue in 1918, and set another precedent when she conducted a prayer two
years later. Regina Jonas, ordained in 1935 by later chairman of the Vereinigung der liberalen Rabbiner Max Dienemann, was the earliest known female rabbi to officially be granted the title. In 1972, Sally Priesand was ordained by Hebrew Union College, which made her America's first female rabbi ordained by a rabbinical seminary, and the second formally ordained female rabbi in Jewish history, after Regina Jonas.[24][25][26] Reform also pioneered family seating, an arrangement that spread throughout American Jewry but was only applied in continental Europe after World War II. Egalitarianism in prayer became universally prevalent in the WUPJ by the end of the 20th Century.

Tolerance for LGBT and ordination of LGBT rabbis were also pioneered by the movement. Intercourse between consenting adults was declared as legitimate by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1977, and openly gay clergy were admitted by the end of the 1980s. Same-sex marriage were sanctioned by the end of the following decade. In 2015, the URJ adopted a Resolution on the Rights of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People, urging clergy and synagogue attendants to actively promote tolerance and inclusion of such individuals.

American Reform, especially, turned action for social and progressive causes into an important part of religious commitment. From the second half of the 20th Century, it employed the old rabbinic notion of Tikkan Olam, "repairing the world", as a slogan under which constituents were encouraged to partake in various initiatives for the betterment of society. The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism became an important lobby in service of progressive causes such as the rights of women, minorities, LGBT, and the like. Tikkan Olam has become the central venue for active participation for many affiliates, even leading critics to negatively describe Reform as little more than a means employed by Jewish liberals to claim that commitment to their political convictions was also a religious activity and demonstrates fealty to Judaism. Dana Evan Kaplan stated that "Tikkan Olam has incorporated only leftist, socialist-like elements. In truth, it is political, basically a mirror of the most radically leftist components of the Democratic Party platform, causing many to say that Reform Judaism is simply 'the Democratic Party with Jewish holidays'."[27] Rabbi Jakob Josef Petuchowski complained that under the influence of secular Jews who constitute most of its congregants since the 1950s, when lack of religious affiliation was particularly frowned upon, "Reform Judaism is today in the forefront of secularism in America... Very often indistinguishable from the ACLU... The fact of the matter is that it has, somewhere along the line, lost its religious moorings."[28] In Israel, the Religious Action Center is very active in the judicial field, often resorting to litigation both in cases concerning civil rights in general and the official status of Reform within the state, in particular[29]

**Jewish identity**

While opposed to interfaith marriage in principle, officials of the major Reform rabbinical organisation, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), estimated in 2012 that about half of their rabbis partake in such ceremonies. The need to cope with this phenomenon – 80% of all Reform-raised Jews in the United States wed between 2000 and 2013 were intermarried –[30] led to the recognition of patrilineal descent all children born to a couple in which a single member was Jewish, whether mother or father, was accepted as a Jew on condition that they received corresponding education and committed themselves as such. Conversely, offspring of a Jewish mother only are not accepted if they do not demonstrate affinity to the faith. A Jewish status is conferred unconditionally only on the children of two Jewish parents.

This decision was taken by the British Liberal Judaism already in the 1950s. The North American Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) accepted it in 1983, and The British Movement for Reform Judaism affirmed it in 2015. The various strands also adopted a policy of embracing the intermarried and their spouses. British Liberals offer “blessing ceremonies” if the child is to be raised Jewish, and the MRJ allows its clergy to participate in celebration of civil marriage, though none allow a full Jewish ceremony with Chupah and the like. In American Reform, 17% of synagogue-member households have a converted spouse, and 26% an unconverted one.[31] Its policy on conversion and Jewish status led the WUPJ into conflict with more traditional circles, and a growing number of its adherents are not accepted as Jewish by either the Conservative or the Orthodox. Outside North America and Britain, patrilineal descent was not accepted by most. As in other fields, small WUPJ affiliates are less independent and often have to deal with more conservative Jewish denominations in their countries, such as vis-à-vis the Orthodox rabbinate in Israel or continental Europe.

**Organization and demographics**
The term "Reform" was first applied institutionally – not generically, as in "for reform" – to the Berlin Reformgemeinde (Reform Congregation), established in 1845. Apart from it, most German communities that were oriented in that direction preferred the more ambiguous "Liberal", which was not exclusively associated with Reform Judaism. It was more prevalent as an appellation for the religiously apathetic majority among German Jews, and also to all rabbis who were not clearly Orthodox (including the rival Positive-Historical School). The title "Reform" became much more common in the United States, where an independent denomination under this name was fully identified with the religious tendency. However, Isaac Meyer Wise suggested in 1871 that "Progressive Judaism" was a better epithet. When the movement was institutionalized in Germany between in 1898 and 1908, its leaders chose "Liberal" as self-designation, founding the Vereinigung für das Liberale Judentum. In 1902, Claude Montefiore renamed the doctrine espoused by his new Jewish Religious Union as "Liberal Judaism", too, though it belonged to the more radical part of the spectrum in relation to the German one.

In 1926, British Liberals, American Reform and German Liberals consolidated their worldwide movement – united in affirming tenets such as progressive revelation, supremacy of ethics above ritual and so forth – at a meeting held in London. Originally carrying the provisional title "International Conference of Liberal Jews", after deliberations between "Liberal", "Reform" and "Modern", it was named World Union for Progressive Judaism on 12 July, at the conclusion of a vote. The WUPJ established further branches around the planet, alternatively under the names "Reform", "Liberal" and "Progressive". In 1945, the Associated British Synagogues (later Movement for Reform Judaism) joined as well. In 1990, Reconstructionist Judaism entered the WUPJ as an observer. Espousing another religious worldview, it became the only non-Reform member. The WUPJ claims to represent a total of at least 1.8 million people – these figures do not take into account the 2013 PEW survey, and rely on the older URJ estimate of a total of 1.5 million presumed to have affinity, since updated to 2.2 million – both registered synagogue members and non-affiliates who identify with it.

Worldwide, the movement is mainly centered in North America. The largest WUPJ constituent by far is the Union for Reform Judaism (until 2003: Union of American Hebrew Congregations) in the United States and Canada. As of 2013, the Pew Research Center survey calculated it represented about 35% of all 5.3 million Jews in the U.S., making it the single most numerous Jewish religious group in the country. Steven M. Cohen deduced there were 756,000 adult Jewish synagogue members – about a quarter of households had an unconverted spouse (according to 2001 findings), adding some 90,000 non-Jews and making the total constituency roughly 850,000 – and further 1,154,000 "Reform-identified non-members" in the United States. There are also 30,000 in Canada. Based on these, the URJ claims to represent 2.2 million people. It has 846 congregations in the U.S. and 27 in Canada, the vast majority of the 1,170 affiliated with the WUPJ that are not Reconstructionists. Its rabbinical arm is the Central Conference of American Rabbis, with some 2,300 member rabbis, mainly trained in Hebrew Union College. As of 2015, the URJ was led by President Rabbi Richard Jacobs and the CCAR headed by Rabbi Denise Eger.

The next in size, by a wide margin, are the two British WUPJ-affiliates. In 2010, the Movement for Reform Judaism and Liberal Judaism respectively had 16,125 and 7,197 member households in 45 and 39 communities, or 19.4% and 8.7% of British Jews registered at a synagogue. Other member organizations are based in forty countries around the world. They include the Union progressiver Juden in Deutschland, which had some 4,500 members in 2010 and incorporates 25 congregations, one in Austria; the Nederlands Verbond voor Progressief Jodendom, with 3,500 affiliates in 10 communities; the 13 Liberal synagogues in France; the Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism (5,000 members in 2000, 35 communities); the Movement for Progressive Judaism (Движение прогрессивного Иудаизма) in the CIS and Baltic States, with 61 affiliates in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus and several thousands of regular constituents; and many others smaller ones.

**History**

**Beginnings**

With the advent of Jewish emancipation and acculturation in Central Europe during the late 18th Century, and the breakdown of traditional patterns and norms, the response Judaism should offer to the changed circumstances became a heated concern. Radical, second-generation Berliner maskilim (Enlightened), like Lazarus Bendavid and David Friedländer, proposed to reduce it to little above Deism or allow it to dissipate. A more palatable course was the reform of worship in synagogues, making it more attractive to a
Jewish public whose aesthetic and moral taste became attuned to that of Christian surroundings. The first considered to have implemented such a course was the Amsterdam Ashkenazi congregation, Adath Jessurun. In 1796, emulating the local Sephardic custom, it omitted the "Father of Mercy" prayer, beseeching God to take revenge upon the gentiles. The short-lived Adath Jessurun employed fully traditional argumentation to legitimize its actions, but is often regarded a harbinger by historians.

A relatively thoroughgoing program was adopted by Israel Jacobson, a philanthropist from the Kingdom of Westphalia. Faith and dogma were eroded for decades both by Enlightenment criticism and apathy, but Jacobson himself did not bother with those. He was interested in decorum, believing its lack in services was driving the young away. Many of the aesthetic reforms he pioneered, like a regular vernacular sermon, rather than the common Judaeo-German pilpul, would be later adopted by the modernist Orthodox. On 17 July 1810, he dedicated a synagogue in Seesen that employed an organ and a choir during prayer and introduced some German liturgy. This day is celebrated by Reform Judaism worldwide as its foundation date. The Seesen temple – a designation quite common for prayerhouses at the time; "temple" would later become, somewhat misleadingly (and not exclusively), identified with Reform institutions via association with the elimination of prayers for the Jerusalem Temple closed in 1813. Jacobson moved to Berlin and established a similar one, which became a hub for like-minded individuals. Though the prayerbook used in Berlin did introduce several deviations from the received text, it did so without an organizing principle. In 1818, Jacobson's acquaintance Edward Kley founded the Hamburg Temple. Here, changes in the rite were eclectic no more and had severe dogmatic implications: prayers for the restoration of sacrifices by the Messiah and Return to Zion were quite systematically omitted. The Hamburg edition is considered the first comprehensive Reform (with a capital R) liturgy.

While Orthodox protests to Jacobson's initiatives were scant, dozens of rabbis throughout Europe united to ban the Hamburg Temple. Its leaders attempted to justify themselves based on canonical sources, being still attached to old modes of thought. They had the grudging support of one rabbi, Aaron Chorin of Arad (and even he never acceded to the abrogation of the Messianic doctrine). The massive Orthodox reaction halted the advance of the new trend, confining it to the port city for the next twenty years. Although many synagogues introduced mild aesthetic modifications as the process of acculturation spread throughout Central Europe, synchronized with the breakdown of traditional society and growing religious laxity, those were carefully crafted in order to assuage conservative elements – albeit the latter often opposed them anyhow; vernacular sermons or secular education for rabbis were much resisted – and lacked a serious ideological undertone. One of the first to adopt such was Hamburg's own Orthodox community under the newly appointed Rabbi Isaac Bernays. The less strict but still traditional Isaac Noah Mannheimer of the Vienna Stadttempel and Michael Sachs in Prague, who both significantly altered custom but wholly avoided dogmatic issues or overt injury to Jewish Law, set the pace for most of Europe.

An isolated, yet much more radical step in the same direction as Hamburg's was taken across the ocean in 1824. The younger congregants in the Charleston synagogue "Beth Elohim" were disgruntled by present conditions and demanded change. Led by Isaac Harby and other associates, they formed their own prayer group, "The Reformed Society of Israelites". Apart from strictly aesthetic matters, like having sermons and synagogue affairs delivered in English, rather than Middle Spanish (as was customary among Western Sephardim), they had almost their entire liturgy solely in the vernacular, in a far greater proportion compared to the Hamburg rite. And chiefly, they felt little attachment to the traditional Messianic doctrine and possessed a clearly heterodox religious understanding. In their new prayerbook, authors Harby, Abram Moïse and David Nunes Carvalho unequivocally excised pleas for the restoration of the Jerusalem Temple; during his inaugural address on 21 November 1825, Harby stated their native country was their only Zion, not "some stony desert", and described the rabbis of old as "Fabulists and Sophists... Who tortured the plainest precepts of the Law into monstrous and unexpected inferences". The Society was short-lived, and they merged back into Beth Elohim in 1833. As in Germany, the reformers were laymen, operating in a country with little rabbinic presence.
Consolidation in German lands

In the 1820s and 1830s, philosophers like Solomon Steinheim imported German idealism into the Jewish religious discourse, attempting to draw from the means it employed to reconcile Christian faith and modern sensibilities. But it was the new scholarly, critical Science of Judaism (Wissenschaft des Judentums) that became the focus of controversy. Its proponents vacillated whether and to what degree it should be applied against the contemporary plight. Opinions ranged from the strictly Orthodox Azriel Hildesheimer, who subjugated research to the predetermined sanctity of the texts and refused to allow it practical implication over received methods; via the Positive-Historical Zecharias Frankel, who did not deny Wissenschaft a role, but only in deference to tradition, and opposed analysis of the Pentateuch; and up to Abraham Geiger, who rejected any limitations on objective research or its application. He is considered the founding father of Reform Judaism.

Geiger wrote that at seventeen already, he discerned that the late Tannaim and the Amoraim imposed a subjective interpretation on the Oral Torah, attempting to diffuse its revolutionary potential by linking it to the Biblical text. Believing that Judaism became stale and had to be radically transformed if it were to survive modernity, he found little use in the legal procedures of Halakha, arguing that hardline rabbis often demonstrated they will not accept major innovations anyway. His venture into higher criticism led him to regard the Pentateuch as reflecting power struggles between the Pharisees on one hand, and the Saducees who had their own pre-Mishnaic Halakha. Having concluded the belief in an unbroken tradition back to Sinai or a divinely dictated Torah could not be maintained, he began to articulate a theology of progressive revelation, presenting the Pharisees as reformers who revolutionized the Saducee-dominated religion. His other model were the Prophets, whose morals and ethics were to him the only true, permanent core of Judaism. He was not alone: Solomon Formstecher argued that Revelation was God's influence on human psyche, rather than encapsulated in law; Aaron Bernstein was apparently the first to deny inherent sanctity to any text when he wrote in 1844 that, "The Pentateuch is not a chronicle of God's revelation, it is a testimony to the inspiration His consciousness had on our forebears." Many others shared similar convictions.

In 1837, Geiger hosted a conference of like-minded young rabbis in Wiesbaden. He told the assembled that the "Talmud must go". In 1841, the Hamburg Temple issued a second edition of its prayerbook, the first Reform liturgy since its predecessor of 1818. Orthodox response was weak and quickly defeated. Most rabbinic posts in Germany were now manned by university graduates susceptible to rationalistic ideas, which also permeated liberal Protestantism led by such figures as Leberecht Uhlich. They formed the backbone of the nascent Reform rabbinate. Geiger intervened in the Second Hamburg Temple controversy not just to defend the prayerbook against the Orthodox, but also to denounce it, stating the time of mainly aesthetic and unsystematic reforms has passed. In 1842, the power of progressive forces was revealed again: when Geiger's superior Rabbi Solomon Tiktin attempted to dismiss him from the post of preacher in Breslau, 15 of 17 rabbis consulted by the board stated his unorthodox views were congruous with his post. He himself differentiated between his principled stance and quotidian conduct. Believing it could be implemented only carefully, he was moderate in practice and remained personally observant.

Second only to Geiger, Rabbi Samuel Holdheim distinguished himself as a radical proponent of change. While the former stressed continuity with the past, and described Judaism as an entity that gradually adopted and discarded elements along time, Holdheim accorded present conditions the highest status, sharply dividing the universalist core from all other aspects that could be unremittingly disposed of. Declaring that old laws lost their hold on Jews as it were and the rabbi could only act as a guide for voluntary observance, his principal was that the concept of "the Law of the Land is the Law" was total. He declared mixed marriage permissible – almost the only Reform rabbi to do so in history; his contemporaries and later generations opposed this – for the
Talmudic ban on conducting them on Sabbath, unlike offering sacrifice and other acts, was to him sufficient demonstration that they belonged not to the category of sanctified obligations (issurim) but to the civil ones (memonot), where the Law of the Land applied. Another measure he offered, rejected almost unanimously by his colleagues in 1846, was the institution of a "Second Sabbath" on Sunday, modeled on Second Passover, as most people desecrated the day of rest.

The pressures of the late Vormärz era were intensifying. In 1842, a group of radical laymen determined to achieve full acceptance into society was founded in Frankfurt, the "Friends of Reform". They abolished circumcision and declared that the Talmud was no longer binding. In response to pleas from Frankfurt, virtually all rabbis in Germany, even Holdheim, declared circumcision obligatory. Similar groups sprang in Breslau and Berlin. These developments, and the need to bring uniformity to practical reforms implemented piecemeal in the various communities, motivated Geiger and his like-minded supporters into action. Between 1844 and 1846, they convened three rabbinical assemblies, in Braunschweig, Frankfurt am Main and Breslau respectively. Those were intended to implement the proposals of Aaron Chorin and others for a new Sanhedrin, made already in 1826, that could assess and eliminate various ancient decrees and prohibitions. A total of forty-two people attended the three meetings, including moderates and conservatives, all quite young, usually in their thirties.

The conferences made few concrete far-reaching steps, albeit they generally stated that the old mechanisms of religious interpretation were obsolete. The first, held on 12–19 June 1844, abolished Kol Nidrei and the humiliating Jewish oath, still administered by rabbis, and established a committee to determine "to which degree the Messianic ideal should be mentioned in prayer". Repeating the response of the 1806 Paris Grand Sanhedrin to Napoleon, it declared intermarriage permissible as long as children could be raised Jewish; this measure effectively banned such unions without offending Christians, as no state in Germany allowed mixed-faith couples to have non-Christians education for offsprings. It enraged critics anyhow. A small group of traditionalists also attended, losing all votes. On the opposite wing were sympathizers of Holdheim, who declared on 17 June that "science already demonstrated that the Talmud has no authority either from the dogmatic or practical perspective... The men of the Great Assembly had jurisdiction only for their time. We possess the same power, when we express the spirit of ours." The majority was led by Geiger and Ludwig Philippson, and was keen on moderation and historical continuity.

The harsh response from the strictly Orthodox came as no surprise. Moshe Schick wondered, "why shall we not disclose the truth about the sentence of these men... as they have blasphemed against the Divinity of the Law, they are no Israelites and equal to Gentiles". Yet they also managed to antagonize more moderate progressives. Both S. L. Rapoport and Zecharias Frankel strongly condemned Braunschweig. Another discontented party were Christian missionaries, who feared Reform on two accounts: it could stem the massive tide of conversions, and loosen Jewish piety in favor of liberal, semi-secularized religion that they opposed among Christians as well, reducing the possibility they would ever accept new dogma.

Frankel was convinced to attend the next one, held in Frankfurt on 15–28 July 1845, after many pleas. But he walked out after it passed a resolution that there "were subjective, but no objective, arguments for retaining Hebrew in the liturgy". While this was quite a trivial statement, well grounded in canonical sources, he regarded it as a deliberate breach with tradition. The 1840s, commented Meyer, saw the "Reform movement crystallized both intellectually and institutionally", narrowing from "reformers (in the generic sense)" who wished to modernize Judaism to some degree or other (including both Frankel and the Neo-Orthodox Samson Raphael Hirsch) "a broad stream that embraced all opponents of the premodern status quo", to "a more clearly marked current which rejected not only the religious mentality of the ghetto, but also the modernist Orthodoxy which altered form but not substance". After his withdrawal, the conference adopted another key doctrine that Frankel opposed already in the second Hamburg Temple dispute of 1842; declaring that "today, Messianic belief can only be accepted as the hope for the liberation of mankind in an era of peace and fraternity", it officially enshrined the idea of a future Messianic era, rather than a personal redeemer. Rabbi David Einhorn elucidated a further notion, that of the Mission to bring ethical monotheism to all people, commenting that, "Exile was once perceived as a disaster, but it was progress. Israel approached its true destiny, with sanctity replacing blood sacrifice. It was to spread the Word of the Lord to the four corners of the earth."
The last meeting, convened in Breslau (13–24 July 1846), was the most innocuous. The Sabbath, widely desecrated by the majority of German Jews, was discussed. Participants argued whether leniencies for civil servants should be enacted, but could not agree and released a general statement about its sanctity. Holdheim shocked the assembled when he proposed his “Second Sabbath” scheme, astonishing even the radical wing, and his motion was rejected offhand. They did vote to eliminate the Second Day of Festivals, noting it was both an irrelevant rabbinic ordinance and scarcely observed anyway.

While eliciting protest from the Orthodox, Frankfurt and Breslau also incensed the radical laity, which regarded them as too acquiescent. In March 1845, a small group formed a semi-independent congregation in Berlin, the Reformgemeinde. They invited Holdheim to serve as their rabbi, though he was often at odds with board led by Sigismund Stern. They instituted a drastically abridged prayerbook in German and allowed the abolition of most ritual aspects.

Geiger and most of the conferences’ participants were far more moderate. While Holdheim administered in a homogeneous group, they had to serve in unified communities. Though practice and liturgy were modified, it was decidedly restrained. Except Berlin, where the term “Reform” was first used as an adjective, the rest referred to themselves as “Liberal”. Two further rabbinical conferences much later, in 1869 and 1871 at Leipzig and Augsburg respectively, were marked with a cautious tone. Their only outcome was the bypassing of the Loosening of the Shoe ceremony via a prenuptial agreement and the establishment of the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, though officially non-denominational, as a rabbinical seminary. While common, noted Michael Meyer, the designation “Liberal Jew” was more associated with political persuasion than religious conviction. The general Jewish public in Germany demonstrated little interest, especially after the 1876 law under which communal affiliation and paying parish taxes were no longer mandatory.

Apart from that, Reform had little to no influence in the rest of the continent. Radical lay societies sprang in Hungary during the 1848 Revolution but soon dispersed. Only in Germany, commented Steven M. Lowenstein, did the extinction of old Jewish community life lead to the creation of a new, positive religious ideology that advocated principled change. In Western and Central Europe, personal observance disappeared, but the public was not interested in bridging the gap between themselves and the official faith. Secular education for clergy became mandated by mid-century, and yeshivas all closed due to lack of applicants, replaced by modern seminaries; the new academically-trained rabbinate, whether affirming basically traditional doctrines or liberal and influenced by Wissenschaft, was scarcely prone to anything beyond aesthetic modifications and de facto tolerance of the laity’s apathy. Further to the east, among the unemancipated and unacculturated Jewish masses in Poland, Romania and Russia, the stimulants that gave rise either to Reform or modernist Orthodoxy were virtually unheard. The few rich and westernized Jews in cities like Odessa or Warsaw constructed modern synagogues where mild aesthetic reforms, like vernacular sermons or holding the wedding canopy indoors, rather than under the sky, were introduced. Regarded as boldly innovative in their environs, these were long since considered trivial even by the most Orthodox in Germany, Bohemia or Moravia. In the east, the belated breakdown of old mores led not to the remodification of religion, but to the formulation of secular conceptions of Jewishness especially nationalistic ones.

In 1840, several British Jews formed the West London Synagogue of British Jews, headed by Reverend David Woolf Marks. While the title "Reform" was occasionally applied to them, their approach was described as "neo-Karaite", and was utterly opposite to continental developments. Only a century later did they and other synagogues embrace mainland ideas and established the British Movement for Reform Judaism.

America and Classical Reform

At Charleston, the former members of the Reformed Society gained influence over the affairs of Beth Elohim. In 1836, Gustavus Poznanski was appointed minister. At first traditional, but around 1841, he excised the Resurrection of the Dead and abolished the Second day of festivals five years before the same was done at the Breslau conference.

Apart from that, the American Reform movement was chiefly a direct German import. In 1842, Har Sinai Congregation was founded by German-Jewish immigrants in Baltimore. Adopting the Hamburg rite, it was the first synagogue established as Reformed on the continent. In the new land, there were neither old state-mandated communal structures, nor strong conservative elements among the newcomers. While the first generation was still somewhat traditional, their Americanized children were keen on a new religious expression. Reform quickly spread even before the Civil War. While fueled by the condition of immigrant communities, in matters of...
doctrine, wrote Michael Meyer, "However much a response to its particular social context, the basic principles are those put forth by Geiger and the other German Reformers – progressive revelation, historical-critical approach, the centrality of the Prophetic literature."

The rabbinate was almost exclusively transplanted – Rabbis Samuel Hirsch, Samuel Adler, Gustav Gottheil, Kaufmann Kohler, and others all played a role both in Germany and across the ocean – and led by two individuals: the radical Rabbi David Einhorn, who participated in the 1844–1846 conferences and was very much influenced by Holdheim (though utterly rejecting mixed marriage), and the moderate pragmatist Isaac Meyer Wise, who while sharing deeply heterodox views was more an organizer than a thinker. Wise was distinct from the others, arriving early in 1846 and lacking much formal education. He was of little ideological consistençoften willing to compromise.

Quite haphazardly, Wise instituted a major innovation when introducing family pews in 1851, after his Albany congregation purchased a local church building and retained sitting arrangements. While it was gradually adopted even by many Orthodox Jews in America, and remained so well into the 20th Century, the same was not applied in Germany until after World War II. Wise attempted to reach consensus with the traditionalist leader Rabbi Isaac Leeser in order to forge a single, unified American Judaism. In the 1855 Cleveland Synod, he was at first acquiescent to Leeser, but reverted immediately after the other departed. The enraged Leeser disavowed any connection with him. Yet Wise's harshest critic was Einhorn, who arrived from Europe in the same year. Demanding clear positions, he headed the radical camp as Reform turned into a distinct current.

On 3–6 November 1869, the two and their followers met in Philadelphia. Described by Meyer as American Reform's "declaration of independence", they stated their commitment to the principles already formulated in Germany: priestly privileges, the belief in Resurrection and a personal Messiah were denied. A practical, far-reaching measure, not instituted in the home country until 1910, was acceptance of civil marriage and divorce. A Get was no longer required. In 1873, Wise founded the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (since 2003, Union for Reform Judaism), the denominational body. In 1875, he established the movement's rabbinical seminary, Hebrew Union College, at Cincinnati, Ohio. He and Einhorn also quarreled in the matter of liturgy, each issuing his own prayerbook, Minhag America (American Rite) and Olat Tamid (Regular Burnt Offering) respectively, which they hoped to make standard issue. Eventually, the Union Prayer Book was adopted in 1895. The movement spread rapidly: in 1860, when it began its ascent, there were few Reform synagogues and 200 Orthodox in the United States. By 1880, a mere handful of the existing 275 were not affiliated with it.

In 1885, Reform Judaism in America was confronted by challenges from both flanks. To the left, Felix Adler and his Ethical movement rejected the need for the Jews to exist as a differentiated group. On the right, the recently arrived Rabbi Alexander Kohut, an adherent of Zacharias Frankel, lambasted it for having abandoned traditional Judaism. Einhorn's son-in-law and chief ideologue, Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler, invited leading rabbis to formulate a response. The eight clauses of the Pittsburgh Platform were proclaimed on 19 November. It added virtually nothing new to the tenets of Reform, but rather elucidated them, declaring unambiguously that, "Today, we accept as binding only the moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives." The platform was never officially ratified by either the UAHC or HUC, and many of their members even attempted to disassociate from it, fearing that its radical tone would deter potential allies. It indeed motivated a handful of conservatives to cease any cooperation with the movement and withdraw their constituencies from the UAHC. Those joined Kohut and Sabato Morais in establishing the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. It united all non-Reform currents in the country and would gradually develop into the locus Conservative Judaism

The Pittsburgh Platform is considered a defining document of the sanitized and rationalistic "Classical Reform", dominant from the 1860s to the 1930s. At its height, some forty congregations adopted the Sunday Sabbath and UAHC communities had services without most traditional elements in a manner seen in Europe only at the Berlin Reformgemeinde. In 1889, Wise founded the Central
However, change loomed on the horizon. From 1881 to 1924, over 2,400,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe drastically altered American Jewry, increasing it tenfold. The newcomers arrived from backward regions, where modern education was scarce and civil equality nonexistent, retaining a strong sense of Jewish ethnicity. Even the ideological secularists among them, and more so the many who were or became lax or nonobservant, had a very traditional understanding of worship and religious conduct. The leading intellectuals of Eastern European Jewish nationalism castigated Western Jews in general and Reform in particular not on theological grounds, which they as laicists wholly rejected, but for what they claimed to be assimilationist tendencies and the undermining of peoplehood. This sentiment also fueled the often cool manner in which the denomination is perceived in Israeli society.\[58\]

While at first alienated from all native modernized Jews, a fortiori the Reform ones, the Eastern Europeans did slowly integrate. Growing numbers did begin to enter UAHC prayerhouses. The CCAR soon readopted elements long discarded in order to appeal to them: in the 1910s, inexperienced rabbis in the East Coast were given Ram Horns fitted with a trumpet mouthpiece, seventy years after the Reformgemeinde first held High Holiday prayers without blowing the instrument. The five-day workweek soon made the Sunday Sabbath redundant. Temples in the South and the Midwest, where the new crowd was scant, remained largely Classical.

### The World Union

In Germany, Liberal communities stagnated since mid-century. Full and complete Jewish emancipation granted to all in the German Empire in 1871 largely diffused interest in harmonizing religion with Zeitgeist. Immigration from Eastern Europe also strengthened traditional elements. In 1898, seeking to counter these trends, Rabbi Heinemann Vogelstein established the Union of Liberal Rabbis (Vereinigung der liberalen Rabbiner). It numbered 37 members at first and grew to include 72 by 1914, about half of Germany's Jewish clergy, a proportion maintained until 1933. In 1908, Vogelstein and Rabbi Cäsar Seligmann also founded a congregational arm, the Union for Liberal Judaism in Germany (Vereinigung für das Liberale Judentum in Deutschland), finally institutionalizing the current that until then was active as a loose tendency. The Union had some 10,000 registered members in the 1920s. In 1912, Seligmann drafted a declaration of principles, “Guiding Lines towards a Program for Liberal Judaism” (Richtlinien zu einem Programm für das liberale Judentum). It stressed the importance of individual consciousness and the supremacy of ethical values to ritual practice, declared a belief in a messianic age and was adopted as “a recommendation”, rather than a binding decision.

In 1902, Claude Montefiore and several friends, including Lily Montagu and Israel Abrahams, founded the Jewish Religious Union (JRU) in London. It served as the cornerstone of Liberal Judaism in Britain. Montefiore was greatly influenced by the ideas of early German Reformers. He and his associates were mainly driven by the example and challenge of Unitarianism, which offered upper-class Jews a universal, enlightened belief. Meyer noted that while he had original strains, Montefiore was largely dependent on Geiger and his concepts of progressive revelation, instrumentality of ritual et cetera. His Liberal Judaism was radical and puristic, matching and sometimes exceeding the Berlin and American variants. They sharply abridged liturgy and largely discarded practice.\[59\] In 1907, the former Consistorial rabbi Louis-Germain Lévy, who shared a similar worldview, formed the Union Libérale Israélite de France, a small congregation that numbered barely a hundred families. It eventually evolved into the Liberal Jewish Movement of France.

Seligmann first suggested the creation of an international organization. On 10 July 1926, representatives from around the world gathered in London. Rabbi Jacob K. Shankman wrote they were all “animated by the convictions of Reform Judaism: emphasized the Prophets’ teachings as the cardinal element, progressive revelation, willingness to adapt ancient forms to contemporary needs”.\[60\] The conference was attended by representatives of the German Liberal Union, the British JRU, the American UAHC and CCAR, and
Lévy from France. After weighing their options, they chose "Progressive", rather than either "Liberal" or "Reform", as their name, founding the World Union for Progressive Judaism. It began to sponsor new chapters globally. The first was founded in the Netherlands, where two synagogues formed the Verbond voor Liberaal-Religieuze Joden in Nederland on 18 October 1931.

Already in 1930, the West London Synagogue affiliated with WUPJ. In the coming decade, waves of refugees from Nazi Germany arrived in Britain, bringing with them both the moderation of German Liberal Judaism (few mingled with the radical with the radical JRU) and a cadre of trained rabbis. Only then did British Reform emerge as a movement. 1942 saw the founding of the Associated British Synagogues, which joined the WUPJ in 1945. Preserving the relative traditionalism of Germany, they later adopted the name "Reform Synagogues of Great Britain" (since 2005, Movement for Reform Judaism), distinct from the smaller "Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues", which succeeded the JRU. Tens of thousands of refugees from Germany brought their Liberal Judaism to other lands as well. In 1930, the first Liberal congregation, Temple Beth Israel Melbourne, was founded in Australia. In June 1931, the South African Jewish Religious Union for Liberal Judaism was organised, soon employing HUC-ordained Moses Cyrus Weiler. The Congregação Israelita Paulista of São Paulo, first branch in South America, was established in 1936. German refugees also founded a Liberal community named Emet ve-Emuna in Jerusalem, but it joined the Conservatives by 1949.

The New Reform Judaism

Kohler retired in 1923. Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon was appointed HUC Chair of Theology in his stead, serving until 1956. Cohon, born near Minsk, was emblematic of the new generation of East European-descended clergy within American Reform. Deeply influenced by Ahad Ha'am and Mordecai Kaplan, he viewed Judaism as a Civilization, rather than a religion, though he and other Reform sympathizers of Kaplan fully maintained the notions of Election and revelation, which the latter denied. Cohon valued Jewish particularism over universalist leanings, encouraging the reincorporation of traditional elements long discarded, not as part of a comprehensive legalistic framework but as means to rekindle ethnic cohesion. His approach echoed popular sentiment in the East Coast. So did Solomon Freehof, son to immigrants from Chernihiv, who advocated a selective rapprochement with Halakha, which was to offer "guidance, not governance"; Freehof advocated replacing the sterile mood of community life, allowing isolated practices to emerge spontaneously and reincorporating old ones. He redrafted the Union Prayer Book in 1940 to include more old formulae and authored many responsa, though he always stressed compliance was voluntary. Cohon and Freehof rose against the background of the Great Depression, when many congregations teetered on the threshold of collapse. Growing Antisemitism in Europe led German Liberals on similar paths. Rabbis Leo Baeck, Max Dienemann and Seligmann himself turned to stressing Jewish peoplehood and tradition. The Nazis' takeover in 1933 effected a religious revival in communities long plagued by apathy and assimilation. The great changes convinced the CCAR to adopt a new set of principles. On 29 May 1937, in Columbus, Ohio, a "Declaration of Principles" (eschewing the more formal, binding "platform"), promoted a greater degree of ritual observance, supported Zionism – considered by the Classicists in the past as, at best, a remedy for the unemancipated Jewish masses in Russia and Romania, while they did not regard the Jews as a nation in the modern sense – and opened not with theology, but by the statement, "Judaism is the historical religious experience of the Jewish people". The Columbus Principles signified the transformation from "Classical" to the "New Reform Judaism", characterized by a lesser focus on abstract concepts and a more positive attitude to practice and traditional elements.

The Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel reinforced the tendency. The Americanization and move to the suburbs in the 1950s facilitated a double effect: the secular Jewish ideologies of the immigrants' generation, like Bundism or Labour Zionism, became anachronistic. Military service exposed recruits to the family-oriented, moderate religiosity of middle-class America. Many sought an affiliation in the early years of the Cold War, when lack of such raised suspicion of leftist or communist sympathies. The
"Return to Tradition", as it was termed, smoothed the path for many such into UAHC. It grew from 290 communities with 50,000 affiliated households in 1937 to 560 with 255,000 in 1956. A similar shift to nostalgic traditionalism was expressed overseas. Even the purist Liberals in Britain introduced minor customs that bore sentimental values. Bar Mitzvah replaced confirmation [64][28]

World War II shattered many of the assumptions about human progress and benevolence held by liberal denominations, Reform included. A new generation of theologians attempted to formulate a response. Thinkers such as Eugene Borowitz and J.J. Petuchowski turned mainly to existentialism, portraying humans in a fragile, complex relationship with the divine. While religious humanism was ever-present, it remained confined to a small group, and official positions retained a theistic approach. But the main focus in American Reform lay elsewhere: in 1946, Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath was appointed President of the UAHC. He turned the notion of Tikkun Olam, "repairing of the world", into the practical expression of affiliation, leading involvement in the civil rights movement, Vietnam War opposition and other progressive causes. In 1954, the first permanent Reform congregation was established in the State of Israel, again at Jerusalem. The Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism was registered in 1971, and the worldwide movement moved the WUPJ's headquarters to Jerusalem in 1974, signalling its growing attachment to Zionism.

The 1960s and 70s saw the rise of multiculturalism and the weakening of organized religion in favour of personal spirituality. A growing "return to ethnicity" among the young made items such as prayer shawls fashionable again. In 1963, HUC-graduate Sherwin Wine seceded to form the openly atheistic Birmingham Temple, declaring that for him Judaism was a cultural tradition, not a faith. Knowing that many in their audience held quite overlapping ideas, the pressure on the CCAR to move toward nontheism grew [65]

In 1975, the lack of consensus surfaced during the compilation of a new standard prayer book, "Gates of Prayer". To accommodate all, ten liturgies for morning service and six for evening were offered for each congregation to choose from, very traditional to one that retained the Hebrew text for God but translated it as "Eternal Power", condemned by many as de facto humanistic. "Gates of Prayer" symbolized the movement's adoption of what would be termed "Big Tent Judaism", welcoming all, over theological clarity. In the following year, an attempt to draft a new platform for the CCAR in San Francisco ended with poor results. Led by Borowitz, any notion of issuing guidelines was abandoned in favour of a "Centenary Perspective" with few coherent statements [66]. The "Big Tent", while taking its toll on the theoreticians, did substantially bolster constituency. The UAHC slowly caught up with Conservative Judaism on the path toward becoming the largest American denomination [67]. Yet it did not erase boundaries completely and rejected outright those who held syncretic beliefs like Jewbu and Messianic Judaism, and also Sherwin Wine-style Secular Humanistic Judaism. Congregation Beth Adam, which excised all references to God from its liturgy, was denied UAHC membership by a landslide vote of 113:15 in 1994 [65]

In 1972, the first Reform female rabbi, Sally Priesand, was ordained at HUC. In 1977, the CCAR declared that the biblical ban on male same-sex intercourse referred only to the pagan customs prevalent at the time it was composed, and gradually accepted openly LGBT constituents and clergy. The first LGBT rabbi, Stacy Offner, was instated in 1988, and full equality was declared in 1990. Same-sex marriage guidelines were published in 1997. In 1978, UAHC President Alexander Schindler admitted that measures aimed at curbing intermarriage rates by various sanctions, whether on the concerned parties or on rabbis assisting or acknowledging them (ordinances penalizing such involvement were passed in 1909, 1947 and 1962), were no longer effective. He called for a policy of outreach and tolerance, rejecting "intermarriage, but not the intermarried", hoping to convince gentile spouses to convert. In 1983, the CCAR accepted patrilineal descent, a step taken by British Liberals already in the 1950s. UAHC membership grew by 23% in 1975–1985, to 1.3 million. An estimated 10,000 intermarried couples were joining annually [67][68]

On 26 May 1999, after a prolonged debate and six widely different drafts rejected, a "Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism" was adopted in Pittsburgh. It affirmed the "reality and oneness of God", the Torah as "God's ongoing revelation to our people", and committed to the "ongoing study of the whole array of Commandments and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community. Some of these sacred obligations have long been observed by Reform Jews; others, both ancient and modern, demand renewed attention." While the wording was carefully crafted in order not to alienate the estimated 20%–25% of membership that retained Classicist persuasions, it did raise condemnation from many of them [69].

See also

- Cantor in Reform Judaism
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Reform Judaism (formally, The Movement for Reform Judaism and, until 2005, known as Reform Synagogues of Great Britain) is one of the two World Union for Progressive Judaism-affiliated denominations in Britain. Reform is relatively traditional in comparison with its smaller counterpart, Liberal Judaism, though it does not regard Jewish law as binding. As of 2010, it was the second largest Jewish religious group in the United Kingdom, with 19.4% of synagogue-member households.

## Belief and practice

The denomination shares the basic tenets of Reform Judaism (alternatively known also as Progressive or Liberal) worldwide: a theistic, personal God; an ongoing revelation, under the influence of which all scripture was written – but not dictated by providence – that enables contemporary Jews to reach new religious insights without necessarily being committed to the conventions of the past; regarding the ethical and moral values of Judaism as its true essence, while ritual and practical observance are means to achieve spiritual elation and not an end to themselves and therefore, rejecting the binding nature of Jewish law; a belief in the coming of a Messianic era rather than a personal Messiah, and in immortality of the soul only, instead of bodily resurrection. Prayers referring to such concepts were omitted from the liturgy, and traditional practices abolished or altered considerably.\(^1\)

Although Reform Judaism in the UK does subscribe to these views, held also by Liberal Judaism and the American Union for Reform Judaism, several factors made it more moderate and less prone to modify old forms. Its constituency was socially conservative and it attempted to appeal to potential newcomers from the Centrist Orthodox majority in British Jewry; renewed traditionalism by all WUPJ members since the 1970s also motivated Reform Judaism in the UK to adopt once discarded elements. Though it does not consider itself halakhic, it has been sometimes compared to American Conservative Judaism – the sociological functions of which as an “intermediate” movement it indeed filled, especially since the "Assembly of Masorti Synagogues" was only established in 1985 and is very small – while Liberals are more reminiscent of US Reform.\(^2\)\(^3\)

Reform liturgy had always contained a high proportion of Hebrew or Aramaic, while the Liberals and American Reform abridged theirs and introduced much English.\(^4\) Since the 1970s, formerly excised blessings (like those on phylacteries) were returned. Reform Judaism in the UK observes dietary laws and the Sabbath to a considerable degree in the public sphere. It has a get-like divorce
document issued by its rabbinic court, and conversion requires circumcision by males and ablation by both sexes.[2] Egalitarianism did not become prevalent in most synagogues until the 2000s, although the first female rabbi, Jackie Tabick, was ordained in 1975. Mixed seating was only accepted just before and during World War II.[5]

Recognition of Jews by patrilineal descent was affirmed in 2015.[6] Reform Judaism currently ordains female and LGBT clergy, conducts LGBT marriages and has egalitarian services, counting women for minyan and allowing them full participation. Girls have their bat mitzvah at 13, the same age as boys have their bar mitzvah. Reform Judaism is welcoming to non-Jewish spouses; while the Assembly maintains "clear opposition" to involvement in interfaith unions, since 2012 it allows rabbis to conduct celebratory events as long as the ceremony does not involve clergy or motifs from other religions, or conversely those of a Jewish wedding, like ritual canopy.[7]

Organisational structure

As of 2017, Reform Judaism has 41 synagogues, of which 39 are located in England and 13 in Greater London. There is one congregation in Cardiff and one in Glasgow.[8] As of 2010, Reform Judaism had 16,125 member households, accounting for 19.4% of synagogue-affiliated Jewish families in Britain and roughly 14% of the total Jewish population.[9]

All of the synagogues are autonomous, owned and financed by their members who also hire their own local rabbi independently. All clergy are members of the Assembly of Reform Rabbis, which publishes Reform prayerbooks and determines policy in religious matters. The denomination is led by the Senior Rabbi, while the Chair of the Assembly represents and organises the rabbis. It maintains a rabbinical court (Beth Din), located at the Sternberg Centre in London. The Reform Beth Din's decisions are recognised worldwide by all WUPJ affiliates. Alongside the clergy, lay leadership is provided by a board of delegates, the chair of which represents Reform Judaism in the Board of Deputies.

Reform Judaism trains its clergy at the Leo Baeck College, London, which is shared with the Liberals and the Masorti Assembly. While British Reform Judaism and British Liberal Judaism are both WUPJ affiliates and cooperate in many fields, such as outreach to the religiously non-active and interfaith families, the two stress that they "retain their autonomy and distinct identities".[10] Through its work for the welfare and development of young people, Reform Judaism is a member of the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS).[11]

As of 2017, Senior Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner is Senior Rabbi to Reform Judaism[12], which is chaired by Geoffrey Marx.[13] Rabbi Josh Levy is chair of the Assembly of Reform Rabbis and Rabbi Jackie Tabick is Convenor of the Beth Din.[14] Sir Trevor Chinn is President.[15]

History

In the 1820s and 1830s, a small intellectual current arose in English Jewry, influenced by the Anglican environment which laid great emphasis on the Bible alone and scorned the Jews for valuing the Talmud. Represented by such figures as Isaac D'Israeli, they were sometimes named "neo-Karaites", though their actual knowledge of Karaitism was scant. This group rejected rabbinic authority and espoused a biblicocentric view.

Concurrently, wealthy members of the Sephardi Mocatta and Ashkenazi Goldsmid families, who were related by marriage, were complaining about lack of decorum and rigid regulations in the Bevis Marks and Great Synagogue of London, respectively. The Mocattas were forced to walk miles on the Sabbath as an old communal ordinance banned forming prayer groups in a radius of ten miles from Bevis; Isaac Goldsmid vied for more clout with the wardens, and repeatedly protested against the protracted blessings for family members during services. They were also inclined to worship together. Eventually, a group of Mocattas, Goldsmids, Montefiores and other supporters withdrew from their two congregations on 15 April 1840, declaring their intention to found a house of worship for neither Sephardi nor Ashkenazi, but "British Jews". They appointed David Woolf Marks to lead services in their new West London Synagogue, dedicated on 27 January 1842. A former reader in Liverpool, he was deeply influenced by the "neo-
Karaite” tendency and refused to cantillate the Torah on the second day of festivals, grounded only in rabbinic tradition. His stance suited the secessionists mainly on the practical level; Most never cared much for the bibliocentric issue, but were content to abolish the second day.

Although the term “Reform” was occasionally conferred on the congregation, Todd Endelman stressed that they were “unique and owed nothing” to the continental movement. Jakob Josef Petuchowski emphasised that Marks' philosophy was the polar opposite to that espoused by the German founding fathers of Reform Judaism. The latter regarded the Beatified Sages as geniiuses and progressives who developed Rabbinic Law further. Marks granted the Written Torah alone divine status, refused to call himself rabbi but insisted on "reverend", and even translated the Kaddish into Hebrew, viewing Aramaic prayer as a later rabbinic corruption. In his new prayerbook and Passover Haggadah, he excised or reinstated various elements, always contrary to rabbinic tradition. Petitions for the Return to Zion under the Messiah and reinstitution of sacrifices, rejected by Continental Reform, did not concern the English at all. West London was subject to a harsh denunciation and de facto excommunication by Chief Rabbi Solomon Hirschell in 1842.

In 1856, tensions in Manchester were increasing, as many in the community sought greater autonomy from the authoritarian new Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler and regarded local Rabbi Solomon Marcus Schiller-Szinessy with disfavour. On 25 March 1858 the dissident "Manchester Congregation of British Jews" was dedicated. They adopted Marks' prayerbook, but retained the second day of festivals. Their motives were far more political than principally religious. In 1872, a third English synagogue withdrew from Adler's jurisdiction, the Bradford Jewish Association. Unlike the rest, Bradford was clearly influenced by continental developments: the founders were mostly German Jews, as was their first rabbi, Joseph Strauss. The three breakaway congregations were neither organised together nor had a consistent religious philosophy. Marks' "neo-Karaism", which was never very important to ordinary constituents in West London, virtually died with him. His successor Rabbi Morris Joseph was dismissed by the Orthodox in 1890 for evincing doubt about the prayers concerning the sacrifices, but was of little conviction. His moderate style brought a rapprochement with the United Synagogue.

At the turn of the century, Claude Montefiore emerged as the most important religious philosopher among Anglo-Jewry. Montefiore, whose mother attended West London, studied at the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums and was a disciple of the teachings of German Reformers Abraham Geiger and Samuel Holdheim. His Jewish Religious Union (JRU), antecedent of British Liberal Judaism, was as purist and radical as American Reform Judaism, if not exceeding it. He too emphasised the ethical aspects as the essence of religion, instituted drastic ritual reforms – over half of the Liberal liturgy was in English, men were bareheaded and sat together with women, practical observance was not only ignored by the public (as was the case in the United Synagogue, too) but officially discarded. While the three nonconformist synagogues did not emulate the JRU, it did influence them toward greater modifications, albeit yet inconsistent. In 1919, the St. George synagogue, appealing for unaffiliated East End Jews, was opened by Basil Henriques. It was alternatively sponsored by both West London and the Liberals.

The first of the three breakaway synagogues to adopt full-fledged Reform Judaism was West London. After the retirement of Rabbi Joseph in 1929, it hired Harold F Reinhart, a Hebrew Union College graduate who served as rabbi in several congregations of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Within a year, Reinhart brought the synagogue into the recently established World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), albeit retaining a relatively conservative ritual, consistent with the congregation's sensibilities. Though both were WUPJ affiliates, cooperation and competition alike characterised relations with the Liberal ULPS as a growing interest in non-Orthodox forms emerged among the wider public. A Glasgow printer named Samuel Ginsberg was impressed with what he saw in West London and opened the Glasgow Progressive Synagogue in 1932. In 1933, Reinhart sponsored the establishment of the North Western Reform Synagogue at Golders Green. In 1935, a group at Edgware seceded from the United Synagogue and formed the Edgware & District Reform Synagogue again under West London's guidance.

A movement only arose with the arrival of some 40,000 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. While worldwide Reform Judaism originated there, the nature of German communities limited what was known as “Liberal Judaism” to the status of a tendency within unified congregations which had to accommodate traditionalist members. German Liberals were relatively conservative (for example, maintaining mainly-Hebrew liturgy, head coverings for men and separate seating), and found the British Liberal synagogues far too radical. The moderation of the independent nonconformist ones suited them better, and immigrants overwhelmed West London and the others. They also brought along a cadre of 35 Hochschule-trained rabbis, most prominently Ignaz Maybaum and Werner van der
Zyl who were aided by Reinhart in finding new posts at Britain. Harmonising ritual and religious approach to a great measure, they made their loosely related communities quite uniform. One that remained independent and strongly clung to German Liberal worship was Belsize Square Synagogue.

On 4 January 1942, representatives from the West London, North Western, St. George Settlement, Glasgow, Manchester and Bradford synagogues met at the Midland Hotel, Manchester and founded the Associated British Synagogues, later renamed Associated Synagogues of Great Britain. The ASGB joined the WUPJ as a whole in 1945. In 1956, it cooperated with the ULPS to establish the Leo Baeck College for training rabbis.[17] In 1958, it adopted the name Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, which would last until 2005.

**Notable Reform rabbis**

- Rabbi Tony Bayfield (born 1946), former President of the Movement for Reform Judaism (2011–16)
- Rabbi Lionel Blue (born 1930), broadcaster and former European Director of the World Union for Progressive Judaism
- Rabbi Jonathan Magonet (born 1942), former principal of Leo Baeck College
- Rabbi Julia Neuberger, Baroness Neuberger (born 1950), Senior Rabbi at West London Synagogue
- Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Romain MBE (born 1954), writer, broadcaster and minister of Maidenhead Synagogue
- Rabbi Sybil Sheridan (born 1953), Chair of the Assembly of Reform Rabbis UK (2013–15);

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External links

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- Jeneration.org - Reconnect: A Retreat for Jewish Students
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The Union for Reform Judaism (until 2003: Union of American Hebrew Congregations), founded in 1873 by Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, is the congregational arm of Reform Judaism in North America. The other two arms established by Rabbi Wise are the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The current president of the URJ is Rabbi Richard Jacobs.

The URJ has an estimated constituency of some 880,000 registered adults in 873 congregations. It claims to represent 2.2 million, as over a third of adult U.S. Jews, including many who are not synagogue members, state affinity with Reform, making it the largest Jewish denomination. The UAHC was a founding member of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, of which the URJ is the largest constituent by far.

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#### Belief and practice

Reform Judaism, also known as Liberal or Progressive Judaism, embraces several basic tenets, including a belief in a theistic, personal God; continuous revelation, with the view that scripture was written by divinely-inspired humans. The Reform movement upholds the autonomy of the individual to form their own Jewish beliefs, and to be the final arbiter of their own spiritual practices. At the same time, Reform Judaism stresses Jewish learning in order to gain insights into the tradition and make informed choices. The Reform movement also encourages its members to participate in synagogue and communal Jewish life. Reform Judaism draws a distinction between the moral and ethical imperatives of Judaism and traditional ritual requirements and practices, which, it believes may be altered or renewed to better fulfill Judaism's higher function. Another central tenet of Reform Judaism is the belief that it is the universal mission of Jews to spread God's message, to be a light unto the nations. Reform Judaism foresees a future Messianic Age of peace, but without the coming of an individual Messiah or the restoration of the Third Temple and sacrificial cult in Jerusalem. Reform Judaism rejects the notion of bodily resurrection of the dead at the end of days, while affirming, at most, immortality of the soul.

During its "Classical" era, roughly between the Civil War and the 1930s, American Reform rejected many ceremonial aspects of Judaism and the authority of traditional jurisprudence (halakhah), favoring a more rationalistic, universalist view of religious life. "New Reform", from the 1937 Columbus Declaration of Principles and onwards, sought to reincorporate such elements and emphasize Jewish particularism, though still subject to personal autonomy. Concurrently, the denomination prioritized inclusiveness and diversification. This became especially pronounced after the adoption of "Big Tent Judaism" policy in the 1970s. Old ritual items became fashionable again, as were ceremonies, such as ablution. The liturgy, once abridged and containing much English, had more Hebrew and traditional formulae restored, though not due to theological concerns. In contrast with "Classical", "New Reform"
abandoned the drive to equate religious expression with one's actual belief. Confirmation ceremonies in which the young were examined to prove knowledge in the faith, once ubiquitous, were mostly replaced by Bar and Bat Mitzvah yet many adolescents still undergo Confirmation (often at the Feast of Weeks) between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. A unique aspect of Reform was its interpretation to the old rabbinic concept of Tikkun Olam (Repair of the World); it became a rallying cry for participation in various initiatives pursuing social justice and other progressive agendas, like the Civil Rights Movement, women's equality and gay rights.

Another key aspect of American Reform, which it shares with sister movements in the WUPJ, is its approach to Jewish identity. Interfaith marriage, once a taboo – the CCAR penalized any involvement by its clergy in such ceremonies by ordinances passed in 1909, 1947 and 1962 – were becoming more prevalent toward the end of the 20th Century. In 1979, the URJ adopted a policy of embracing the intermarried and their spouses, in the hope the latter would convert. In 1983 it recognized Judaism based on patrilineal descent, affirming that offspring of a single Jewish parent (whether father or mother) would be accepted as inheriting his status if they would demonstrate affinity to the faith. Children of a Jewish mother who will not commit to Judaism were not to be considered Jewish. These measures made Reform the most hospitable to non-Jewish family members among major American denominations; in 2006, 17% of synagogue-member households had a converted spouse, and 26% and unconverted one. These policies also raised great tensions with the more traditional movements. Orthodox and Conservatives rejected the validity of Reform conversions already before that, though among the latter, the greater proclivity of CCAR rabbis to perform the process under halachic standards allowed for many such to be approved. Patrilineal descent caused a growing percentage of Reform constituency to be regarded as non-Jewish by the two other denominations.

**Organizational structure**

The URJ, which was named the "Union of American Hebrew Congregations" until 7 November 2003, incorporates 846 congregations in the United States and 27 in Canada. The Union consists of four administrative districts, West, East, South and Central, which in turn are divided into a total of 35 regional communities, comprising groups of local congregations; 34 are in the United States and one represents all those affiliated with the Canadian Council for Reform Judaism. The URJ is led by a board of trustees, consisting 253 lay members. This board is overseen by the 5,000-member General Assembly, which convenes biennially. It was first assembled in Cleveland on 14 July 1874, and the most recent biennial was held in Boston on 5 - 10 December of 2017.[1]

The board directs the Senior Leadership Team, headed by the URJ President. Spiritual guidance is provided by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which has some 2,300 clergy members who convene annually. Most CCAR members have been trained at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Reform movement's seminary. The CCAR has a publishing arm and oversees various committees, such as those focusing on Ritual, Responsa, and Prayerbooks. Synagogue prayers are conducted mainly by members of the CCAR and of the American Conference of Cantors. The political and legislative outreach of the URJ is performed by the Religious Action Center based in Washington D.C. The RAC advocates policy positions based upon religious values, and is associated with political progressivism, as part of the vision for Tikkun Olam. The denomination is also supported by the Women of Reform Judaism (formerly, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods).

The URJ has an estimated constituency of 850,000 in the United States, 760,000 Jews and further 90,000 non-converted gentile spouses. A greater number identifies with Reform Judaism without affiliating with a synagogue. The 2013 Pew survey assessed that 35% of Jews in the United States consider themselves Reform (the 2001 AJC poll cited 38%); based on these figures, Steven M. Cohen estimated there were 1,154,000 identifying non-member adults in addition to those registered, not including children.[2]

There are further 30,000 affiliated congregants in Canada. Citing those findings, the URJ claims to represent a total of 2.2 million individuals.[3]

**Youth Group & Summer Camps**

NFTY: The Reform Jewish Youth Movement exists to supplement and support Reform youth groups at the synagogue level. About 750 local youth groups affiliate themselves with the organization, comprising over 8,500 youth member.[4]

The URJ Camp & Israel Programs is the largest Jewish camping system in the world,[5] comprising 17 summer camps across North America, including specialty camps in science & technology, creative arts, and sports,[6] teen leadership institute,[7] and programs for youth with special needs.[8] Many of the camps have long provided the opportunity for high school pupils to travel to Israel during
the summer. The Union offers various Israel programs for seminarians and students.

History

Reform-like ideas in the United States were first expressed by the Reformed Society of Israelites, founded in Charleston, South Carolina on 21 November 1824. It was led by Isaac Harby, Abraham Moise and David Nunes Carvalho, who represented the younger, Americanized and religiously lax generation in the Jewish community Congregation Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim. Standing in opposition to a more stringent establishment, formed from English-born immigrants, Harby and his followers were mainly concerned with decorum. They demanded English-language sermons, synagogue affairs handled in English rather than Middle Spanish (as was prevalent among Western Sephardim) and so forth. However, they also arrived at more principled issues. On their first anniversary, Harby delivered an oratory in which he declared Rabbinic Judaism a demented faith, no longer relevant, and that America was "the Promised Land of Scripture." They fully seceded by their second anniversary, after continued rebuffs on the part of the wardens, forming their own prayer group. The three leaders authored a prayerbook in which they completely excised any mention of the Messiah, restoration of sacrifices and return to Zion. It was published in 1830. Far more moderate alterations along these lines, in the first liturgy considered Reformed, caused an uproar at Hamburg in 1818.

The Society, numbering several dozens, dissipated and merged back into Beth Elohim during 1833. But they did not cease being a factor. In 1836, the unified congregation hired Gustavus Poznanski as cantor. He spent time in Hamburg and knew the rite of the Hamburg Temple. Traditional at first, Poznanski soon turned to a different course. In 1843 he attempted to abolish the Second Day of Festivals and later published his own version of the Maimonides' Creed, which lacked reference to Resurrection of the Dead and the Messiah. He also instituted various ritual reforms. Supported by many of the former secessionists, he eventually resigned in 1847.

A year before that, Isaac Mayer Wise arrived from Europe. In a country where Jewish immigrants lacked an organized and established religious leadership, Wise quickly rose to prominence. While far from traditional belief, he was disinterested in offering a comprehensive new approach, focusing on pragmatic compromises. Wise introduced family pews for the first time in known synagogue history (by random, when his congregation bought a church) in Albany on Shabbat Shuvah, 3 October 1851. His attempts to forge a single American Judaism motivated him to seek agreement with the conservative Isaac Leeser. Relations between them, wrought with suspicion from the beginning, were terminated after Wise agreed to Leeser's demands in the 1855 Cleveland Synod and then retracted when the latter left. Wise was soon outflanked by the radical Reform rabbi David Einhorn, who espoused a dogmatic, rigid line demanding conformity with the principles of Reform Judaism then formulated in Germany. Many other German rabbis crossed the ocean to the land where their religious outlook, free from state intervention or communal pressures, could be expressed purely.

Einhorn gradually gained the upper hand, though the conflict-laden synergy between him and Wise would lay the foundation of American Reform. The Philadelphia Conference of 3–6 November 1869 saw the radicals' victory, and the adoption of a platform which summarized the theory concocted in Germany in the previous decades. Priestly privileges were abolished as the rebuilding of the Temple was no longer anticipated, belief in Messiah and Resurrection denied. Michael Meyer regarded the document as the denominational "declaration of independence." The need for religious divorce (get) was also annulled, and civil one confirmed as sufficient, one of the first steps towards abandonment of most ritual. While American Jews, even the nominally Orthodox, were scarcely observant, Reform began to officially dispose of practices still upheld. Its doctrine was well received by the immigrants and especially their assimilated children. Of 200 synagogues in the United States in 1860, there were a handful of Reform ones. Twenty years later, only few of the existing 275 were not part of the movement. On 8 July 1873, representatives from 34 congregations met in Melodeon Hall, Cincinnati, Ohio and formed the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) under Wise's auspices. The name reflected his hope to unite all Jews under a single roof. In 1875, Wise also founded Hebrew Union College. Yet his attempts to maintain a moderate facade failed. On 11 July 1883, during the banquet celebrating the first graduation from HUC, non-kosher dishes such as shrimps and crabs were served. The trefa banquet, while apparently the decision of the Jewish caterer and not of Wise
himself (who observed dietary laws), prompted protests from the few American traditionalists, like Sabato Morais, who remained outside the UAHC. Several conservative members later claimed to have exited the room with repulsion, though little is factually known about the incident.

It was the arrival of Rabbi Alexander Kohut in 1885 which forced an unambiguous stance. Kohut, a follower of Zecharias Frankel and his Positive-Historical school attacked the UAHC for abandoning traditional Judaism. A series of heated exchanges between him and Reform's chief ideologue, Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler, encouraged the latter to convene an assembly which accepted the Pittsburgh Platform on 19 November. Embodying the spirit of "Classical Reform", it added virtually nothing to the theoretical foundation of the movement but elucidated it clearly. It was declared that today we accept as binding only the moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives. A small group of conservatives withdrew from the UAHC in protest, joining Kohut, Morais and their supporters in founding the Jewish Theological Seminary. At first unifying almost all non-Reform currents, it developed into the center of Conservative Judaism. In 1889, Wise founded the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

"Classical Reform" soon faced a more pressing challenge. The massive immigration from Eastern Europe, bringing over two million Jews who had strong traditional sentiments in matters of religion even when personally lax, dwarfed the UAHC constituency within a generation. In the 1910s and 1920s, the CCAR rabbis gradually reintroduced many elements once discarded in an effort to appeal to the newcomers. The influx, and the growth of interwar antisemitism, also brought a renewed stress on Jewish particularism and peoplehood, ritual and tradition. In contrast with the coolness toward Zionism expressed by Classicists — emanating both from their rejection of old Messianic belief, involving a restoration of the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem, and commitment to emancipation — many new clergy, like Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen Wise, were enthusiastic and influential Zionists. These tendencies were codified in the 1937 Columbus Declaration of Principles, influenced by rabbis Samuel S. Cohon, Solomon Freehof and others from Eastern Europe. Anti-Zionist Reform rabbis broke away during WWII to found the American Council for Judaism, which declined in activity following the Six-Day War.

In 1950, HUC merged with the Jewish Institute of Religion, a Reform rabbinical college founded in 1922 by Rabbi Stephen Wise. The selective "return to tradition" encouraged many Americanized Eastern-European-descended Jews to flock to Reform congregations in the postwar years, rapidly swelling the membership ranks of the UAHC. This factor along with the URJ's commitment to Outreach, diversity ("big tent Judaism"), and a welcoming attitude labeled "Audacious Hospitality" by URJ president, Rabbi Richard Jacobs, have all contributed to the Reform Movement's emergence as the largest Jewish religious denomination in North America.

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- RJ.org - The Blog of the Reform Movement
- Central Conference of American Rabbis
- American Conference of Cantors
- Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion
- Reform Judaism Magazine Home Page
- URJ Camps
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The World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) is the international umbrella organization for the various branches of Reform, Liberal and Progressive Judaism, as well as the separate Reconstructionist Judaism.[1] The WUPJ is based in 40 countries with 1,275 affiliated synagogues, of which 1,170 are Reform, Progressive or Liberal and 105 Reconstructionist.[2] It claims to represent a total of some 1.8 million people, both registered constituents and non-member identifiers.[3] The WUPJ states that it aims to create common ground between its constituents and to promote Progressive Judaism in places where individuals and groups are seeking authentic, yet modern ways of expressing themselves as Jews. It seeks to preserve Jewish integrity wherever Jews live, to encourage integration without assimilation, to deal with modernity while preserving the Jewish experience and to strive for equal rights and social justice.

The WUPJ was established in London in 1926 as the Union of all Progressive (also Liberal or Reform) movements. It moved its headquarters to New York in 1959 and to Jerusalem in 1973. In 1990, the Reconstructionists – who espouse a philosophy different from that of the former – joined the WUPJ under an observer status, being the first and only non-Reform member.[3] The WUPJ has regional offices in London, Moscow and New York City.

As of September 2014 the President of the WUPJ is Rabbi Daniel H. Freelander,[4] and the Chair is Carole Sterling. Past presidents included Claude Montefiore (1926-1938), Rabbi Leo Baeck (1938-1956), Lily Montagu (1955–1959), and Rabbi Solomon Freehof (1959-1964).

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### Mission statement
- The establishment and support of synagogues and schools wherever there are Jews searching for meaningful access to modern Jewish life.
- Recruitment, training and placement of rabbis, cantors and educators.
- Publication and distribution of liturgical and educational materials in languages Jews speak.
- Sponsorship of international programs for youth, education, leadership development, and all aspects of community building.
- Bringing together like-minded Jews to derive strength from one another blending ancient traditions with the changing world of today

## Regional affiliates

### Continental Europe
Reform Judaism began in Germany, led by Rabbi Abraham Geiger. It stagnated considerably after the 1840s. In 1898, German Liberal rabbis organized the *Union of Liberal Rabbis in Germany* under Heinemann Vogelstein. In 1908 the laity formed the *Union for Liberal Judaism in Germany*. At its height, it had some 10,000 members and half the rabbis in the country. The ULJ was a founding member of the World Union in 1926. After the destruction of the Holocaust, Germany's Jews, mostly refugees of foreign descent, largely favoured Orthodoxy. Liberal Judaism managed to gain inroads slowly, and first prayer groups appeared in 1995. The Union of Progressive Jews was founded in 1997.

The first new branch established by the WUPJ was in the Netherlands, in 1931, eventually coalescing into the *Nederlands Verbond voor Progressief Jodendom*.

The movement is growing in Spain. As of 2016 there are six congregations, while there was only one congregation a decade ago. In 2017 the Reform community there expects to have its first native-born rabbi since the Expulsion in 1492 once he completes his rabbinical training in London.[5]

### United Kingdom
Claude Montefiore, a major theologian, named his religious ideology "Liberal Judaism", founding the Jewish Religious Union as a platform in 1902. His movement was a founding member of the WUPJ in 1926. British Reform, established officially in 1942, joined the global organization in 1945.

### North America
The URJ is by far the largest member organization of the WUPJ, with a solid constituency of over 750,000 Jewish members (along with further 90,000 unconverted gentile spouses) and over a million non-members who identify with it in the U.S., and further 30,000 constituents in Canada. As of 2016, 1.5 million of the 1.9 million members of WUPJ are in the U.S. [6] German immigrants and rabbis brought Reform to America, through a short-lived congregation that espoused a somewhat similar ideal existed in Charleston between 1824 and 1833. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, URJ since 2003, was founded in 1873.

North America is also home to the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, which has 105 affiliates, only two of them outside the continent (in Delft, Netherlands and Curacao). The JRF joined as an observer in 1990. It is the only non-Reform organization in the WUPJ, the other members of which do uphold the basic tenets of ongoing revelation, personal God and the like. In 2013, it had some 65,000 constituents.

### Israel
A first congregation was formed at Jerusalem during 1958. The movement was incorporated in 1971. The Israeli surrounding encouraged a more conservative approach on behalf of the local branch. The prayer in vernacular, for example, was Hebrew anyway, and the populace was relatively more familiar with rabbinic sources. Patrilineal descent is not recognized by the IMPJ, as by many other smaller affiliates, which cannot antagonize the Israeli Orthodox religious establishment.

### Other
- Union for Progressive Judaism comprising congregations in Australia, New Zealand, China, India, and Singapore.[7]
- European WUPJ providing regional support to congregations in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Spain, Switzerland. Within the European region there are also subregional associations for Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and the UK.[8]
- "WUPJ – Former Soviet Union" providing support for congregations in the Former Soviet Union[9][10]
- South African Union for Progressive Judaism supports congregations in South Africa.[11]
- Union of Jewish Congregations of Latin America and the Caribbean supports congregations in Latin America and the Caribbean.[12]

Shai Pinto, the vice president and COO of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, noted in 2012 that Latin America represented the fastest growing region for the movement.[3]

There are also, Arzenu – the international umbrella organization for progressive religious Zionist organizations, and Netzer Olami, the international youth wing of the progressive movement, jointly sponsored by Arzenu and the WUPJ.[4]

**Communal life**

**Rabbis, cantors and communal leaders**

Rabbis, cantors and communal leaders for the worldwide progressive movement are trained in one of three rabbinic institutions: Leo Baeck College,[15][16] Abraham Geiger College,[17] and Hebrew Union College.[18] While all three train rabbis for the worldwide progressive movement, each has a different regional focus: The Abraham Geiger College focuses on providing leadership for communities in Germany, Central and Eastern Europe.[17] Leo Baeck College, located in the UK, focuses on leadership for the UK Reform and UK Liberal.[15] Hebrew Union College, with campuses in the USA and Israel, trains rabbis and communal service leaders for work in North American Reform and Israeli Progressive congregations. It also provides a year in Israel program for students at the Leo Baeck College and Abraham Geiger Institute.[18]

**References**

1. WUPJ history (http://wupj.org/about/about.asp)
7. The World Union for Progressive Judaism | Worldwide Congregations | Australia, Asia and New Zealand (http://wupj.org/Congregations/Australia.asp)
10. – number obtained by counting the congregations listed for each region in the combo box on this page (http://www.reform.org.il/Heb/Index.asp)
Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism

The Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism (or the IMPJ, Hebrew: המועצה הרפורמית - הזרות מתוקדמת בישראל) is the organizational branch of Progressive Judaism in Israel, and a member organization of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. It currently has 40 communities and congregations around the state of Israel, 13 of which are new congregations, referred to as "U'faratzah" communities, and two kibbutzim, Yahel and Lotan, Israel.

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History

Some of the earliest Reform rabbis to settle in what would become Israel included Rabbi Judah Leon Magnes, who was the first Chancellor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and in 1938, became its President. Rabbi Meir Elk, who graduated from the liberal Breslau Rabbinical Seminary in Germany (now in Wroclaw, Poland), founded the Leo Baeck School in Haifa.

The first Reform congregation in Israel opened in Jerusalem in 1958, and it was named Congregation "Har'el". A conference open to the public who wished to see a Jewish alternative to the Orthodox Movement took place in 1965. This strengthened the relationship between the six existing congregations, and served as the cornerstone for the establishment of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ). The IMPJ officially became an organization in Israel in 1971. The Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the rabbinical college of Reform Judaism, began its Rabbinical Studies program in Israel in 1974, and in 1980, the first Reform rabbi was ordained by the HUC. The headquarters of the World Union for Progressive Judaism was moved to Jerusalem in 1973.

Today, there are 40 communities and congregations affiliated with Reform Judaism in Israel. The IMPJ runs about 40 kindergartens, school-run educational programming; "Noar Telem", the Reform Movement youth organization, a part of Netzer Olami; and the Youth Adult and Students Forum for 20- to 30-year-olds, as well as four Batei Midrash, Jewish study centers. The first Reform kibbutz, Yahel, was founded in 1976 in Arava, and Lotan was founded in 1983. Har Halutz was established in Galilee in 1985.

The movement has not attracted a significant following among religious Jews in Israel. Researchers attribute this to several factors:

- the political clout of Orthodox Judaism in Israel, which controls the religious establishment and is hostile towards other denominations;
- the Eastern European or the Middle Eastern origin of most Israelis, populations which are neither strictly religious nor oriented toward religious reform.
The perceived lack of need, in a Jewish-majority state, for Orthodox-alternative organizations.

The Movement participates in various initiatives for social justice, such as Rabbis for Human Rights, and it is affiliated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism. In 2012, The Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism officially changed its name to the "Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism". Reuven Marko serves as the Chairman of the IMPJ, and Rabbi Gilad Kariv serves as the Executive Director.

In June and July 2015 the Reform movement in Israel came under attack by the new minister of religious affairs, David Azulai. The context was the Women of the Wall, an Israeli group fighting for the right of Jewish women to pray at the Kotel in a fashion incompatible with conservative Western Wall religious norms. In a meeting with MK Ayelet Shaked about that group, Azulai referred to them as "provocateurs" and claimed that Reform Judaism is “a disaster for the nation of Israel.” Azulai's comments were condemned by Rabbi Gilad Kariv, executive director of the Reform movement in Israel, who noted, “If Minister Azoulay cannot function as minister for all the citizens of Israel, then he should resign.”

In 2016 MK Yariv Levin criticized efforts to accommodate multi-denominational Judaism in Israel. At a government hearing on non-Orthodox prayer space at the Western Wall, Levin slammed Reform Judaism, saying egalitarian prayer space at the Wall is unnecessary based on his opinion that Reform Jews will "be all but gone in three generations.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned Levin’s remarks and the Reform movement in the U.S. (the largest Jewish religious organization there) decided to shun him. Kariv called on his American partners to refuse access to Levin. Rabbi Richard Jacobs, president of the American Union for Reform Judaism, agreed to cancel all meetings between Levin and Reform leaders. Jacobs told Israeli Army Radio: “There’s no reason to give him a platform in Jewish communities and organizations in the United States. Minister Levin will not teach us what support for Israel is.”

An Israeli court ruling in 2016 prohibited discrimination against Reform Jews in using publicly funded mikvehs. The Reform Movement’s Israel Religious Action Center sued the state on behalf of the Reform and Conservative/Masorti movements to allow members to use publicly funded mikvehs. The case, which took ten years to resolve, resulted in the Israeli Supreme Court ruling that public ritual baths must accept all prospective converts to Judaism, including converts to Reform as well as Conservative Judaism. In his 2016 ruling, Supreme Court Justice Elyakim Rubinstein said barring certain converts amounts to discrimination. Until this ruling Orthodox officials barred non-Orthodox converts from using any mikveh, claiming their traditions do not conform to Jewish law and the people they convert are therefore not Jews. Rubinstein noted: “Once it established public mikvahs and put them at the service of the public — including for the process of conversion — the State cannot but be evenhanded in allowing their use,” Rubinstein said. "The State of Israel is free to supervise the use of its mikvahs, so long as it does so in an egalitarian manner.

Achievements of Reform rabbis

- Kehillat Yozma, a Reform synagogue in Modi'in, is the first non-Orthodox congregation in Israel to receive state funding for its synagogue building
- Kinneret Shiryon, a Reform rabbi, is the first female rabbi in Israel
- Alona Lisitsa, a Reform rabbi, is the first female rabbi in Israel to join a religious council joining Mevaseret Zion in 2012

The IMPJ Institutions

The headquarters of the IMPJ are located in The Shimshon Center Beit Shmuel in Jerusalem.

MARAM - Council of Progressive Rabbis
MARAM serves as the center of all Reform rabbis in Israel. MARAM had edited prayer books for Shabbat and high holidays, and other publications on Jewish law, prayer, and holidays. MARAM deals with a variety of Jewish topics, and runs a Conventional program and court. Rabbi Professor Yhoyada Amir serves as the head of MARAM.

Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC)

IRAC was founded in 1987, and serves as the public and legal advocacy arm of the Reform Movement in Israel. It focuses on issues of religion and state, including state recognition of Reform Rabbis and Reform conversions. Anat Hoffman serves as the executive director of IRAC.

Programs and Initiatives

Project Mechina

The IMPJ Mechina Project is a post-high school, pre-military year of study and preparations toward compulsory IDF service. Participants in the Mechina study Jewish heritage and Israeli identity, and work in community service projects. The IMPJ Mechina takes place in Jaffa.

Further reading


References

2. [“After offensive remark, Reform Jews demand ouster of Israel’s new religious affairs minister”] Haaretz, 17 June 2015
6. Minister refuses to walk back comments about Reform Jews [http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-Aid-Diplomacy/Minister-refuses-to-walk-back-comments-about-Reform-Jews-443780#article=6020NzgyMjUyNUE4NkU4MjFFQjAxN0I0QjU3REFFREJBMjE] The jerusalem Post, Feb 12, 2016
8. [1] [http://yozma.org.il/eng/index.htm]
External links

- Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (Hebrew) (English)
- Israel Religious Action Center founded by the IMPJ


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