RSY-Netzer’s
Summer Choveret
Reform Judaism

What does it mean to be a Jew in the modern world?

Where did Reform Judaism come from?

How can Reform Judaism help me address challenges and questions in society today?
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This choveret has been lovingly put together and edited by Sarah Grabiner.
Shalom RSY-Netzer,

We are very excited to give you… this year’s summer choveret!

As some of you may know, on Veidah 2011/5771, the movement voted on a three-year cycle of chinuch themes… in 5771 we had a phenomenal summer with our Torah Tales choveret, then in 5772 Tikkun Olam gave us incredible energy in chinuch, activism, and drive to change the world! And last year, we developed our Israel and Reform Zionism chinuch, debates and values to an amazing new level.

So this year, we’ve returned to the beginning of our cycle and are focusing this summer on… Reform Judaism!

We feel that as a movement there are many exciting and dynamic conversations about different elements of our Jewish practice, values and ideals which we have been discussing this year.

We want to share with you some of the questions we started off our thinking with…

When, where and how did Reform Judaism come into existence?

What does it mean to be a Jew in the modern world, and in modern society?

How does Reform Judaism impact on our values and outlook on the world?

I know Reform Judaism is all about personal autonomy and the individual… but what about community?

Who sets the rules and boundaries in Reform Judaism? Rabbis? The Torah? Me?

Is Reform Judaism more about what you think and believe or what you do and how you act?

What does Reform Judaism have to say about… the environment? Feminism? LGBTQ? God? …?

Taking all of these questions into account, and many more, we have created a choveret to help you and your chanichim this summer to address these topics and challenges and many more.

In order to tackle the question What is Reform Judaism?, we’ve split the choveret into three parts:

1. The history of Reform Judaism

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, and as the modern era began, everything about how Jews lived was open to change. In this section, three educators have looked at different elements of how Reform Judaism came out of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: it addresses the big questions about the various direction Judaism could go in at this turning point, and sets out the basic history of Reform Judaism. It also looks at the particular way in which reform practice and actions developed before the theology and beliefs were solidified. It is important to acknowledge that Reform Judaism has progressed hugely since its foundation, but studying history is always valuable in understanding how the world came to be the way it is now!

2. The process and reality of Reform Judaism

In many ways, the process of Reform Judaism, and the way in which we make decisions, could be seen as more important than the outcomes of the decisions themselves. In these four articles, educators discuss how we might go about making informed decisions, and creating communities that fulfill our values and ideals. Here we set out
a model for how to approach any issue or question that you could come upon in your Jewish life, and also consider the ways in which this process of communities making decisions for themselves, and finding themselves in different contexts and realities has led to differences across the Reform Jewish world.

3. How does Reform Judaism help us approach contemporary issues?

In this section, 14 educators have taken different issues and discussed how Reform Judaism might approach the topic. These may be issues and problems of society, questions of religious belief and ideology or challenges, which every person faces in the modern world.

We have split these issues into three categories:

- **Religious issues** – Torah, mitzvot (commandments), t’filah (prayer) and God may be some of the first things you’d think of to do with Judaism. Although the word “religious” is often used to describe more traditional Judaism, Reform Judaism is as much a religious movement as orthodoxy, and we’ve spent some time here thinking about exactly what this means.
- **Social justice issues** – Whether it’s the environment, issues of gender and sexuality or those who are vulnerable in society, Judaism and Jewish texts have a great deal of wisdom to share about how we treat the earth and people around us. How might Reform Judaism drive us to action concerning these issues?
- **Identity issues** – As well as questions addressing the world, Judaism can have a dramatic and immense impact on each person and our individual identity. We have looked at a few areas in particular here: Israel and Zionism, what it means to be a Jew in Britain, how the Shoah (the Holocaust) might impact on your life as a Jew today, and the future of technology in religion.

This resource does not cover every issue we could address, but we have aimed to represent a broad spectrum of educators, questions and views.

We have concluded with some space to think about what the future might look like, what your vision is for Reform Judaism, and the big question... *What is Reform Judaism?* and we have asked a number of people for their thoughts! In reality, the whole of this choveret is an answer to that question, explored in our three sections: understanding the history of where our movement came from; thinking about how we make informed, authentic, Jewish decisions as individuals and communities; and how Reform Judaism might help us address contemporary issues.

This *choveret* would not be possible without the incredible contributions of all our educators, most of whom grew up in RSY-Netzer themselves. We want to thank them immensely, and we appreciate the continued support they show for our fabulous movement!

Why not say the blessing for study before getting busy with your learning...?


B’nai Torah, Blessed are You, God of the Universe, who sanctifies us by commandment and instructs us to busy ourselves with Torah.

We hope that this *choveret* will provide you with content for your *peulot*, ideas and energy for the summer of chinuch, and a desire to learn more and more!

*B’hatzlacha* (good luck) and we can’t wait to see and experience an amazing RSY-Netzer summer with you!

The 5774 RSY-Netzer movement worker tsevet xxxx
1. Approach all **peulot** as a challenge. A challenge to yourself to make sure that chanichim:
   a) Are having fun
   b) Are learning the 3 key pieces of information that you want them to learn
   c) Will always remember this **peulah**.

2. The knowledge we remember the most is the knowledge that we reach ourselves, rather than just being told the answer. Always use questions and experiences rather than just telling.

3. All **chinuch** can and should be an interesting, fun and immersive experience. You are on RSY-Netzer, there are no limits to the world that you can create for your chanichim.

4. Start writing all **peulot** by looking at the educational aims that you have been given and thinking how in an ideal world with no limits on your budget or time you would do them. Don’t you know that you can get to the moon, just by covering windows in dark paper and then walking around a room as if there is no gravity and making heavy breathing sounds? Anything is possible on RSY-Netzer.

5. Variety is the spice of life and in **peulot** writing this is even more true. If every **peulah** is focussed on discussions and free-roams, that will get a bit boring. If on the other hand you use a new technique, something that the chanichim can associate with from home, or something completely out of the ordinary it becomes SO much more exciting. The picture below may give you some ideas, but they really are just a starter.

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In order to look at Reform Judaism around the world could you skype a different Reform Community every day of camp and then produce a magazine at the end showcasing all the communities?

What **peulot** stand out in your mind?

If you had no financial constraints and no time constraints what would you do to get your educational message across?

How will you make every **peulah** memorable and enjoyable?

To engage in values and practices surrounding Reform Judaism would you create a whole day of informed decisions, where each decision that the camp makes impacts on the running of camp either just for the rest of the day or for the rest of the summer. What would that look like?
A Short timeline of some key moments in the history of Reform Judaism...

**Early 19th century** – Early German reformers begin to rethink Judaism in light of modern thought, values and culture.

1818 – First Reform congregation in Hamburg.

1844-6 – A series of conferences of German rabbis create a fully-fledged movement, led by Abraham Geiger and Samuel Holdheim.

1840 – The first Reform synagogue in the UK is founded: the West London Synagogue of British Jews.

1856 – An Act of Parliament is passed, empowering the minister of West London Synagogue to register marriage ceremonies, establishing the congregation’s full autonomy from and equality with the Orthodox congregations.

**Mid 19th century** – Reform spread to America, led by Isaac Mayer Wise, defined by the Pittsburg Platform as a declaration of principles by the rabbis in 1885.

1875 – Hebrew Union College established in Cincinnati, USA to train Reform rabbis for the first time.

1876 – The first Reform kibbutz, Yahel, is established in the Arava and Lotan is founded in 1983.

1935 – The first female rabbi, Regina Jonas, is ordained in Germany

1937 – The American Reform rabbinate accepts a Zionist stance for the first time.

1939 – NFTY is founded as the youth arm of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, (now the URJ).

1942 – The Associated British Synagogues, the first Reform organisational body in the UK is formed, with six communities.

1940s – YASGB (Youth Association of the Synagogues of Great Britain – RSY-Netzer’s predecessor) is formed, led by Rabbi Dr Werner Van der Zyl in London.

1956 – Leo Baeck College founded to train Reform rabbis in London. It has since trained over 170 rabbis.

1958 – The Associated British Synagogues grows to become the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain.

1958 – The first Reform congregation in Israel opened in Jerusalem, named Congregation “Har’el.”

1971 – The Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism officially became an organization in Israel.

1972 – The first American female rabbi is ordained, to be followed in 1975 by the first female rabbi in Britain.

1978 – Work begins in South Africa and Australia to form an international Reform Zionist youth movement. This would become the basis for Netzer Olami.

1978 – The Reform Synagogues of Great Britain changes its name to the Movement for Reform Judaism.

2005 – At the NFTY Convention in LA, NFTY finally formalised their relationship with Netzer Olami.
WHAT IS JUDAISM? According to Raphael Sylvester

When the new(ish) Jewish community centre in London (JW3) asked people to submit short answers about what being Jewish means, I helpfully obliged. Sad to say, they didn’t publish my witty comment...

Underneath my unhelpful sarcasm I was making a vaguely serious point:

We Jews do spend a lot of time worrying about what Judaism is and what being Jewish means! Is that even healthy?! But it is worthwhile to do some abstract thinking now and again, and to try to arrive at some kind of general sense of what this thing called “Judaism” actually is...

BUT WHY DOES IT MATTER?

THE PROBLEM:

For almost half a millennium, starting in the time of the Black Death, the Jews of Europe lived in enforced segregation. They were sequestered in rural hamlets or locked away in restricted areas of towns and cities (ghettos)... As centuries passed the isolation deepened. Then, in one remarkable act during the French Revolution, the Jews of France were given full citizenship. They were “emancipated.” The ghetto gates were opened.

For the next century, as modern nation-states were created around the continent, the question of what to do with the Jews became intimately tangled up in the birth of each new state. Just as the question of race has had to be answered in each phase of America’s development, the Jewish Question had to be asked and answered at each stage of European development. It was not a smooth process. Rights were given, then taken away. But from that first action in France, Jewish Emancipation became an unstoppable force.

Something quite remarkable happened once the ghetto gates were thrown open. During the centuries of segregation Jewish community life had developed a separate existence to the surrounding society. There were points of contact in commerce and trade but the Jewish community had turned in on itself. Customs, clothes, almost all aspects of life were different inside the ghetto. Yet now, within a few short decades Jews were not only integrating but playing an increasingly important role in the life of Europe.

“Emancipation: How Liberating Europe’s Jews from the ghetto led to Revolution and Renaissance” by Michael Goldfarb

All of modern European Jewish life can be traced back to this time, and is essentially a response to emancipation, and the sudden opening up of opportunities and new possibilities for Jews.

BUT this monumental change also meant that Judaism wasn’t the same, secluded, isolated, protected communally-based entity it had been... individuals had rights, could make choices, and were not constrained by the old boundaries of their communities. The creation of the whole idea of “what kind of Jew you want to be” meant that different options started to arise and everything had to change!

But when we emerged from the ghetto what would we be? Who would we be? How would modernity affect what Judaism fundamentally was?

Some felt that Judaism should be considered a *religion* like any other, sitting happily alongside your country of loyalty, so you could be a “Frenchman of the Jewish persuasion” or a “German of the Mosaic faith”. Others thought that Judaism itself could be that *national* identity to which people belonged, giving rise to Jewish nationalism (Zionism). And yet another group considered Judaism a *cultural heritage*, but dismissed the spiritual, religious legal elements and communal responsibilities altogether...
Today, there isn’t a proper Jewish word for Judaism. The Hebrew word for Judaism (yahadut) is a modern European word deriving from the name “Judah”. It originally meant something like Judah-ness (or Judean-ness). It referred to the customs and beliefs of a particular tribe, and had no abstract sense as an ism until at least the eighteenth century.

So what is Judaism?

A RELIGION? This is the most obvious definition of Judaism. The way it is depicted in school RE textbooks is as a kind of weird version of Christianity, with added beards and bizarre rules about not eating pigs. Clearly, there is a religion which is often referred to as Judaism. It has a revealed text (the Torah), certain core beliefs, a vast legal tradition, and many customs. On the other hand, there are millions of Jews who do not subscribe to Jewish religious beliefs, and many for whom the Jewish religious tradition plays no significant role in their lives. Yet, even according to halachah (the Jewish legal tradition), such Jews are unquestionably Jews. So if Jews don’t need to be religious to be Jews (unlike Christians, for example), Judaism can hardly be a religion.

A NATION? Judaism seems to have many of the key characteristics of a nation: a common language, land, history, customs, some kind of genetic connection etc. However, it doesn’t take much to pick holes in this argument. Most Jews don’t speak Hebrew, most don’t live in the Jewish nation-state, and Jewish history is extremely diverse. Judaism also lacks the fundamental characteristics of a nation, as understood in a modern sense: that its members feel a sense of belonging and loyalty to it. Most Jews have opted not to live in a Jewish state and Jews around the world feel at least some kind of dual loyalty.

A FAMILY? This is the most feel-good and content-free definition I have come across. It sounds cute, but what does it really mean? That we are all somehow related and have common ancestry? Perhaps. That we feel the pain of our Jewish brothers and sisters around the world more than of others? We support Israel rather than England? We are proud when a Jew wins an Oscar, but ashamed when one goes to jail for fraud? Some might disagree, but there is a more basic problem. You can walk away from your family (just like you can walk away from Judaism), but you can’t belong to lots of different families. Many Jews belong to various families, might support England and Israel, might feel equal pain at the suffering of an Israeli and a Syrian. So to claim Judaism is a family sounds nice, but doesn’t tell us a great deal and doesn’t really work as a metaphor …

SO WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER RAPHAEL???

A CULTURE The most honest and relevant way to think about Judaism is as a culture (or a “civilisation” as Mordecai Kaplan calls it). This does NOT mean cultural Judaism, as in Judaism = bagels and shakshuka. I mean culture in a much more substantial sense: a body of ideas, values, traditions, creations that belong to a group. Judaism has a religious, a national, an artistic and a genetic component, but it is more than all of these.

So why is this the strongest definition of Judaism? Because it reflects the reality of the modern world. All of us live in at least two cultures: western culture and Jewish culture (and probably more). In our radically free world of the twenty first century, we are all forced to choose (whether we are aware of it or not) the cultures we belong to and practise...

Do you agree with Raphael? Could you call Judaism a religious culture? Would you argue for one of the other options?
Unless we are going to totally abandon Judaism, or become *charedi* and live in Stamford Hill,

we are choosing to live in two worlds: **WESTERN and JEWISH.**

**BUT HOW DO JUDAISM AND THE WESTERN WORLD DIFFER?**

Here are some examples...

Judaism unambiguously places God (whatever that might mean) at the centre of its worldview and of everyday life, whereas God is peripheral in mainstream western culture.

Judaism places much less emphasis on ideas that are absolutely core to modern western living, such as individual “achievement”, importance and self-fulfilment. Instead, Judaism stresses the value of the community and is generally less concerned about individual autonomy.

Judaism places far greater value on inherited wisdom than western culture. In the Talmud, it often seems that inherited wisdom trumps human logic or newer ideas.

Economics has a very different emphasis in the Jewish worldview, which introduces concepts like *Shmīta* (resting the land every 7 years) or *Pe'ah* (leaving the corners of a field for the poor after the rest is harvested). These are seen as both care for the land and social justice.

Luckily, we as Jews are blessed to have access to a radical alternative and critique to the dominant culture, which can help us reflect on and decide who it was that we want to be, and how we should act in the world.

**Raphael’s answer is to understand Judaism as a culture, a civilisation of ideas, values and traditions... but what is your answer to the question of**

**WHAT IS JUDAISM?**

**How can we go about living in these two worlds of modern Western life and Jewish tradition, history and learning?**

**Raphael says**: Judaism allows Jews to “creatively re-imagine the world.” You have to be prepared to put in some work, but this re-imagining, leading to action, is the challenge and opportunity that Judaism gives us.

How are you going to “creatively re-imagine” your life to include Judaism in this modern or even post-modern world?

One answer to this question that arose as a result of emancipation and the breaking down of the boundaries of the ghettos of pre-modern Europe is...

**REFORM JUDAISM**

Read on to find out more...
A History of Reform Judaism by Rabbi Sybil Sheridan

IN THE BEGINNING... THE ENLIGHTENMENT

It all started with the European Enlightenment and the notion that ‘All men are equal’ (women had to wait a while longer!). Napoleon conquered Europe under the slogan ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ and the idea that Jews could be like everyone else became a practical possibility. The first thing Napoleon did when he captured a town, was to break down the ghetto walls, thus ‘freeing’ the Jews from their oppression.

What was it like to be a Jew, who suddenly was thrown into the open? The ghetto walls may have made a prison, but they were safe. To some the new world was a threat and they continued to live as they always had, refusing to engage with the wider world. To others, the new freedom was full of opportunity to join in the high culture of Europe.

THE LURE OF CHRISTIANITY

One thing in this amazing new world of opportunities the Jews could now explore without risk of being murdered was the Church. They were so beautiful, the worship so uplifting. It was very different from the noise and gabble of the synagogue. And one thing did not change. Society at large still hated Jews. When Napoleon was defeated, in some towns the ghetto walls were rebuilt and Jews were forced out of their wonderful new lives, back into the cramped confines of the back streets. They did not like it. Nor did they enjoy the sneering and superiority of the anti-Semitic population around them. But there was a way out. They could convert. And they did, in their thousands.

SO THERE AROSE A PROBLEM... HOW TO KEEP JEWS JEWISH?

This was the question that exercised many Jews. The Enlightenment threw up a new breed of Rabbi, one versed not only in Bible and Talmud, but in Greek and Latin, German philosophy and literature. They saw what was happening and were concerned. ‘We need to make a distinction,’ they thought, ‘between what is true and eternal in Judaism, and what the add-on of tradition over the ages.’

Jews were being put off by the bits of Judaism that didn’t really matter – the length of services in synagogue, for example the mumbling of the prayers. Christian scholars were now looking at the Bible, not as the Word of God, but as a historical document and Jews began to do the same. They saw the Torah as a work compiled by different authors at different times. Once you no longer believe that God wrote every word of it, you can begin to question some of the commandments. ‘Did God really want you to stone your stubborn and rebellious son, or was this written by some angry parent?’ A distinction was made between the ethical commandments (from God; absolute must dos) and the ritual commandments (good to do if you feel it helps, but definitely not compulsory).

THE REFORM TEMPLE

The first Reform communities were founded, not by Rabbis but by ordinary people who wanted to stay Jewish, but to change the way it looked. Israel Jacobson (1768-1828) was an educator, who was appointed by Napoleon to run the Jewish affairs in a large province of Germany called Westphalia.

Jacobson decided to build a model school for Jewish boys in which they would learn both Hebrew and German; religious and secular studies. Attached to this school was a synagogue. It had a bell in the belfry to summon worshippers, it had an organ, and prayers in German. Similar places were set up in Hamburg and Berlin. They did not call them synagogues but Temples thus declaring that they no longer wanted to pray for the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The movement spread. New Temples sprung up all over Germany, the Austro Hungarian Empire, extending into Poland and Russia. A generation of charismatic Rabbis reformed their places of worship and took the lead in shaping the movement. Chief among them was Abraham Geiger (1810-1874). New music was composed and new prayer books developed with shorter services and with prayers in German. The highlight of the Reform Temple service was the sermon – a passionate and often dramatic look at Jewish history, tradition and modern society. People loved them (they had no television or social media to entertain them) and they flocked to hear.
Things developed differently in the United States. The Jewish pioneers going out west found it impossible to observe Shabbat or keep kosher as they had done in Eastern Europe. Many Jews coming from Russia and Poland in the 19th and early 20th century made a decision no longer to observe Jewish ritual. There are stories of the Hudson Bay full of floating wigs and Tsitsit as the new immigrants threw them overboard as they sailed towards the Statue of Liberty. American Reform, therefore was more radical and more creative than German Reform, but as time went on, German Rabbis emigrated to the US and influenced its development.

**THE LIBERAL MOVEMENT**

Two cousins, a philosopher Claude Montefiore (1858-1938) and a social worker Lily Montagu (1863-1975) saw that young Jews were leaving the United Synagogue as it had no relevance to their lives. Lily Montagu wrote a letter to the Times about the potential for a new style religious worship and this led to a meeting in 1902 that founded the Jewish Religious Union. It was not supposed to be a breakaway from Orthodoxy. Lily Montagu led children’s services at the Orthodox synagogue in Bayswater, that were really popular and the plan was to hold similar adult services – with lots of English on Shabbat afternoons. However, they wanted men and women to sit together. This was not allowed in the United Synagogue, so they moved to West London Synagogue. They too did not want mixed seating, so they looked for premises of their own, forming the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in 1911.

![Image](image-url)

They brought over an American Reform Rabbi, Israel Mattuck (1884-1954) and these founding personalities are known collectively as ‘The Three Ms.’ The fact that the Reform Movement looked to Germany for its inspiration and the Liberal movement to America explains the different feel of the two movements. There is not much difference in substance.

**THE WAR**

When Hitler came to power, the Rabbi at West London Synagogue was an American called Harold Reinhart (1891-1969). He saw the dangers, and decided to help the Rabbis who were fleeing Nazism, by finding them jobs in England and setting up new Synagogues. Many of the Jews coming from Germany and Austria were Reform, and they joined the existing synagogues increasing the numbers hugely, which led to the establishment of yet more synagogues so that today, we are the second largest Jewish movement in the UK with 45 Synagogues.

**REFORM IN BRITAIN**

In Britain things were different again. Reform did not start as the result of ideology, nor to keep Jews Jewish. It started as a result of a row. Bevis Marks was the oldest and biggest Sephardi synagogue in England. Founded in 1701, by the 1840s, the rich merchants that were its greatest donors had moved from the City to live in Park Lane. It’s a long walk from there on Shabbat, and these Jews were Orthodox. They asked if they could start a small branch of the synagogue in the West End, but the leaders, seeing their source of funding disappear into another synagogue building said ‘No’.

Living next door, were rich Ashkenazi Jews who were having the same problem, so they decided to join together and start a new synagogue. Since Bevis Marks would have nothing to do with them, they decided to explore the new ideas coming out of Germany. The West London Synagogue of British Jews was founded in 1840 as a Reform Synagogue and they invited a German Reform scholar David Woolf Marks (1811-1909) to be its Rabbi. Manchester Reform Synagogue was formed in 1857 and Bradford in 1873 by German industrialists who were working temporarily in the town.

But that was it. Unlike in Germany, where passionate leaders and fiery preaching encouraged more and more people to join the Reform movement, West London Synagogue members were content. They now had a synagogue in the area and were not interested in spreading an ideology; men and women sat separately at West London till the 1960s. But Orthodox Judaism was in trouble and increasingly not meeting the needs of its members.

Don’t be scared to include historical content in your peulot! You could use characters to bring it to life, travel through time, focus on one of headings above, or re-create debates and controversies of the time!

*If you want to find out more, read what is on the MRJ website and Google the names in bold in this article.*
Ritual and practice as the foundation of the progressive dynamic in Judaism

By Ben Lewis

Imagine the scene: a religious gathering meets, as bells ring in the bell-tower, to listen to psalms and hymns sung by a choir and backed by an organ. Intermixed with this is a man in a black robe delivering a sermon and the majority of everything which takes place is in the language used by the people in their day-to-day life.

Bells? Organs? Robes? Doesn't sound very Jewish, does it?
It sounds much more like a Church service and even the congregation which was there that day had a large number of Christians in it. But this was a Jewish service; what could be said to be the first ever Reform service in Seesen, Germany in 1810.

Can you imagine a service like this happening in a Reform synagogue today? Would you feel comfortable being part of a community which prayed like this?

The early Reform movement was driven by a group who passionately want to be Jewish, whilst living in the modern world. They felt that some Jewish practices had become old-fashioned and even embarrassing in their new, enlightened age. Some Jews wanted to engage with the rest of society, but Jewish traditions were putting up barriers which prevented them from doing so - by forcing isolation (e.g. Kashrut, Shabbat on a Saturday as opposed to Sunday) or by marking Jews out as different in society (e.g. clothing, circumcision).

The answer?
Get rid of these barriers! Let's be more like the rest of society!
If a Christian had walked into a synagogue and seen the frenzy and madness inside, compared to the decorum they expect of a church service, they would not have been impressed and seen these Jews as backwards and having no place in their enlightened society. So let's tidy everything up and make it look better to those from outside so we can fit in!

But, wait. How can getting rid of these parts of Judaism be justified? In the first instance, this was a question which the pioneers of Reform Judaism didn't answer - the kind of theology and justification we know today came second. The questions of what this means in terms of our relationship to what God is and to the nature of “law” and tradition within Judaism were not the first thoughts these pioneering reformers had. It was not a case of what people thought about religion causing them to change their practice, but a need to change practice and ritual which later prompted a re-evaluation and re-formulation of the beliefs behind them. As Moses Mendelssohn said - if the law of God seems irrational then it is reason that should be followed and the law has to go!

Is this an idea we feel comfortable with now? Is it justifiable to change our tradition and practice without that being informed by our theology? Is practical concern enough of a reason for us to change our rituals?

We don't have bells and robes now, though, and we do mark Shabbat on a Saturday and have rules for kashrut which are followed in communal settings - is this battle out-dated? Definitely not!

We have practices which mark us out as "Reform" which come from a similar place of considering what is practical: Our Shabbat morning prayer services in synagogues are shorter because we only choose to read 1/3 of the Torah portion and we don't do repetitions of prayers such as the Amidah. Why? It is definitely reasonable to argue that the practical need for a service length which is acceptable to the community came before considerations of theology.

RSY-Netzer Veidah encountered such a situation just last year. We want to include as many people within our definition of the Jewish community as possible and as such chose to state our belief in bilineal descent - that people with either a Jewish mother or a Jewish father are to be considered Jewish. Some, including figures in the Reform Movement, have criticised this position because it was essentially practical and that what was absent from the debate was a rigorous examination of whether our position on this issue is in keeping with our tradition and is justifiable with a basis in Jewish belief. In other words, were we putting our feeling that what we did had to change first, before we truly considered why we believe what we believe?
In defence of the Reformers… Are they the truly traditional Jews?

Whilst making decisions based on practicality first seems radical, some (such as Masorti Rabbi Louis Jacobs) might say it is how even the most stringent defenders of halacha (Jewish Law) have operated for years: by knowing what decision they had to make and making sure to find the textual justification for that decision after.

One notable example of this is when Rabbis were asked to rule on whether Christianity was a form of idolatry. Those making this ruling in Christian countries knew if they said yes, they would stop all Jews from trading with the rest of society and this would make life for Jews nearly impossible - so they managed to find ways of making the decision which they knew they had to make for the benefit of their community: the practical need came first. The opposite ruling was found much more often in Muslim countries by Rabbis such as Maimonides, for whom declaring Christianity was idolatry wouldn’t have a negative impact on their lives at all.

For Reform Jews today, perhaps this argument is less relevant, since it includes a key commitment to the halachic process of people making their decisions based primarily on the tradition of Jewish law. Reform Judaism do not, and do not want to, claim to have this kind of halachic commitment. We proudly take Jewish tradition and text into account in our decision making, but it is our standing outside the full adherence to halachah and its process which marks us out as different.

HALACHAH/JEWISH LAW

Where do you stand? - On Summer Events

All this Theology vs. Practicality sounds very lofty, but it is a battle which you will face on a different scale every day on any RSY-Netzer event you lead.…

1. You’re running behind time and need to find something in the tochnit to get rid of. Is it OK to get rid of the ma’amad for the day, even though we believe we’re always supposed to have one? Is it OK to cut bits out of the ma’amad and skip prayers?

2. You’re put in a position where the only food available for your chanichim isn’t veggie, or even kosher… what do you do then?

3. You know that the prayer “Hashkiveinu” is only actually in the evening service, but your chanichim really love it and it helps them get into the service. Do you put it into your morning ma’amad? What else could you do?

These are real scenarios and as a madrich/a you will be faced with plenty of decisions at all stages of your hadracha journey which challenge you to look at where the balance lies between belief and the practicality of your situation. Not only are these the decisions you make, but the ones you model for your chanichim. Where do you draw your lines?

Reform Judaism has continued to change… So turn to Rabbi Miriam’s article on page 17 to find out more!
Where Reform Judaism is today and how it is different in different places

By Rabbi Malcolm Cohen, Temple Sinai, Las Vegas [email]

I am a British Rabbi working in a Reform shul in Las Vegas having spent plenty of time in Israel and am therefore uniquely placed to reflect on the differences between Reform Jews in the UK, USA and Israel:

One issue which is important to consider is REFORM JUDAISM’S STATUS AND POWER in each place:

In the UK the Movement for Reform Judaism (MRJ) has always been a minority denomination. However, recently it has taken a turn for the positive with regard to its self-perception. Instead of worrying what the Orthodox think, there has been a proactive effort to position themselves in the mainstream of the community. The Rabbi of the movement is invited to speak on communal matters as a matter of course whereas before everyone would defer to the Chief Rabbi. There has also been success in transforming the communications (websites, paper publications) and therefore showing a more professional and confident image to the wider community. The movement has benefited in recent years from RSY-Netzer graduates and Limmudniks becoming rabbis, hopefully to lead British Reform Judaism into the future!

In the USA Reform Judaism is incredibly powerful both in numbers and institutions. There are around 1.5 million Reform Jews and 900 congregations, by far the largest denomination. The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) is far less apologist than other countries’ movements. It has a seat at the table and works from a position of strength. The movement’s biennial convention includes around 6000 attendees and has keynote speakers such as the US President or Israeli Prime Minister. Most impressive is the Religious Action Centre (RAC), the social justice wing of the URJ which has an office in DC, the staff of which are on personal speaking terms with most elected officials.

The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) is the most embattled of our movements. The orthodox establishment there wage an almost constant ideological war. Having said that, the Reform Jewish leadership in Israel are better placed than most to do well on the religious battlefield. Led by such dynamic and hardened figureheads such as Rabbi Gilad Kariv (head of the movement) and Anat Hoffman (head of the Israel Religious Action Centre, IRAC) ground has been gained for the hearts and minds of Israelis. Both have fought increasingly successful battles in the Israeli Supreme Court in the fields of conversions, state salaries for Reform Rabbis, Reform representation on municipal religious councils and protection for mixed worship at the Western Wall. More sabras (native Israelis) are going to Reform shuls for lifecycle ceremonies and, while there are many battles ahead, the IMPJ, to paraphrase the words of its former Chief Executive Rabbi Richard Hirsch, do not need anyone to write them in and will not let anyone write them out of Israeli society.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SUBSTANCE, STYLE AND IDEOLOGY OF EACH COUNTRY’S REFORM JEWS?

The URJ probably feel more like British Liberal congregations. There is more English in services, less of a care for Kashrut (this is almost worn as a badge of honour of American Independence!), but the musical life of the movement is much more dynamic. While MRJ congregations were just cottoning on to Debbie Friedman melodies, URJ congregations were running huge song leader boot camps and giving rise to Jewish musicians with nationally-selling CD’s.

The IMPJ, because of the majority of Hebrew speakers, feels naturally more traditional. Most t’filah is in Hebrew with occasional announcements in English because of the presence of expats in certain congregations.

The MRJ feels like it is in the middle of both. There is a care and respect for tradition but an interest in the dynamic, American way of doing things.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE...

The biggest issue which will define these movements over the next few years (although less for the IMPJ) is that of intermarriage. Many American Reform rabbis already perform interfaith weddings and there is much more of an open policy for interfaith couples. The British movement is having a real discussion about this and are progressively becoming more open. Americans see non-Jewish partners coming into the movement as a potential benefit, British still see them as a threat. In America, the recent Pew study, “A Portrait of American Jews”, shows that intermarriage is a massive phenomenon. In the same report, the numbers of people who are technically Jewish but profess to have no religion has grown enormously: a huge challenge for the American Jewish community for the future.

In the final reckoning of this comparison, we will have to find new and creative ways to engage younger Jews. Study, prayer and good deeds will never stop being the core of Judaism but how we package and present these and involve people in them will need to change if we are to be successful!
Informed Decision Making: What makes me a Reform Madrich/a? By Rabbi Miriam Berger

How would you define “Reform Judaism”? How do we describe Reform Judaism?

Recently the Movement for Reform Judaism published a set of “core values” and definitions of what Reform Judaism does, thinks, and is:

Reform Judaism…

• Treasures both Jewish tradition and Judaism’s ability to evolve in response to the contemporary world.
• A life of integrity based on a process of informed decision-making.
• An uncompromising commitment to gender equality and inclusion, responding to the changing realities of our community.
• Seeks out new opportunities and spaces in which to welcome and engage with members, unaffiliated Jews and those with non-Jewish partners.
• Is committed to Israel and the pursuit of peace; democracy; human rights and religious pluralism.
• Means building a just society through social action and tikkun olam, repair of the world.

Our core values:

› Creating inclusive, egalitarian communities, valuing difference.
› Bringing Holiness into the world by seeking meaning in our lives and a just society for all.
› Treasuring the autonomy of the individual, Jewish tradition and the insights of the wider world.

How far do these statements reflect a Reform Judaism you are familiar with?

Reform Judaism does not provide answers or definitives. There are established minhag or customs within our communities but Reform Judaism practiced with integrity is about the process of informed decision making and not simply the outcomes. Reform Judaism is committed to adhering to the values which underpin our traditions in an ever changing world.

Decisions are made through the balancing of the 3 major values of wisdom, community and holiness:

Wisdom – Chochmah חכמה – Our wisdom comprises of the wisdom of each individual, Jewish wisdom and the wisdom of the world.

Community – Kehilah קהילה – Our community values a communal identity passing through the generations established through our practices and values.

Holiness – Kedushah קדושה – Holiness is our relationship with God through ritual and our relationships with people and the world through ethical behaviour.

Judaism as a continual process can often result in a much more rigorous and challenging commitment to religious life.
CHALLENGE: As a Reform Jewish Youth Movement we should apply fixed rules on our camps about…

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/issue</th>
<th>YES?</th>
<th>NO?</th>
<th>MAYBE?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eating unkosher meat</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing musical instruments on Shabbat</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual behaviour</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating ethically-sourced food</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Shabbat different from the rest of the week</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making time for prayer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring the child is halachically Jewish</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring all participants have had a bar/bat mitzvah</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making boys wearing kippot for prayer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying birkat hamazon</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What have you based your answers on? How would you go about creating the fixed rules?
What is it important for you to reflect in those rules?

Take a look at this model for Reform Jewish Decision Making...

6 SIDES OF A TRIANGLE? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

“The three sides of the inner triangle are formed by the traditional trio of God, Torah and Israel, here expressed as our God and the God of our Ancestors (Who spoke at Sinai); Jewish tradition (Torah l’Moshe m’Sinai – The belief that Moses received the whole Torah from God at mount Sinai); the Jewish community (those who stood at Sinai and their spiritual descendants). The three sides of the outer triangle are formed by the Ein Sof, the Ultimate Reality (Who redeems all humanity); human wisdom and knowledge (which ever enriches Torah); the human family (who will stand together at the End of Days). The Jewish self stands in the middle of the star, faces each side in turn and engages in dialogue.”

From Sinai, Law and Responsible Autonomy by Rabbi Tony Bayfield

The triangles here are all equilateral triangles giving equal weight to each side.
In your decision making process which sides of the triangle would be the most important for you?
Is it the same for any question?
Are your triangles different when making a personal decision rather than that on behalf of RSY-Netzer?
Let's look at an example and see how to use the triangles:

**As a Reform Jew, should I keep kosher?**

**Jewish tradition** There are copious quantities of texts which could go in this section. From Biblical lists of forbidden animals to Talmudic debates as to whether poultry constitutes meat and is therefore forbidden to be consumed with milk even though it does not feed its young in that way.

**Jewish community** Within this section you may consider the part that kosher butchers or bakers play in the creation of community. You may consider the continuity that kashrut has given Judaism throughout the generations.

**Our God** Within this category you could look at what the values are that underpin Kashrut. Is Kashrut trying to make us distinct and give us a sense of identity? Is kashrut concerned with animal welfare? Does kashrut encourage putting boundaries around ourselves to discourage excess?

**Wisdom and Knowledge** In this category you may wish to consider recent reports on the practice of shechitah or ritual slaughter. You may think about health benefits around drawing boundaries around what we eat. You may think about the scientific processes our food has been through which significantly change its state.

**Humanity** In this category you may wish to think about living in a global society, our responsibilities to everyone involved in the production and sales of food. How has that changed from the society in which these laws of kashrut were formed?

**Ein Sof** In this category you may want to ask what are the values that we see as universal that we want reflected in our particularistic laws of kashrut. What are the values that may not be specifically Jewish values but impact on the world at large?

**What is your decision?**
These are all just initial thoughts. What other ideas would you place in each category?

A story from Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism (the American Reform movement), from his speech at the Biennial conference December 2013:

Throughout the first book of the Torah, God speaks to our ancestors through the people they meet, in the holy moments that unfold at every turn. Abraham is blessed by Melchitzedek, Rebecca is the answer to Eliezer's prayer at the well, and an unidentified man called Ish guides Joseph to his brothers. We, too, must be open to hearing truths from those we meet, remembering that we hold no monopoly on wisdom. That's why I met recently with Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, a cherished member of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's inner circle, who now has the responsibility of overseeing Chabad's worldwide activities. Shortly after we sat down in his office... Rabbi Krinsky leaned forward and asked, "Rabbi Jacobs, can we be frank?" I said yes, not sure where he was going. "Why are you so busy trying to get more people into your Reform Movement? After all, you don't care about kashrut, you don't care about Shabbat, and you don't care about mitzvot, so what are you so busy doing?" I responded, "Rabbi Krinsky, we care about kashrut, we care about Shabbat, we care about mitzvot; we just care differently. My job," I told him, "is exactly the same as yours: to try and bring more and more people close to the sacred core of Jewish life."

**What does it mean to care about these elements of Jewish life “differently”?**
Do you care about kashrut? Shabbat? Mitzvot? How do you show you care? What do you do, say, believe? How would you say Reform Judaism tries to "bring people close to the sacred core of Jewish life"?

Another quotation from Rabbi Rick Jacobs:

The time is long overdue for us to stop using Orthodox Jewish practice as the baseline against which we define our own Jewish practice. We can affirm the authenticity of other Jewish practices without conceding Jewish authenticity to them alone. Our Judaism is appealing to everyone, those from more traditional backgrounds, no Jewish backgrounds, Jews by religion, Jews by culture, and Jews by affinity. We will amply nourish all who are hungry for meaning.

**Do you think we ever compare our Jewish life to Orthodox practise? Why might Reform Jews do this?**
Is it possible to hold one strong opinion as your own and also see other Jewish practises as authentic?

**How can we make Reform Judaism appealing to everyone?**

**Do you feel “nourished” by Judaism? What do you think you need to have your Jewish hunger suitable satisfied?**

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Sophie grew up in North West London, she attends the local Jewish School along with many of her friends from synagogue. Sophie’s family are members of one of the biggest Reform Synagogues in the UK which has an active youth provision. Sophie has regularly attended Cheder and other youth events at her synagogue whilst growing up. Sophie’s first RSY-Netzer event was Sheleg when she was in year 6 followed by Briyah. Sophie will be on Atid this summer, and despite what some people may think of her and her friends, they are really looking forward to spending two weeks in tents in the middle of a field! Sophie plays an active role in her community, teaching at Cheder, participating in the Hadracha Course and coming to services regularly. Her and her friends are already talking about Tour and can’t wait to sign up for Course Hadracha so they can be madrichim on Day Camp as they love working with younger chanichim.

James grew up in small community in the North and is one of very few young people in the ageing community. He loves school but as he is the only Jewish person he often feels like this is very apparent when in classes like Religious Studies. James has only ever met one other Jew who is his age, another boy from synagogue who he does not really get on with. James has signed up for Atid this summer as his synagogue have paid for him to go as his family are unable to afford the cost of Shemesh. Other than having his Bar Mitzvah James has had very little to do with Judaism. James has only ever spent time away from home when he's been on school trips with his friends. He has never been away before on his own. James does not know anyone who will be on Shemesh this summer, even though he is normally confident and outgoing, he is feeling slightly anxious about having to share a room with people he has never met for two weeks.

As madrichim, most of us are probably able to relate to bits of Sophie and James. Whether the relationship they have with their communities sounds familiar, or the relationship they have with their own Jewish Identity. Both of these individuals are chanichim that we come across every day in RSY-Netzer. Everyone is different, and has their own individual needs.

How do we support these young people on their journeys of development and discovery of their Jewish identity?

How can we support each person, ensure that each person is included and actually feels included, valued and listened to?
What sort of things do we already do on RSY-Netzer to ensure that we are doing what we can for people to be included?
What things do you bring to the role of being a madrich/a that could help chanichim feel comfortable in a new setting?
How do you bring these people together to create a community that includes everyone?

How can one community cater for so many different individual needs?

How can one community cater for those who feel homesick; have never been on RSY-Netzer before; love singing; have recently converted; can’t read Hebrew; have mental health issues; have physical disabilities; LGBTQ... the list goes on and on. So how can we ensure that we are balancing everyone’s needs whilst creating a community too?

Martin Buber said ‘In the beginning is the relationship’. Buber was an Austrian Jewish philosopher well known for his distinction between I–Thou and I–It relationships: The attitude of the “I” towards an “it” is the relationship with an object, the relationships we have with the many different its in life. On the other hand the relationship of “I” towards “Thou” refers to the world of relations, not objectifying any “it” but acknowledging a real relationship in the spirit and mind, whether this is a tree, a person, the sky, a community. In RSY-Netzer through creative peulot, conversations and building relationships with our chanichim we form these “I-thou” relationships and thus the community we know and love.

For me, one of the best things we do in RSY-Netzer is form relationships. When I visit communities as part of my job with the Reform Movement and RSY-Netzer I love talking to young people about the value of RSY-Netzer and chatting to them about why it could be a good experience for them to try out. I don’t talk about the dry slope skiing at Llangrannog, or the raft building and rock climbing at Bala, or the indoor activities at the Frontier Centre. I tell them how RSY-Netzer is a space where they will be listened to, respected and empowered. I tell them about dorm madrichim, the welfare structure and Course Hadracha. I tell them about informed decision making, about the conversations that continue after a significant peulah, between madrichim and chanichim at meal times. I tell them about the moment when 200 RSY-Netzer madrichim in a hall in Wales jumping up and down singing One Day by Matisyahu gives you shivers. I explain to them how RSY-Netzer is a place where they can be themselves, explore who they are and who they want to be. We create a community for a few weeks in the summer that is different and special for each person.

What will you do to make the experience special for the community you will be creating this summer?

How can you bring this thinking into your Hadracha across the summer? In mishpachat? In dorm time?
What are the prime times to include and empower every single chanich/a?
The tension between individual and community in Reform Judaism by Libby Burkeman

As we’ve seen, Reform Judaism has a lot to do with informed decision making.

We have already begun to address lots of questions, like…

What are our reference points for making decisions?
What information and ideas do we take in to account?
When balancing traditional practices with modern ideas, is it an "either or"?
Or could it be "both"? Or "neither"?
What makes this process Jewish decision making? Is there such a thing as Jewishly making a decision?

Reform Judaism clearly treasures the autonomy of the individual BUT we also see great importance in community—how can these dynamics work together?

How does your personal practice relate to your community?
How do you bring individual practice into community?

IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES:
1. Everyone comes in to the room with a different task to do that directly conflicts with everyone else.
2. The group has to all do the same thing, all standing up at exactly the same time, leaning on each other. Or a similar exercise but in pairs back to back…

How do these two experiences feel different? Which one did you prefer?

Is there a way to have a happy medium of doing what you want and using your individual autonomy to make decisions, without all having to do exactly the same thing?

Where does creating a community fit into this?

IDEA FOR ACTIVITY:
Madagascar – everyone stands on a sheet with things scattered around the room that they have to collect.
http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=QDXE9BpXZ9Y

How did that feel? With this one everyone had their own role to play, but they needed to work together to be successful. How can we relate this to our individual practice within a community?

What makes a community? What kind of community can we build that balances these tensions?
How many different definitions for “community” can you find?
Who is our community? What are all the different communities you are a part of?
Which of these words describe the communities you are a part of? Which are valuable? Which aren’t?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical</th>
<th>Reliance</th>
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<td>Friendship</td>
<td>Able to argue</td>
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<td>Shared humour</td>
<td>History</td>
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<td>Separateness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>Common interest</td>
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Hillel said: ‘Do not separate yourself from the community’. Why do you think this value was so strongly held in the Mishnah, 1800 years ago? What responsibilities and benefits are there as part of a community?

Watch The miniature earth project: http://www.miniature-earth.com/ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4639vev1

How does this make you feel? Who is the community in this video? What does that mean in terms of responsibility?

Looking at it the other way, what can you expect from your community?
Let's look at some different examples of Jewish communities created throughout the ages to see what possibly does and doesn’t work…

The Massada community - The zealots were the last Jewish stronghold against the Romans during the Jewish revolt in the first century CE. They moved to Masada after the destruction of the temple. They were against pagan practice in Israel and were very extreme in their religious practice and behaviour. They held out for 3 years but the Romans were building a camp at the base of Masada and were advancing successfully. Then, the leader Elazar Ben Yair said that they should all commit suicide. This was recounted by two survivors who said that the 1000 people who lived at the top of Masada burnt the fortress down and then killed themselves. 10 men were selected by drawing lots. Among the 10 they decided on the final person who would kill this last surviving group and then himself.

“Since we long ago resolved never to be servants to the Romans, nor to any other than to God, Who alone is the true and just Lord of mankind, the time is now come that obliges us to make that resolution true in practice…We were the very first that revolted, and we are the last to fight against them; and I cannot but esteem it as a favour that God has granted us, that it is still in our power to die bravely, and in a state of freedom.” (Elazar Ben Yair)
The synagogue seems to have been an important part of the community as columns were built and there are four layers of plaster benches around the synagogue. Ten names were found in the synagogue and it is thought these may have been the 10 selected men.

The First Kibbutz - Degania Alef was the first kibbutz established by Jewish Zionist pioneers in 1911 in Palestine, then under Ottoman rule. It was founded by a group of ten men and two women. The poet Rachel, A.D. Gordon, and Joseph Trumpeldor all worked at Degania. Moshe Dayan (later a senior Israeli military leader and politician) was the second baby born on the kibbutz and was named after Moshe Barsky, a kibbutz member killed in an Arab attack. They started the Kibbutz movement, founded on the basis of equality (work, people and consumption), freedom of the individual from material worries, and democracy (the abolition of all hierarchy and rank). For early chalutzim (pioneers) living on kibbutz, life was challenging. They were living in areas where the land needed a lot of work to cultivate and they had to defend themselves too. An ideal Kibbutz community consisted of communal meals, shared money; some even housed all their children in one building rather than with their parents. The early chalutzim were labour Zionists – they wanted to move to Israel, work the land and make it their own. For these young people their personal and national identities were inextricably tied up as one. Although they were still only in their teens/early 20s, they were working to restore a Jewish national life. Whatever the nation demanded of them, they would do – it was their duty to correct the faults of the past and iron out the changes that exile had caused in the national character of their people.

The Israelites rebelling in the desert – Exodus 32 reads: “And when the people saw that Moses was taking ages to come down from the mountain, they gathered in front of Aaron and said, ‘get up and make us a god to place before us, because who knows what has happened to Moses who brought us out of Egypt.’ Aaron said to them, ‘take your wives’ and sons’ and daughters’ golden rings and bring them to me.’ All the people took the golden rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took them and turned them into a molten golden calf. They said, ‘this is Israel’s god which brought us out of Egypt’ And when Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of it and proclaimed, ‘tomorrow will be a feast to the Lord’. They got up early the next morning and offered burnt-offerings and brought sacrifices, and everyone sat eating and drinking and being merry. And God said to Moses, ‘Go! Get down! Because your people who you brought out of Egypt have rebelled and acted corruptly!’

What is the context for this rebellion? The Children of Israel were tired, weary, had been wondering in the desert having escaped slavery in Egypt but were not convinced their new life was any better. Moses, their leader, had been absent for days up the mountain… What do you think happened in the community to lead them in this direction? How could it have been avoided? Can you reconstruct this community and play out a different ending? Was this community effective? Would you even describe this group as a community? What role did leadership play?
Upon

Ghetto- According to the Hagadah, “It is not only one that has risen up against us to destroy us. Rather, in every generation, they rise against us to annihilate us. However, the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand.” Thus, in 1943, the Nazis were the ones to “rise against us to annihilate us.” However, the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, inspired by the Passover story, rose up against the Nazis and demonstrated that a struggling community of half-starved Jews had the power to hold out longer than countries like Poland and France against the Nazi oppressors. As Mordechai Anielewicz, a leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, proclaimed, “The dream of my life was realized. Jewish self-defense in the Warsaw Ghetto became a fact. The armed Jewish struggle and the revenge became a reality. I am a witness to this grand, heroic battle of the Jewish fighters.”

“They took up arms, though no one gave them arms. They fought, though no ally fought with them. On this night of Passover, the Jewish birthday of freedom from oppression and slavery, they restored self-defense and power to the Jewish people.” (Rachel Avraham, unitedwithisrael.org)

Virtual community - JEDLAB started off as a robust Facebook Group that went from one member to 740 members. But it’s not just the size of the membership; it’s the quality and quantity of the conversations. JEDLAB say: The people here know and care deeply about Jewish education. Our best conversations can stretch to 50, 70, even 100 comments, spanning over numerous days, and involve people from all areas of Jewish life. Our members are vastly diverse: they work at a variety of organisations, and are planted all over the map. The denizens of JEDLAB hold all kinds of opinions, and are unafraid to make these opinions known. It’s very civil and respectful and we take the time to get to know one another and learn each other’s intellectual and spiritual contexts. Here are four reasons why you no longer have any excuse to join our kehilah (community):

1. Building strong relationships, 24:6. This is what Ron Wolfson says Jewish communal life is all about: “After more than forty years of living and teaching the Jewish way, I have come to an understanding about the essence of Judaism: It’s all about relationships.”
2. A highly efficient means to listen in. Most of us haven’t the time or energy or schedule space to get out and mix it with the people. With JEDLAB, you can do this instantly from your computer.
3. Conversations are authentic, honest, smart and in depth. We know and care deeply about the issues of Jewish education. Moreover, we are working hard to improve our communities and ourselves. We ask for help, float out ideas, discuss failures and successes.
4. Bulldozing the silos. Already JEDLAB is creating collaborations between Jewish professions who otherwise would never have met.

In each of these examples, how are the individual and community balanced in terms of their needs? Values? Importance?

Could you use each of these examples of communities, and others, in a peulah?

• How could you re-create what it would feel like to live there and be a member of that group?
• What kinds of decisions would they need to make?
• How would the decision-making process happen?
• How effective would they be?

In your life, does the individual or community hold more importance?

What about in RSY-Netzer?

Upon what kind of values do you want to build this community?
A great deal of the content of the Torah is really wonderful: fascinating, challenging narratives; powerful pieces of ethical exhortation; inspiring laws that are as relevant today as when they were written.

Lots of it is wonderful.

But certainly not all.

Some of it reflects a world far from our own lives – mundane, uninspiring and tedious. Worse, some passages in Torah express values and ideals so repugnant that they are, in the words of 20th Century British Rabbi John Rayner, “so plainly human… that to hold God responsible for them is a ‘profanation of God’s name’.

So what to do with Torah?

How do we understand the stories it contains – good and bad?

How do we relate to those sections that tell us what to do, many of which are long way from our own ethical instincts?

How do we cope with the fact that much of it is just so ugly?

The classical Jewish position tells us…

› that we can’t distinguish between bits of Torah at all. The work is to be treated as a unity, all of it with the same status, because it is a unity with a very special author – God.
› that there is a God, who cares how we behave, and chose to communicate divine will for us through the means of revelation of Torah – given at one moment in time, but of eternal truth.

The Torah, we are told by Moses Maimonides, the great Spanish Jewish scholar of the Middle Ages, was:
“given to us from Moses Our Teacher entirely from the mouth of the Almighty… It is not known how it was conveyed to him, except to Moses, to whom it was given, and he was like a scribe taking dictation.”

“Torah min HaShamayim”
(Torah from heaven)
or “Torah l’Moshe mi-Sinai”
(the Law of Moses from Sinai)

= every story should be read as ‘true’ and every law as binding – for all of them come directly from God.

So… our job is to engage with the text–to engage in interpretation of this core work to understand what the law means, to find out how best to meet divine will.

This is a model that has produced some of the most beautiful literature in the world, in the form of the Talmud and Midrash. These are the product of an obsession with, and love of, the text. And they are clever, and often inspiring works. But as a method of reading our texts for modern times, Torah min HaShamayim is deeply flawed…
• For one thing, it requires us to start with authorship rather than starting with the text itself – in fact, asking that we ignore many features of the text itself.
• When we start with the text itself, we see that it is not a unity but a collection of documents woven together. When we start with the text itself, we see that the authorship must be in question.
• Perhaps even more challenging is that this model essentially demands full buy in. It allows little room for differentiation between passages, little scope for different understandings of divine presence in the world – or the text. If one biblical instruction is a binding statement of divine will by virtue of its authorship, then the same must necessarily be true of the next commandment in the list, however abhorrent we may find it.
• When we approach Torah in this way we give it the ultimate authority for our worldview rather than asking it to reflect us.

Torah min HaShamayim therefore gives us no mechanism for privileging, for example, that which is ethical in Torah: that which is about care for those for whom we are responsible; about lending graciously to the poor; about being just and fair to all; about giving our best in the service of God.

It gives no way of privileging those over, for example, the law that a man who seduces a virgin must make her his wife by payment of a bride-price to her father… Torah min HaShamayim does not allow us to identify one as representing divine will while the other is a law which must be seen as a product of its time.

So what of Reform Judaism and Torah? What replaces Torah min HaShamayim for us?

We believe that the Torah is a human creation – written by our ancestors and inspired by their understanding of themselves and the place of God in their lives – so ‘divine’ in one sense - but utterly human.

This has some great advantages.

✓ For starters, the proposition that the Torah was created by human beings, and then edited together by other human beings, is almost definitely true. This position does not require us to ignore the evidence in front of our eyes, to be led by the theology rather than the text itself. It is intellectually honest.

✓ Recognition of the human origin of Torah allows the sort of differentiation between texts that Torah min-HaShamayim cannot accommodate. We can say that some laws have ‘eternal truth’ while others are a product of their time. The fundamental Jewish exercise is therefore very different – to engage with the text (and the world) to try to find that which we can call ‘sacred’.

BUT… The rejection of Torah min HaShamayim leaves another massive challenge:

If the Torah is a human book, why give it any special importance in our lives? Why read it in synagogue? Why attach any more significance to Torah than to Shakespeare, or the Beano?

That is truly the fundamental question of Reform Jewish life – to answer that question – why bother with Torah, with Judaism, at all?

To that question each of us must find our own answer.

I know mine – what is yours?
PRAYER AND LITURGY

What is Prayer? From Rabbi Jonathan Romain’s introduction to “Really Useful Prayers”

Let’s go for the official answer first and then examine some alternative ones.

According to Joseph Hertz, former Chief Rabbi, prayer is “an instinct that springs eternally from man’s unquenchable faith in a living God, almighty and merciful, who hears prayer and answers those who call upon Him in truth. It ranges from half-articulate confession of sin, to jubilant expression of joyful fellowship with God”. In other words, prayer is communion with God, a Jacob’s ladder joining heaven to earth, men and women trying to establish a relationship with their Maker, seeking out the awesome presence that we cannot define but sense is there. It is an acknowledgement that there is something more to life than what we can see and touch and manipulate – something that dwarfs humanity and transcends history.

The English term “to pray” comes from the Latin verb *precare*, meaning to entreat or supplicate, with the image of humans opening their hearts to God, arms open and on their knees (mentally if not physically). By contrast, the Hebrew term “to pray” comes from Hebrew verb *l’hitpalleil*, meaning “to judge oneself”. Here, prayer is an act of self-examination, not so much addressing God but oneself… I do not want to give the idea that Jewish prayer ignores God and is an act of personal therapy, but it does contain a strong element of looking at oneself in a critical way. Prayer-time can be the only occasion when we force ourselves to be objective, considering our existence and to what extent we live up to the ideals to which we say we subscribe, and resolving to lessen the gap between them.

Some are thinking neither of God nor of themselves but have a sense of community. They feel that this is the way to express their Jewish identity, enjoying the camaraderie that arises from coming to synagogue, knowing that everyone else there has given up the opportunity of doing dozens of other activities so as to share time together and recreate the words and atmosphere in which past generations of Jews have engaged. It is no accident that some key parts of the service require there to be a *minyan* (quorum) of ten adults present: we can always pray by ourselves, but there can be particular advantages to communal prayers. We merge ourselves with the people of Israel – both those in our immediate congregation and the Jewish community worldwide – and become the sound of the family of Abraham.

Another motive for prayer is as a direct response to events that occur in our life: be it the desire to give thanks after a spot of good fortune, or for the fact that we are still alive and enjoying relative health and security despite the many things that could so easily have gone wrong. Less happily, it could be the need to turn somewhere at times of trauma or despair. As Abraham Lincoln – who was not a regular church-goer – put it: “I have been driven many times to my knees, by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go”.

The Development of a Reform Siddur and Prayer
from Rabbi Danny Burkeman’s Companion to the RSY-Netzer Siddur

Historically, Jews were reluctant to write down prayers and give people a set order for how they should pray. However, over time it became clear that there was a need for a uniform structure, and so Saadia Gaon, in the 10th century compiled the first Siddur for general use.

The first Reform Siddur was produced in Hamburg in 1819. Writing in defense of its innovations, Rabbi Aaron Chorin drew on the Talmud to explain why the reforms to the Siddur were legitimate. In many ways we have the same challenges as those Rabbi Aaron Chorin faced in explaining these early Reform decisions. Here are Rabbi Chorin’s arguments for why it is legitimate to...

Cut out bits of the Siddur which were not considered “original”, but rather later additions:
Rabbi Aaron Chorin explained the editing of the liturgy by dividing the Siddur into different types of prayers. He began with the obligatory prayers (like the *Shema* and the *Amidah*), they originated with the Menagthic Great Assembly and so neither the content nor the language should be changed. However, the *Pesukei DeZimra* (the hymns of thanks and praise) was another issue entirely. For Chorin they had grown into a voluminous book which deserves “the cutting knife of the vintner who labours in God’s vineyard.” For Chorin it was better to say a few prayers with devotion, than many without.

Pray in your own language, not Hebrew, “so that the heart of the worshipper may know what the lips speak”:
In explaining the use of other languages, Meyer Israel Bresslau, one of the compilers of the first Reform Siddur, showed that in the Talmud it states that the *Shema*, *Amidah* and *Grace after Meals* may be said in any language. For example, the *Shema* may be said in any language because it says: “Hear O Israel”, which means hear and understand.

Use musical instruments in services: After the destruction of the Temple there was a sense within Jewish tradition that it was inappropriate to use music, as the people were in a constant state of sorrow. Leopold Stein explained that although music disappeared from the service, this was not due to any Rabbinic ruling and so it could be reintroduced. In terms of using instruments on Shabbat the rabbinic prohibition was related to the fear that one would do some “work” on the instrument, and so would break Shabbat. However, as Stein pointed out, as long as we do not craft or repair the instrument on Shabbat it appears to be halachically acceptable to use instruments on Shabbat.
The order and meaning of the sections of the service (page numbers from the MRJ siddur!)
Adapted from Rabbi Billy Dreskin and Cantor Ellen Dreskin

The warm-up consists of Birchat Hashchar (morning blessings, p.162-165) in the morning service, and P’sukei D’zimra (verses of song, p.172-197).

Bar’chus on page 216 – This is the official opening of a service and the communal call to prayer. It says: Give praise to God. The word, Bar’chus, comes from the Hebrew word, “berech”, which means means. This prayer says that we are ready to think about things that are so important, we are willing to bend our knee for them (in other words, we are ready to acknowledge that things like peace, kindness, generosity are more important than we are).

Ma’ariv aravim (in the evening, p. 316)/Yoter Or (in the morning, p.207) – This prayer looks at the ordinary world around us, and takes notice of its being a true miracle. It also notices that this miracle is ongoing – it is the continuous activity of a loving being which we call God.

Ahavat Olam (in the evening, p. 129)/Ahavah Rabah (in the morning, p.210) – After taking note of the miracle of Creation, we express gratitude for being allowed to become part of that creation, and acknowledge God’s love for the world.

Sh’ma, eg p. 212-216, – Judaism’s basic principle: God is one. And if God is one, then all humanity belong to one family, having all been created by the same God – a prayer, hope, dream. It also explores the tension between universal (all humanity) and particular (the Jewish people). The first paragraph, V’hat’ahat, tells us to love God completely, all the time, so everything we do or say should reflect the dreams/visions associated with a belief in God. It teaches us to make Judaism last forever: each generation teaching it to the next. The second paragraph deals with the tension between whether positive actions should be rewarded or negative ones punished, and the third paragraph remembers leaving Egypt and talks about wearing a tallit.

Mi Chamocha – This is the song the Israelites sang after crossing the Red sea. It is taken from the book of Exodus, chapter 15. It talks of how God redeemed us from Egyptian slavery, and also now looks over us and protects us. We must never forget that we were once slaves. In this way, we will always respond to the suffering of those around us. Did it really happen? Doesn’t matter! What is important is that we learn and live its lesson.

Hashkiveinu (in the evening) – This prayer asks God for peace and protection in all its varieties: peace from hatred, plague, war, famine, and personal pain. Thanks God for keeping an eye out for all of these.

The Amida
d means the “Standing” prayer. On Shabbat it can be found on p. 221-234, and p. 73-86 for the daily service. It’s also called “Ha’t’filah”, “the Prayer”, because it’s so important. There are three sections with which we ask God for things during the Amida:

1. **Praise** (we always butter someone up before asking for a favour).
2. **Petition** (this is w here we do our asking).
3. **Thanks** (a little gratitude could go a long way when asking a favour)

Avot v’imahot (from the praise section) – avot v’imahot means “ancestors” (lit. “fathers and mothers”). This prayer speaks about Abraham, Sarah, Rebecca, Isaac, Jacob, Rachel, and Leah, symbolising all our ancestors who served God by creating and sustaining Judaism. One explanation for why it says “God of Abraham, God of Isaac…” (repeating “God of…” each time) is that each ancestor had their own conception of what God is… and you can too – it’s also ok to have your own conception of God!!

G’vurot (also from the praise bit) – This prayer commends God for doing great things, like giving us life, keeping us alive, healing the sick and freeing those who are captive. Does God really do these things? Maybe? Maybe through us? Maybe these are things that we could be asking for in the petition section of the Amida?

K’dushah (more praise) - “Holy holy holy”, God is great, is holy,forever and ever.
Nuff said.

V’shamru (praise again) – This comes from the Torah, from the book of Exodus, 31:16-17. This is God’s commandment that all Israel observes Shabbat. Shabbat is a… Sign of the covenant. Observing Shabbat is our sign to God that we count ourselves in. Way of acknowledging that we are not the world’s creators; God is. Good time to slow down and smell the roses.

Petition Prayers – In the weekday service, there are lots of blessings here, asking for things, including: knowledge, the ability to change, forgiveness, freedom, justice, protection of Jerusalem, accepting our prayers. You could go wild and be creative and thinking up new and amazing petitions.

R’tseh (the thanks bit) – We ask that what we have just expressed has been ok, and that our offering has been acceptable.

Modim anachnu lach (more thanksgiving) – this prayer’s themes are like the G’vurot earlier in the Amida. It thanks God for giving us life, for protecting that life, and for showering us with gifts every day we are alive.

Shalom Rav (in the evening)/Sim Shalom (in the morning) – Praying for peace. These blessings are a little sneaky: Sim Shalom = “Please, God, grant us peace”, sneaking petition into the thanks section. Shalom Rav is even sneaker. It says, “Thanks, God, for giving us peace” (as if we already have it). But it’s really saying, “Please, God, help us to create a peace like the one you’ve told us about.”

Silent Prayer at the end of the Amida – It used to be that the entire Amida was read silently. When you were finished, you could use the rest of the time for silent prayer. We include this moment here, before Yihiyu l’ratson and Oseh Shalom (eg p.139 or 234) to give people that opportunity…

This is where the TORAH SERVICE goes (eg on p. 235-257). There is always a Torah service on Shabbat and you can also do one on Mondays or Thursdays (when historically there were market days in Temple times).

Aleinu, p. 310 – This prayer describes our partnership with God. We pray that this partnership will bring God to all peoples, and so make our vision for a perfect world come true. The Reform movement has an alternative version (p. 312-313), showing more acceptance of diversity and difference.

Kaddish, p. 314-316 – This prayer never mentions death, but we recite it in remembrance. By doing so, we say the following: Despite the pain and death in our world, we insist on proclaiming God’s existence. In other words, we insist on saying that life is good and worth living, holding fast to our dreams and ideals of what life could be in the best possible world. Kaddish is in Aramaic, an ancient language which Jews spoke before Hebrew became the main day-to-day language.

Then sing a song, read something meaningful, or spark an interesting discussion to finish!

27
God  By Jeremy Tabick

Names are extremely important, both in the biblical tradition and today. Knowing someone’s name is a sign of intimacy and relationship—calling someone “Hey you!” is not a great way to interact with others! It also entails a kind of power over someone. After all, if I call your name in a crowded room—you will look up.

In many of the older Jewish traditions, names are even more important: they describe their owners. For example, Ya’akov (Jacob) is called so because he is a trickster (in the Hebrew related to ḥ-k-v, a root meaning ‘deceive’). People often also changed their names when significant events happened, for example Ya’akov is renamed Yisra’el (Israel) when he fights the angel, representing a new chapter in the life of him and his people.

God has many names. Why would we need more than one? The truth is, each name has its own meaning, connotations and purposes. A name of God can:

• Represent a different aspect of God (perhaps one name represents a God that you can speak to during prayer, another represents the king of the heavenly host etc.);
• Reflect the relationship to God of the person who uses it (for example, if I feel very connected to the parent-child relationship metaphor for me and God, I may be very comfortable using the language of Avinu Malkeinu, Our Father Our King);
• Be tied to a specific time in history (since names change over time—for example, God had to reveal the Tetragrammaton [see below] to Moses in Exodus 6).

Our relationship with God is limited by our language: we can only use human terms to describe God, though when we do so we should be aware that they are only approximations.

I believe this is even true of people. I can use the name “Joe Bloggs”, and it accurately conveys the impression of who I am talking about. But it is, of necessity, a convenient shorthand. I am missing out on all the parts of what makes Joe Joe—his musical talent, for example, or his moustache, or his very annoying laugh. I might even come up with a different name for Joe that represents something about him, like “Moustache Man”. By using Moustache Man instead of Joe, I am using a different set of features to identify him. Each name is only a crude approximation of who Joe Bloggs actually is. Any language I use will necessarily fall short because there is so much about Joe that I can’t really express in words.

This is why we have so many names of God… For example…

YHWH ויהיה
Called the Tetragrammaton, this is the Four-Letter Name of God. It has no vowels and so cannot be pronounced (if you see this word with vowels, then they are to remind you to read “Adonai” instead of what's written). It is often considered to be related to the Hebrew root היה (to be) and therefore could mean roughly, if anything, “The One Who Is”, and is often translated as “Eternal”. It is the holiest name of God and some people believe it cannot be erased or thrown away once written.

Elohim אלהים
This is also a common name of God in the Torah, which means literally “Gods” or “Powers”. Although it is a plural word that can refer to lots of Gods (for example, the gods of Egypt), it is also used to mean the One God, perhaps because God is equal in power to all the gods of the other peoples combined. Various other forms of this word are commonly used, for example “Eloheinu” (Our God), “Eloheichem” (Your [plural] God), “Elohai” (Almighty), “Elohai” (My God) and “El” (God).

HaShem חם
HaShem just means “the Name”. It is what many people say if they want to avoid using any holy name of God, especially the Tetragrammaton.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu ה’قدس ברוך הוה
Could be translated as the Holy Blessed One. This is the most common name for God used in rabbinic literature (such as Talmud). It is also translated as “the Holy One—Blessed be He”.

28
Modern theology versus ancient mythology

For many Jews today, there is a giant disconnect between what we understand God to be and what the *Tanach* (Bible) and the *Talmud* (compilation of rabbinic debates and Jewish law – *halacha* – from the 2nd-6th centuries) understand God to be. For example, the God of *Tanach* can be vengeful and arbitrary (look at the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4); whereas today people often understand God to be ultimately fair and kind.

Here are some other words that theologians today use to describe God:

- Immutable (unchanging)
- Omnipresent (all-pervading)
- Omnipotent (all-powerful)
- Omniscient (all-knowing)
- Non-corporeal (without body)
- Infinite (without end)

These seem in stark contrast with biblical understandings of Israel, the land where God dwells (Deuteronomy 11:12); of God’s finger (Exodus 8:15); of God’s learning about human nature (compare Genesis 6:5 to 8:21); of God fighting sea monsters (Psalm 71) and many other examples…

So how are we to reconcile the huge differences between

THEOLOGY (the study of God today) and

MYTHOLOGY (the way *Tanach* understands God)?

There could be several answers:

1. **The God of Tanach and the God of today are actually the same.** Any physical attributes, like hands and fingers, or hatred, ascribed to God are actually just metaphors—they should not be taken literally (Rambam/Maimonides takes this view).

2. **God in the Tanach is actually a literary device** — a member of the cast of characters that make up our foundational stories. It does not actually describe the God that we worship and pray to.

3. **God has changed over time.** God used to act in the world through great miracles, used to be vengeful. But now God has withdrawn and only acts subtly if at all and is the merciful God we would like to believe in (modern theologian Yitz Greenberg takes this view).

4. **God is the same** — but the way in which we experience God and describe that experience has changed. In the *Tanach*, God is expressed in human terms because that is what spoke to people back then. Now it does not so we use non-human terms like omnipresent.

Questions for you and your chanichim:

- How close is the God of *Tanach* to the God you (or people you know) believe in?
  - How close is the God of modern theologians to the God you believe in?
- What happens if you don't believe in God—does that mean the whole Torah is meaningless for you?
  - How will you incorporate all sorts of different beliefs about God in your programme?
- How will you refer to God on camp? In the masculine, in the feminine, in non-gendered language? In English or Hebrew? Does it matter? Why?
  - Do you think talking about God in human terms is helpful or misleading?
- Why are people in our society so afraid to talk about God? What does this say about us? God? our society?
Ritual and mitzvot: being commanded by Rabbi Debbie Young-Somers

This is what rituals are for. We do spiritual ceremonies as human beings in order to create a safe resting place for our most complicated feelings of joy or trauma, so that we don't have to haul those feelings around with us forever, weighing us down. We all need such places of ritual or safekeeping. And I do believe that if your culture or tradition doesn't have the specific ritual you're craving, then you are absolutely permitted to make up a ceremony of your own devising, fixing your own broken-down emotional systems with all the do-it-yourself resourcefulness of a generous plumber/poet.

Does Jewish ritual feel for you like “a resting place for our most complicated feelings”? Do you think it could? Have you ever created your own ritual for a specific purpose? How would you think about creating a ritual?

Rituals are wonderful! Rituals are one of our most powerful tools of Jewish life. In just a few minutes they can change reality. They can transform us from one status to another. Rituals deepen and delight and ease grief. They shape, express and maintain relationships.

D.I.Y. Rituals by Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner

Can you think of a ritual we do with others, or something that may “shape, express and maintain relationships”?

Standing at Sinai, the Jewish people heard God reveal the Torah. Through study, we become aware of God’s mitzvot, commandments, that call to us even though we live in modernity... Though all the mitzvot are open to us as to all Jews, the Reform movement believes that changing times affect the way we understand the mitzvot. We respond to the call of Torah in two ways: out of the ever-growing body of interpretation by the eternal community of the Jewish people, and out of our individual understanding of what is holy in our own time. Study, prayer and reflection on our actions will help us offer informed responses to the Torah’s call to do God’s will in our days. Such responses will help us transform a life too often lived exclusively in a state of chol, ordinariness, into a life filled with kedushah, with holiness. We want to deepen the Jewish content of our lives not only to enrich our own existence, but to enhance the quality of the communities and the lands in which we live. Reform Judaism calls us to help transform our culture and our world.

How do we respond to Torah in a way that is appropriate for today? Do you feel like this is even the task or aim?

How much of your life feels like “chol” (ordinariness), compared with that which feels “kadosh” (holy)?

How could we create more holy moments or experiences, to “enhance the quality of the communities...in which we live”?

For us, halachah is and must be transformed from an externally imposed legal system to the responsible, disciplined, pluralistic and rabbinically guided response of individuals and communities to their covenantal obligations. It is not a straitjacket fashioned and imposed by others but a chosen, mitzvah-strewn path through life, reflective of Jewish learning and under constant maintenance and renewal. In that sense, we are a profoundly halakhic movement.

What is Reform Judaism by Rabbi Tony Bayfield

Do you think we need to feel a commitment to these obligations, however we reinterpret them? Can you choose to feel commanded by something?

How could we re-evaluate and renovate halachah so that it is under “constant maintenance and renewal”?

Do you feel connected to halachah (traditional Jewish law)?

Rituals and mitzvot, the doing parts of our Judaism, work differently for each of us. But they serve crucial purposes of supporting us through the highs and lows of life, but also of bringing daily mindfulness, and ethical behaviour in action into reality. All mitzvot take on a different flavour when our sense of them isn’t one of obligation because we believe God commands us through Torah, but because we understand what they add to our lives, and therefore, perhaps, what God intended us to bring into the world through them.

A Chosen people or a Choosing people?

As Reform Jews we do not generally see Torah or halachah as a binding set of God’s commandments, and so mitzvot and rituals take on a new and exciting possibility.

If we are not commanded not to eat pork, or to keep milk and meat separate, or to light Shabbat candles, what value do they add to our lives if we try and observe them? Can we hear God’s voice in their practices?

Reform Judaism is NOT Judaism light. It is NOT about being able to do less, or ignore the bits we can’t be bothered with. Reform Judaism is about thinking deeply and experiencing widely so that we can make informed decisions about what our observance and theology will look like. These practices differ from individual to individual, and community to community, and always have done!

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1 Said with caution for if we claim to know the thoughts, will or intention of God we perhaps go beyond our own abilities.
When the world was created, Shabbat said to the Holy One, “Ruler of the universe, every living thing created has its mate, and each day has its companion, except me, the seventh day. I am alone!” God answered, “The people of Israel will be your mate.” When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, the Holy One said to them, “Remember what I said to Shabbat: The people of Israel will be your mate. It is with reference to this that My fourth commandment for you reads: ‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.’” (Genesis Rabbah 11:8)

Six days a week we humans use time. We value it as a means to an end. Time “well spent” for us is time that helps us acquire something. Yet to have more does not mean to be more. Indeed, there is a realm of time where the goal is not to have, but to be; not to own, but to give; not to control but to share; not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things, becomes our sole concern.

The seventh day rights our balance and restores our perspective. It is like a palace in time with a kingdom for all. It is not a date, but an atmosphere.

The seventh day, we celebrate time rather than space. Six days we live under the tyranny of the things of space; on the seventh day we try to become attuned to holiness in time.

It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time: to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world. (Adapted from Abraham Joshua Heschel)

A great pianist was once asked by an ardent admirer: “How do you handle the notes as well as you do?” The artist answered: “The notes I handle no better than many pianists, but the pauses between the notes, ah, that is where the art resides.” In great living, as in great music, the art may be in the pauses. Surely one of the enduring contributions that Judaism made to the art of living was Shabbat, “the pause between the notes.” And it is to Shabbat that we must look if we are to restore to our lives the sense of serenity and sanctity that Shabbat offers in such joyous abundance. (Likrat Shabbat)


What does your “to do” and “not to do” list look like for Shabbat? How is it different from the rest of the week? Compare your list with a friend – to create community how much do your lists need to have shared ground?

What could we do on RSY-Netzer to include each of the following in our Shabbat...

- The Mitzvah of Oneg (Joy)
- The Mitzvah of Kedushah (Holiness)
- The Mitzvah of Menuchah (Rest)
- The Mitzvah of Refraining from Work
- The Mitzvah of Preparing for Shabbat
- The Mitzvah of Hachnasat Orchim (Hospitality/Welcoming guests)
- The Mitzvah of Giving Tzedakah (charity)
- The Mitzvah of Hadlakat Nerot (Lighting Shabbat candles)
- The Mitzvah of Kiddush
- The Mitzvah of Blessing Children
- The Mitzvah of Hamotzi
- The Mitzvah of Birkat Hamazon
- The Mitzvah of Congregational Worship
- The Mitzvah of eating three meals, including Seudah shlishit (the third meal)
- The Mitzvah of Torah Study
CASE STUDY 2: KASHRUT (KOSHER)

“You are what you eat” so it's hardly surprising that groups and faiths around the world have created boundaries and community identities through food. What and how we eat reflects our Jewish community, but it also reflects Jewish ethics, whether it is about honouring the land, or honouring animals.

There has been a lot of debate around kosher slaughter recently. The Reform Movement is an active member of Shechita UK, and many Reform Jews only eat meat killed by Shechita methods. This is a method traditionally believed to be the quickest and kindest method, and while campaigners may favour stunning, stunning leaves around 9% of animals half-stunned and does not require the slaughterer to take personal responsibility for the swift and respectful slaughter of the animal. Whatever your approach to meat-eating and Shechita, (which represents a tiny percentage of animals killed for meat in the UK) the Reform Movement has an additional serious concern for the welfare of animals whilst alive.

| Where to find Kashrut in Torah: Deuteronomy 14:3-29, Exodus 23:19, Exodus 34:26, Deuteronomy 12:23-25 |

Ethical Kashrout – useful introductions:

b) What is Eco Kashrout from the Shalom Centre: [https://theshalomcenter.org/node/1284](https://theshalomcenter.org/node/1284)
c) Organic AND Kosher?: [http://www.biblicalfoods.co.uk](http://www.biblicalfoods.co.uk)

Priorities for your Kashrout Observance

Put a star by all top priorities -*
Put a circle by all middle priorities - ○
Put an x by all low priorities - X
If you think of an observance that isn’t on the list, add it at the bottom

- Eat vegetarian
- Abstain from all pig products
- Separate milk products from meat products
- Observe a minimal waiting period between eating meat and dairy
- Look at the ingredients to determine whether food is kosher
- Refrain from eating shellfish
- Avoid using eggs that contain blood
- Eat only kosher varieties of fish
- Separate your dishes for dairy and meat use
- Eat only kosher meat
- Acquire cookware/dishes that have had no contact with non-Kosher food
- Eat only foods with a hechsher (Kosher certification)
- Abstain from all meat products
- Order only vegetarian dishes at non-Kosher certified restaurants
- Eat only free-range and organic meat

Test your kosher species knowledge with babaganewz:  [http://babaganewz.com/games/is-it-kosher](http://babaganewz.com/games/is-it-kosher) ... Kosherland the game!

What would you want to be in a game that explored Reform Jewish Kashrout?

How would you help chanichim make informed choices through it?
The Environment
By Libby Burkeman

When God created the first person, they went with God where they were warned about all the trees in the Garden of Eden where God said, “See my creations, how beautiful and balanced they all are… and all I created I created for you. Now be careful that you don’t ruin and destroy my world, because if you ruin it, there will be no-one to repair it after you.” Kohelet Rabbah 7:13

From creation we are instructed in the importance of balance. When we use energy and resources how do you make sure that a balance is maintained?

Bal tashchit is a commandment against unnecessary waste and destruction:

Righteous people… do not waste in this world even a mustard seed. They become sorrowful with every wasteful and destructive act that they see, and if they can, they use all their strength to save everything possible from destruction. But the wicked… rejoice in the destruction of the world, just as they destroy themselves. Sefer HaChinuch 529 (a 16th century book about commandments by an important scholar)

Not only one who cuts down a fruit tree, but anyone who destroys household goods, tears clothing, demolishes a building, stops up a spring, or ruins food deliberately; all these people violate the prohibition of Bal Tashchit, ‘do not destroy’. Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah, the Law of Kings 6:10, translated by the Big Green Jewish website.

Why do these texts tell us that we shouldn’t waste? Do they show different types of waste and their impact? What behaviours can we take away from these texts and our own practices?

The Union for Reform Judaism’s website declares: “To be a Reform Jew is to hear the voice of the prophets in our head; to be engaged in the ongoing work of Tikkun Olam; to strive to improve the world in which we live.” So...

The best remedy; For those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy, is to go outside. Somewhere where they can be quiet, alone. With the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as happy as it should be, And that God wishes to see people happy, Amidst the simple beauty of nature. As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that then there will always be comfort for every sorrow And I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles. Anne Frank, The Diary of a Young Girl, Wednesday, 23th Feb 1944

What are the practical implications of this in our lives today? The Reform Siddur instructs us that it is our duty to not only respect the world, but to repair it through our actions, but what does this really look like to us and to our chanichim?

Jews should be in the forefront of the battle for nature. Judaism is the religion of unity, of oneness – in modern parlance, holistic. Judaism is concerned with life. Life is sacred, yet the world is killing life, destroying species. Lands of milk and honey are becoming lands of desert and dirt. God made the world and ‘behold it was very good’. He told us to look after it, not to destroy, not to waste. Yet we are committing sin after sin against creation. Aubrey Rose in the Jewish Chronicle, January 20th 1989

We, the family of Israel, carry a sacred responsibility for this our fragile planet, the glory of Your creation. You have made us stewards of the land, protectors of the seas and guardians of the air we breathe. Let us not poisonous destiny with selfishness or presumption. Let us draw deep from the living waters of Torah, humbly devoted to respect for all Your creatures and reverence for all Your creation. Let our actions each day help repair Your world, for this is our holy task. O God, help us remember that we are guests in the world, for Your name’s sake. Extract from Prayer for Responsibility for Justice and the Environment, MRJ Siddur

Ideas for RSY-Netzer: We have just read how we are instructed to look after our environment and how important the balance is between using and destroying our resources and how relevant this is to us as Reform Jews. But how can we take this to our events?

Carbon is one of our precious resources and one that we also exploit a lot. Why not try and ration carbon during your event and see the impact it has. This could run through a whole day or even longer. There are lots of resources with suggested amounts of carbon that are used for different activities and coupons that you can give to chanichim in exchange for certain activities. One of these ideas originally came from The Ministry of Trying to do Something About it, The Big Green Jewish created their own version, which is friendly for machanot, this isn’t currently on-line but we have a copy available in the office.
REFORM JUDAISM AND VEGETARIANISM

By Joe Grabiner and Gabriel Pogrund

One generation goes and another generation comes; but the earth remains forever. 
Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 1:4

As Reform Jews our first question is not ‘should we be vegetarian?’ Our first question is ‘As Jews in the modern world how must we eat?’ The extensive laws of kashrut make clear to us that consuming food, especially animals, is not a free for all for us Hebrews. There are restrictions to our gluttony and this is where we start the conversation. Our aim is to consider this long held tradition of dietary restrictions and through these enact our Jewish values as effectively as we can in the modern world.

Our decision making starts with text. We’ll consider two main subjects: the welfare of animals, and humanity’s responsibility for the world. These are the two issues that get right to the centre of the discussion of how we should eat.

### Our Responsibility to Animals

**Genesis 23:4**
If you see your enemy's donkey lying under its burden would you refrain from helping him? You shall surely help along with him.

From this verse we learn of the mitzvah of Tzar Baalai Chayim - care for all of God’s creatures.

There are many rabbinic commentaries that go on to suggest that you should not do what is cruel to animals.

**Exodus 23:12 (from the 10 commandments)**
Six days you may do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, in order that your ox and your donkey shall rest, and your maidservant's son and the stranger shall be refreshed.

It is clear that domesticated animals are to have a rest on Shabbat too- they are part of the household.

**Deuteronomy 25:4**
You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads the corn.

Rabbi Dr Joseph Hertz notes in his commentary on this verse: “This prohibition applies to all animals employed in labour, and not to the ox alone. …It is a refinement of cruelty to excite the animal’s desire for food and to prevent its satisfaction”


### Our Responsibility to the Earth

**Genesis 2:15**
Now God took the man, and God placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.

Humanity’s role is to be stewards over the world.

**Deuteronomy 20: 19 – 20**
When you are trying to capture a city, do not cut down its fruit trees, even though the siege lasts a long time. Eat the fruit, but do not destroy the trees; the trees are not your enemies. You may cut down the other trees and use them in the siege mounds until the city is captured.

From these verses we learn of the mitzvah of Bal Tashchit - do not waste.

**Midrash Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) Rabbah 7:20**
Upon creating the first human beings, God guided them around the Garden of Eden, saying; ‘Look at my creations! See how beautiful and perfect they are! I created everything for you. Make sure you don’t ruin or destroy My world. If you do, there will be no one after you to fix it.’

More texts to check out:

- There’s a great story about Tzar’ar Ba’alai Chayim (treating creatures with respect) in the Babylonian Talmud (Bava Metzia, 85A) surrounding Rabbi Judah. He was punished and the Talmud suggests that this was because previously he had been cruel to a lamb before it was going to slaughter.
- On the subject of Bal Tashchit (not being wasteful) there is an amazing case regarding Rav Chisda. It is said (Bavli Bava Kama, 91b) that whenever he had to walk between thorns and thistles, he would lift up his garment and rip his skin rather than his clothing, since nature would cure his skin but not his clothes. Were his clothes to rip then the resources to make them would have been wasted.
So, what’s the problem with my chicken schnitzel then?

We now know what our tradition has to say. It seems like we must commit ourselves to both causing as little harm to animals as we can, especially when it is not needed, and looking after the planet for future generations.

But, we need to know what the modern day realities of the meat and fish industries really are. Is it possible to eat meat and fish whilst upholding the ideas of Tza’ar Ba’alai Chayim and Bal Tashchit?

Energy Wastage and Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Industrial Meat/Fish Production:

In 2006 a UN report found that Cattle-rearing generates more global warming greenhouse gases, as measured in CO2 equivalent, than transportation. “Livestock are one of the most significant contributors to today’s most serious environmental problems”. (UN Food and Agriculture Organization official Henning Steinfeld) http://www.an.org/apps/story.asp?storyID=20772&%20U2rOj15r3qW

Producing one kilogram of beef leads to the emission of greenhouse gases with a warming potential equivalent the amount of CO2 emitted by the average European car every 250km. The production of that kilo of beef consumes 169 megajoules of energy – enough to light a 100 watt bulb for 20 days! On top of this, meat requires refrigerated transportation and storage and extensive packaging. A third of the world’s cereal harvest and over 90 per cent of soya is used for animal feed, despite inherent inefficiencies. It takes more than 10 kilograms of grain to produce one kilogram of beef. Taken from ‘the internationalist’ December 2008 edition

Grazing occupies 26% of the earth’s ice-free terrestrial surface, and feed crop production uses about one third of all arable land. Hashtag waste. The consumption of animal products contributes to more than one-quarter of the water footprint of humanity. In industrialised countries, moving toward a vegetarian diet can reduce the food-related water footprint of people by 36%.

Animal Conditions:

60 billion land animals are killed each year in order for their flesh to be turned into meat. The majority of these animals are confined to hard wire cages and gestation crates or packed by the thousands into dark, filthy sheds. Animals raised in these intensive farming systems are unable to raise their families, root around in the soil, build nests, or do anything that is natural to them. Most animals kept on factory farms will not see the sun or breathe fresh air until the day they are transported to a slaughterhouse to be killed. 50% of all the fish consumed each year are now raised on farms, where they spend their lives crammed together, bumping against each other and against the sides of their crowded cages. Unless practices change, it is predicted that by 2048 all species of sea fish will have disappeared forcing people to rely almost exclusively on farmed fish. Taken from the Jewish Vegetarian Society website: www.jvs.org.uk

Useful Links:

- Excellent article called ‘Less Meat, Less Global Warming’: http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/15/we-could-be-heroes/?hp
- Video made by PETA called ‘Meet your Meat’: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32IDVdgzmKA
- Video called ‘the meatrix’ about factory farming: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEkc70ztOrc

So then…How Must We Eat?

We believe that it is not possible to uphold our Jewish values and simultaneously rely on the hugely destructive, wasteful, and cruel meat and fish industries. This is why RSY-Netzer decided, in 2009 to become a vegetarian movement.

Extract from the PB&A:

RSY-N believes that Tikkun Olam is important. We strive to make informed and ethical decisions, to engage in social action to limit suffering in the world.

RSY-N notes that current industrial production of meat and fish almost always entails suffering and damage to the environment.

RSY-N therefore resolves that we are Ideologically opposed to the current industrial production of meat and fish and are therefore an ideological vegetarian movement.

The Vegan Question:

At Veidah 5774 (this past year) the movement discussed where we are with our understanding of our own vegetarianism. We agreed that the ideal situation for us would be total veganism as this would allow us even less contact with the meat industry (which we currently rely on for all egg and dairy products) yet we know our movement is not in the position to do this yet.

It’s not always easy

Although it would seem that our Jewish values demand us to abandon the meat and fish industries- we know that food is a complex thing. The food we eat is part of our culture, our family, and our celebrations. By deciding to abstain from some foods we are making a choice to move away from some of those cultural aspects of our Judaism- or perhaps make them harder to maintain. But, we must revolt against a destructive eating culture- even if sometimes that means saying goodbye to smoked salmon and cream cheese bagels on a Sunday and chicken soup on a Friday night too. Long live the quorn schnitzel!

Other Bits & Bobs:

- ‘Eating Animals’- an excellent book by Jonathan Safran Foer on this very question (Joe has a copy you can borrow).
- Joe’s email address is joegrabiner@hotmail.com. Gabriel’s email address is gabriel.pogrund@gmail.com. We are both very happy to chat, give further ideas and information, and help you with any peulah writing on this subject.
Egalitarianism and Feminism or Why do we all have to be so PC in Netzer?

By Rabbi Haim Shalom

If people know anything about Reform (Progressive) Judaism, then they usually know that we are “egalitarian”. They may not know what this means, but they certainly have a sense – men and women sit together during prayer services and women can be rabbis. They don’t really know why we are egalitarian, and they often don’t understand why Orthodoxy isn’t, but it is probably the most outstanding example of the difference in our Jewish practice to that of Orthodox Judaism, which the majority of UK Jewry view as “standard”.

Sometimes – members of our own communities don’t understand why egalitarianism is so important either. And sometimes they think that it is enough that everything is now open to women and we don’t need to do more. This really isn’t the case.

Egalitarianism is the perfect example of what Progressive Judaism is all about.

In many ways, the essence of the original idea for Progressive Judaism was to bring Jewish culture back to a “prophetic ideal” of justice (tsedek), peace (shalom) and loving kindness (chesed). The prophets of Israel thought that the point of being Jewish was that we should try and use our community and culture to make us into good people – meaning people who strove for a just and equal society – a society in which the weak were cared for, and we did our best to treat everyone with dignity and respect. Progressive Judaism posited that Judaism always evolved (progressed), and that if we were to stay true to the Prophetic ideal, we would constantly be searching to find out how to make our society more and more equal and just. And so – when Progressive Judaism was started it included women in services, but it was not truly egalitarian. Our egalitarianism has evolved – it is something which we have understood more of, as time has gone on and which we have embraced – this is exactly why it is the perfect example of Progressive Judaism – exactly because it was not there at the beginning of Progressive Judaism 200 years ago. Also, of course, egalitarianism is just another way of saying that we believe in equality – the guiding principle of the prophetic ideal. So Egalitarianism is one way in which Progressive Jews try and make Jewish communities as equal and as just as possible.

What does Egalitarianism mean in practice?

Is it enough that women can be rabbis?
Is it enough that men and women sit together?

I would like to suggest that the answer to both these questions is: NO.

It is not enough to stop with the most minimal understanding of Egalitarianism. This is why RSY-Netzer is not just egalitarian but also a feminist movement. Feminism is often wrongly attacked and misrepresented as believing that men are responsible for women being paid less, physically harmed or any other wrong to do with them. That is not Feminism, Feminism is very simply the movement that believes men and women should be equal and treated equally. We as a movement agree with this principle and understand that there are a lot of complex reasons why women are not treated equally in society. We would like to tackle all these reasons, not just treat the most obvious symptoms of inequality. It isn’t enough to allow men and women to pray together or to allow women to lead services and serve as rabbis – we need to address the causes for inequality...

Quiz time???
Where in the service do we remember our mothers as well as our fathers? Where don’t we?
Who are we still forgetting?
The main cause, which we need to address, is the collection of traditions that have led to women being marginalised from traditional Jewish life. For instance – because in the past men have written history from their perspective, our collective memory is much better at recording the experience of men than women, so we mistakenly think that men played a larger role in our history than women. In order to correct this – we need to recognise that women have been written out of history, and in order to try and make sure we don’t repeat this mistake, we need to restore women to that history. This is why in Progressive Judaism we have the custom of remembering our mothers as well as our fathers.

If we truly want to change society, it is not enough just to allow women to do what men do in the tradition – we need to build a tradition that is informed by women’s experience as much as it is by men’s experience. We need to look at every aspect of Jewish life and ask how this would look differently if it reflected a reality in which women and men had equally designed Jewish life – and the only way to do this is to make sure that women take roles of leadership in deciding what our communities look like.

This moves us to the next defining characteristic of Progressive Judaism that is encapsulated by the feminist movement within Judaism. Progressive Judaism believes we must act in order to create a society that fits the ideals our tradition holds dear: Freedom, Justice and Equality. This responsibility to act is usually termed “Tikkun Olam” in our modern movement.

In all that we do, we must make sure that we act in a way which increases the likelihood of creating a fairer, more equal community. This should seriously impact on our own Jewish practice.

For example...
In my synagogue (Menorah Synagogue in Manchester), though we claim to be committed to equality, the service is nearly always taken by the male rabbi, far more men than women wear tallit. Men are expected to wear tallit and kippah, while women are not. This creates a community where girls grow up to be women and internalise the idea that tallit is “not for them”. One could claim that this is not so important – that it is ok for women to have different customs from men, BUT – let’s stop and think what the tallit symbolises. The tallit is really just a holder for the tzitzit – the fringes at the corners. These fringes symbolise the fact that Jews take on responsibilities and wearing a tallit is an act which expresses the Jew’s willingness to be a responsible member of the community and fulfil those obligations. Is it possible that we think that it is unimportant whether women are full members of the community or not?

Can you think of other examples of times our communities are not as equal as we could or should be?

What about examples of the things we’re really good at making equal, fair and just?

What does the community we create at Shemesh look like – how are we actively trying to make a more equal future?

For further reading: Standing Again At Sinai – Judith Plaskow

Answers to Quiz:
We insert the names of our 4 mothers – Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah into the second paragraph of the Amidah. BUT on other occasions, we still use the term “Avoteinu” which literally means our fathers, instead of using “avoteinu v’imoteinu” – look out for it in the MRJ siddur.
We still don’t include Zilpah and Bilhah. Do you know who they were?
The Torah on sexuality – how does this influence us as Reform Jews today?

Leviticus 18.22 is a crucial passage; it forms the basis for why both Orthodox Judaism and Christianity denounce homosexuality or call it a sin. If you read the verse in the context of the whole chapter 18, it would be easy to interpret the Torah as saying that having sex with someone of the same sex, and sleeping with your son’s wife, or with an animal are equally wrong, although obviously (to the Reform Jewish mind) they are not. As Reform Jews today believe in the equality of gay and straight relationships, Reform rabbis have scrutinized Leviticus 18.22, even more so in the last few years in the lead up to gay marriage laws being passed in the UK and abroad. In 2013 gay marriage, as opposed to civil partnership, was legalised in the UK. Gay people can now have an official marriage in the UK with all the same privileges and recognition as straight people getting married. This is an incredible milestone on the path to equality for the LGBT community, and it also posed a question for Reform rabbis – can they marry gay people in synagogues?

Rabbi Steven Greenberg, the first openly gay Orthodox rabbi says: ‘For a religious person, the text is eternal and living, and is not subject to just one interpretation. “The Torah has 70 faces”, goes the saying. The text is still binding and I feel the words of God calling to me. But I hear this in a different way because I live in a different time. It’s impossible to understand the text while ignoring the people in the street. They must be heard, and if the rabbis won’t listen to the stories that each one of us carries, they will have difficulty understanding the text.’ For more on this see: [http://bit.ly/1PdlqVA](http://bit.ly/1PdlqVA)

The “Velveteen Rabbi” (a reform rabbi’s blog) says: ‘Some interpret the passage literally, arguing that it says men must not lie with men, period, end-of-story… If one interprets that passage literally, one must also regard as tamei (ritually unclean) anyone who touches a weasel, a mouse, a gecko or monitor lizard… When a man dies without a son, the literalist must order his brother to marry the newly widowed woman so she can bear a son in her deceased husband’s name. These are, after all, the laws… [I] would argue instead that we should follow the reinterpretation of these laws established by the rabbis and sages. The crowning achievement of the rabbinic age was the shift from reading Torah literally (the Torah says we must sacrifice so many animals on such a date each year so we must do so) to reading it metaphorically (since there is no Temple, we can fulfill the mitzvah by reading about the sacrifices instead). According to this mindset, halakhah evolves, and Torah can be reinterpreted to meet a changing world’. See more at [http://bit.ly/1nfftDF](http://bit.ly/1nfftDF)

Some interesting questions...

If God didn’t write the Torah word for word, do we have to believe in everything it says?
Who was this verse written for?

Reform Jews don’t believe the Torah speaks only to men. If you look again at the whole of chapter 18 it seems to only speak about men and sex. Does that mean lesbian relationships are acceptable according to the Torah?

Reform Jews also do not believe God wrote every word of the Torah, so does this one verse about men sleeping with other men have to be taken as ‘God’s word and therefore you can’t ignore it?’

One way to see Leviticus 18.22 is as a product of its time and not a law we have to live by today, to see it as outlining one model of sexuality in one ancient society and accepting that it does not have to be the model in ours.
So why is this in the choveret?! There are several reasons! The LGBTQ community’s ongoing struggle for equality in society is a social justice issue and we as Reform Jews can make a real difference, starting within our own community; we can make everyone feel welcome whatever their sexual orientation and gender identity. Another important reason is that RSY-Netzer is already leading the way in creating a youth movement which provides a safe space for all chaverim. At Veidah 2014 (5774), RSY-Netzer voted to have mixed sex corridors for all chanichim, and discussed having mixed sex dorms for madrichim. Although practically there are questions about whether this can happen, these discussions happening within RSY-Netzer are an integral part of the process of making our movement inclusive.

Understanding Trans: Understanding transgender/transsexual as a concept and a process can be complex, and there are many misconceptions about trans people. The common argument about people who are gender queer is ‘but at the end of the day you can think you’re a woman in the wrong body, but look at your genitals – you’re a man!’ This is not correct; in reality there are at least three ways to determine someone’s biology/sex:

1. Their anatomy (their genitals)
2. Their chromosomes (xy, xx, and also the combination xxy – intersex)
3. Their hormones – hormones are what most affect our physical presentation and in many ways could be the sole definition of sex. If you have hormone therapy, you can qualify in that gender to compete in the Olympics.

Working out someone’s sex is a combination of all these things. It is much more complicated than ‘just look at their genitals’. For example, if someone has a penis and both their chromosomes and hormones are female, they are defined as intersex not male.

A few tips on making your peulot safe spaces: Creating safe spaces isn’t easy. During a peulah a chanich/a may say something offensive to others present merely because they did not know or because they have not been taught that it’s not ok to use ‘gay’ as an insult, for example. Creating a safe space can mean challenging preconceptions and definitely means setting up an environment where everyone knows RSY-Netzer welcomes everyone and does not accept heteronormative assumptions. When running peulot, try not to split groups by gender, and in dorm time be aware that not everyone may be finding the dorm a comfortable and sexually neutral space. Just by being aware of this you will be able to run dorm times that aren’t gender normative; maybe do football with the girls and hot chocolate and chats with the boys...

Some key terminology: Gender identity: A person’s inner understanding of what gender(s) they belong to or identify with. Gender expression: external manifestation of a person’s gender identity, usually expressed through ‘masculine’, ‘feminine’ or gender variant behaviour, clothing etc. Sometimes what is expressed externally ‘matches’ a person’s gender identity, and sometimes it does not.

Bisexual: someone who is attracted to more than one gender and/or sex. Lesbian: someone who identifies as a woman and is attracted primarily to members of the same gender/sex. Gay: someone who is attracted to members of the same gender/sex. Usually used by men, though some women also use the term about themselves.

Intersex: a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the normative definitions of female or male. Visit www.isna.org for more information.

Heteronormative: the social, cultural, institutional and individual beliefs and practices that privilege heterosexuality as the natural, normal sexual orientation.

Transgender or Trans: an umbrella term for anyone who knows themselves to be a gender that is different than the gender they were assigned at birth. Some transgender people modify their bodies through medical means, and some do not. Transsexual: a person who feels that their gender identity does not match their assigned biological sex.

Cisgender: a person who is comfortable with the gender their were assigned at birth eg someone who is biologically male and identifies as a man. Gender Queer: a broad political and cultural identity that includes all who see their gender as falling outside of mainstream norms.

For more terminology, please visit www.keshetonline.org. We are very grateful to Keshet UK and Alma Smith’s training session for some of the information used in this article!
What does Reform Judaism have to say about how to treat “the Other”? *

Judaism teaches us that respect for the fundamental rights of others as each person's duty to God:

"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour" (Hillel, Babylonian Talmud).

Our beliefs about equality in Reform Judaism are often attributed to the idea that we are all "created in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27).

From that flows the biblical command,

"You shall have one law for the stranger and the citizen alike: for I Adonai am your God" (Leviticus 24:22)

"God said to Moses: Is there anyone whom I do not respect? Whether it be Israelite or Gentile, man or woman, slave or handmaid, whoever does a good deed, shall find the reward at its side" (Midrash Yalku Lekh Leka76).

"As a former refugee… I feel morally compelled to remain on the side of other uprooted men and women everywhere,” Elie Wiesel

We are reminded in Leviticus that it is forbidden to "stand idly by the blood of [our] neighbour" (Leviticus 19:16)

*Source: American Reform Movement: http://www.reformjudaism.org/

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - Exodus 22:20

Refugees in Israel— The Basics
In autumn of 2012, the Israeli government completed a fence along the Egyptian border. Since then, the flow of asylum seekers into Israel has nearly stopped.

Israel’s refugee recognition rate is less than 1%. Since Israel’s founding, the State has only recognized 157 refugees. For comparison, recognition rate for asylum applicants from Eritrea worldwide is 84.5 % and 74.4% for those from Sudan.

In December 2013 an amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law was passed.

Asylum seekers can be jailed for one year followed by indefinite detention in the Holot ‘open’ internment camp, while their asylum claims are processed. Though the camp is ‘open’ detainees are required to sleep there and check in three times per day. Capacity to hold 3,300 detainees who are provided with only basic medical and welfare services.

Some Facts
- Since 2005 some 60,000 asylum seekers have entered Israel. (FYI, a refugee is someone who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality.” Whereas, an asylum seeker is “someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated.” [www.unhcr.org.au])
- Approximately 90% of asylum seekers currently residing in Israel are either from Eritrea or Sudan.
- Eritrea is 179th place (last) on the 2012 Worldwide Press Freedom Index
- Sudan’s president, Omar Al Bashir, is wanted by the ICC for genocide and crimes against humanity
- The government does not individually examine asylum claims of Eritreans and Sudanese nationals.
- Refugees are issued “conditional release” papers protecting them from deportation and offering them “collective protection.”
- Collective protection does not afford any social rights and does not protect asylum seekers from detention.
- Asylum seekers are often referred to as "infiltrators”.

What does the current Israeli government say? MK Miri Regev (Likud): "The Sudanese were a cancer in our body." MK Danny Danon (Likud): "They are all infiltrators . . . We must drive them all out."

A little about the New Israel Fund... the New Israel Fund (NIF) helps Israel live up to its founders' vision of a state that ensures complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants. Our aim is to advance democracy, including freedom of speech and minority rights, and to fight inequality, injustice, and extremism that diminish Israel.
We never have forgotten the boat with 900 Jews [the St. Louis], having left Germany in the last weeks before the Second World War... traveling from harbour to harbour, from country to country, crying out for refuge. They were refused... Therefore it was natural... to give those people a haven in the land of Israel.”
- Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin on the decision to award citizenship to 66 Vietnamese refugees

“If we do not stop the entry, the problem, there are now 60,000 illegal infiltrators; could easily grow to 600,000 illegal infiltrators. This would inundate the state and, to a considerable degree, cancel out its image as a Jewish and democratic state.”
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, May 2012

Some Guide Discussion Questions:
1. What values inform Prime Minister Begin’s explanation? How are they different than those that motivate Prime Minister Netanyahu’s statement? Which do you identify with most strongly?
2. What role do Jewish values and experience play in the context of Jewish sovereignty (i.e. a modern nation-state)?
3. How do you personally relate to the question of demographics? (i.e. the balance between accepting refugees and the desire to maintain a Jewish majority)

What is going on in our own community?

Love the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt

Many reform communities, like Hendon run different projects. For example, the Alyth drop-in centre for recent refugees is now 2 years old, helping people with emotional support, practical skills, integration, finding jobs and learning English. One community helping another. Watch their video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7FNlszRIRw

Pe’ulah and Discussion Ideas

Focus on Words: Often a good entry point into this subject is the importance of words. It’s one thing to read the awful words of Regev and Danon, but when we put them in the context of what happened after they spoke these words we realise the power individuals and words can have. In July 2012, following speeches from Regev and Danon African refugee were attacked on a weekly basis including looting of shops.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7V8CkavsBy: Video intro to refugee situation and footage of Regev and Danon at 15.00

Example Activity/ Trigger
Give everyone a piece of paper and a pen and ask them to draw a ‘mind map’ of the word refugee i.e. when you write the word refugee in the centre of the page in a circle and lines coming out of that circle with words that the chanichim associate with the word refugee. Share examples of words and compare to words like ‘infiltrator’, ‘cancer’ and ‘national plague’. Q: What do they think would have been different if the MKs had used their words instead of the negative ones?

The definition of a refugee can be useful for remembering the context of why these people are in Israel (or the UK etc) in the first place, which is often all to easily forgotten: “[They must have a] well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” (1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees).

Remember the Progress NIF is making a lot of headway when it comes to the rights of refugees in Israel. It’s an uphill battle but it’s important that we remember the successes and that we can make a difference and change this reality:

Joint PatROLS and Dialogue Groups: NIF grantees (organisations that we support with training and funding and more!) Ahoti and ARDC, are conducting Dialogue Groups which were launched in response to increasing violence. The groups have led, among other things, to the establishment of joint patrols by asylum seekers and local residents in coordination with the police. The patrols are working to build solidarity and trust, creating a basis for ongoing cooperation. Many RSY-Netzer bogrim have visited and volunteered at the ARDC on Israel tour and Shnat-Netzer, so you could too!

Changing Public Attitudes: As part of ongoing efforts to influence public discourse and attitudes towards asylum seekers, ARDC held its sixth annual Refugee Seder in Levinsky Park in south Tel Aviv in March, with over 130 Israelis and asylum seekers participating. The event, with specially-produced Haggadot in four languages, focused on the refugees’ experiences crossing Sinai on their own tortuous routes to freedom. Check it out in this Ha’aretz article, titled, “For African migrants in Tel Aviv Exodus is more than distant memory”: http://www.haaretz.com/news/features/for-african-migrants-in-tel-aviv-exodus-is-more-than-distant-memory.premium-1.511522

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Nationalism, Zionism and Reform Judaism
By Robin Moss, UJIA Israel Engagement Educator

How do RSY-Netzer, Reform Judaism and Reform Jews feel about Israel?

COMMITTED

WRESTLING

TORN

LOVE

HUGGING

CONFUSED

CARE

RESPONSIBILITY

CHALLENGED

ENGAGEMENT

INFORMED

DIVERSE

CONCERN

IDEALISTIC

CONNECTED

STRUGGLE

HOPEFUL

INTERESTED

Just as nationalism has changed the whole world, Zionism has changed the Jewish world. It throws up enormous questions about identity, nationhood, the collective, community, political reality and the very nature of Jewish life today that all Reform Jews need to be grappling with.

For most of our history, Jews have felt connected to each other and to the Land of Israel. Jewish texts, Jewish prayers, Jewish poetry and Jewish dreams were all, for millenia, deeply rooted in an ideal of people and an idea of place: that Am Yisrael, the Jewish collective, existed across space and time; and that Eretz Yisrael, even as it remained a distant land, never visited by most Jews, was central to what it was to be Jewish. Of course, there was local solidarity and global diversity as well. Jews from one town felt part of the Jewish community of that place more than they did of others, and different Jewish communities around the world developed different religious, cultural, linguistic and organisational practices. But, before the modern era, it is fair to say that Jews, wherever they dwelt, felt part of something bigger than themselves, and felt that ultimately, redemption lay in the Land of Israel.

The onset of modernity (in the late 1700s/early 1800s) transformed Jewish life forever. Jews were freed from the physical incarceration of the ghetto, and now had to contend with the mental prisons centuries of oppression had created. Jews were made, at a stroke, citizens, yet still had to strive for full social acceptance. Jews could suddenly accumulate wealth far beyond what they (aside from the tiny minority) had dreamed before, yet had to negotiate the choices freedom and abundance provides. Jews could, for the first time, choose to identify with the community (or detach themselves from it). New ways of being Jewish sprung up, one after another... Secular Judaism, modern orthodoxy, Reform, Liberal, Conservative, Haredi, socialist Jews, communist Jews, Jews with only one Jewish parent, converts into Judaism – these and dozens of other Jewish identities were forged in the intoxicating atmosphere of modernity.

Across the Western world, another phenomenon burst onto the scene, nationalism. A potent new theory of political legitimacy, it totally reshaped the political map from the 1840s onwards. Simply put, nationalism is the claim that:

a) Nations – distinct, internally-connected groups of people – exist and are politically-relevant entities,
b) Nations have homelands – territories that they have a special claim to live in and have sovereignty over,
c) Therefore the world should be politically organised (as far as possible) around nation-states. These are territories where a particular nation establishes sovereignty.

Note that this does not mean that only that nation can live there. Indeed, national minorities within other nation-states are inevitable under nationalism. But the nationalist claim, that the nation has primacy over (say) the monarch, the church, the family, the city or the artificially-drawn boundary when it comes to deciding who gets to rule where, was powerful. And its effects can still be seen today. Many of the world’s states remain, in some sense, nation-states.

Jewish nationalism, Zionism, can therefore be seen not as an exception, a special case, but merely as the extension of this thinking to Jews. As we said at the beginning, Jews have always considered themselves to be a people bound together by some sense of common memory, common identity and common destiny, and have related to their homeland even through thousands of years of self-understood exile. Hence, the Zionist claim – that there should be a Jewish sovereign state in Eretz Yisrael – was intellectually coherent, ideologically appealing and emotionally inspiring for many Jews in the late-19th/early-20th centuries. The Zionist movement, driven by both the optimistic dream of Jewish self-liberation and the pessimistic fear of incurable European antisemitism, began to settle the Land, revive the Hebrew language, develop institutions, mount a political campaign and more.
In 1948, when the State of Israel came into being, it was, for Zionists, the logical conclusion of 2000 years of yearning, 100 years of nationalist writings and 50 years of practical preparation.

Cut forward 66 years... In one sense the world has changed, whilst in another it has remained the same.

Nationalism has acquired a bad name. It has been tarred with the twin brushes of racist fanatical extremism and colonial supremicism. Its intellectual foundations – the claim that there are such things as nations – has come under severe attack. And within some Jewish circles, the term Zionism has become a dirty one, referring to a right-wing, exclusionary, xenophobic ideology propagated by some within the Jewish world and in Israel.

Yet Israel continues to exist as an explicitly Zionist state, albeit with a 20% Arab minority, and a small number of Jewish Israelis, who disavow Zionism. The institutions of Zionism – the Jewish Agency, the JNF, the World Zionist Organisation, the World Zionist Congress etc – still exist, albeit in very different form to in the pre-State period. Jewish sovereignty is played out in the everyday dramas of the State, with all its triumphs, tragedies, visions, ventures, deliberations, disasters, animations and antagonisms. The Israel of 2014 is, for all its flaws, the greatest collective project of the Jewish people.

How should Reform Jews relate to Israel and to Zionism? Historically, Reform Judaism had a rather adversarial relationship with Zionism and Israel. The Reform mission, to be “a Jew at home and a man [we might today say person] in the street”, aimed to reconcile of Judaism as purely a religion, and was therefore totally at odds with the Zionist claim that Judaism is a nation. The vast majority of the pre-State Zionists were not orthodox, but their Judaism, today called chilona (secular), was a far cry from Reform as practiced in the UK, mainland Europe and the USA. Because Reform Jews were not present in any great number and without any great influence at the start of the State, many of its institutions were designed without sensitivity to the needs of Reform Jews, hence for instance the orthodox monopoly on state level Jewish matters.

Today, things are different. Reform Judaism, and RSY-Netzer, are explicitly Zionist, and are connected in multiple ways to the State and to Israelis. Travel to Israel, and engagement with the Israeli government and society, are common and unremarkable. The presence of Israelis in Reform communities in the UK is enriching. Yet many Reform Jews are uncomfortable with the nationalist claims of Zionism – scratch below the surface, and few, for instance, would probably say they feel a bond of nationhood with Jews from Australia, Canada, Libya, Russia, Israel, the USA, Brazil, India. Despite the branding of programming as “Reform Zionist”, many would struggle to articulate what this actually means.

Clearly a change has taken place here... Reform Judaism essentially became Zionist. Why did that happen? Can you think of any possible reasons? Some people understand this to be as a result of rising anti-Semitism and the Shoah, or possibly the recognition of previous idealism and rose-tinted glasses concerning the ability and safety of Jews to live around the world, or maybe it was because of a growing sense of peoplehood and a connection to klah Yisrael (the world-wide family of Israel)... what do you think?

What, then, should Reform Jews think about Zionism, in the sense of Jewish nationalism?

I think there are 3 key clusters of questions, and hence discussions, Reform Jews should be having about nationalism:

If not nationhood, what are the ties that bind Jews around the world together? In a world that still largely conceives of international political brotherhood and sisterhood in nationalist terms, is there a convincing alternative model that Reform Jews might feel more comfortable with? Essentially, I would throw the challenge back to Reform Jews. Zionism has done tremendous intellectual, spiritual and practical work to actualise a meaningful and vibrant expression of the Jewish collective. If one wants to reject it, one needs as compelling an alternative.

Zionism and Reform Judaism are both products of modernity. They both are answers to the fundamental question – what does it mean to be Jewish – that the modern world forces all Jews to confront. At both of their bests, they can and do coexist, cross-fertilise and mutually improve one another. For instance, Reform Jews who have made aliyah to Israel have catalysed important, positive changes within Israeli society, across a wide range of social justice causes. Similarly, Israelis living in the UK have contributed immeasurably to the life and vibrancy of Reform Jewish communities. What can Reform Judaism learn from Zionism (to start: its audacity, its energy, its vision-led sense of collective endeavour), and in return what can Zionism learn from Reform Judaism (to start: its tolerance, its embrace of diversity, its outward-facing commitment to a better society)? And how can this conversation be mediated so both sides feel empowered and on an equal footing?

Fundamentally, nationalism is about the collective. Nationalism allows people to feel part of something bigger than themselves, to be valuable for who they are within a wider enterprise and to exist within the particular without losing sight of the universal. Nationalism at its best gives rich meaning to each life, crafting a narrative of self-worth (individual and communal) and mutual benefit and emphasising solidarity without sacrificing individuality. Far too often, we have seen nationalism at its worst. A noble task for Reform Jews, I feel, would be to work within our nationalism, Zionism, to help it to be the best it can be. Just as RSY-Netzer should model to the rest of Reform Judaism what an inspired, ideological youth movement, driven by Reform values, can achieve, so the whole of the Reform movement should be a light amongst the Zionists. Zionist can be a force for great good. Reform Jews should ask themselves: how, together, can we make this vision a reality?
Britishness and Jewishness: being a minority and a stranger
Adam Overlander-Kaye – aok@reformjudaism.org.uk

“...Besides, I do have a dual loyalty: to the language of England and the history of Israel...”
(Clive Sinclair, Diaspora Blues, 1987)

British & Jewish?
The Few, Michael Freedland, the Guardian, October 1999
Anthony Julius, solicitor to the late Diana Princess of Wales, says that Judaism is even more important to him than the law. “It is a constituent part of my life. It is so essential to the sense of myself, as much as having sense of smell or sight.” He keeps the kosher dietary laws and belongs to an Orthodox synagogue. “I am inquiring and committed,” he said. “On Shabbat, I don’t work. I don't pick up a phone or drive my car. And I have to say that my work has not suffered. I've still got my legal practice, I’m writing two books, working for charities, but it is Shabbat that energises me.”

Is size everything? In the days when the community was twice as big, (the 1950’s) Jews were half as secure. They changed their name from Cohen to Conway or from Kaminsky to Kaye (which, ironically, has itself become a Jewish name).

What did it mean to be a British Jew historically? What does it mean now? What is British Judaism?

What does it mean to be a British Jew?
Tradition and Change, A History of Reform Judaism in Britain, p.3
On 15 April 1840, 19 Sephardim and 5 Ashkenazim signed the following declaration, bringing Reform Judaism to Britain...

We the undersigned, regarding public worship as highly conducive to the interests of religion, consider it a matter of deep regret that it is not more frequently attended by members of our religious persuasion. We are perfectly sure that this circumstance is not owing to any want of a general conviction of the fundamental truths of our religion but we ascribe it to the distance of the existing synagogues from the places of our residence; to the length and imperfections of the order of service, to the inconvenient hours at which it is appointed; to the unimpressive matter in which it is performed and to the absence of religious instruction in our synagogues. To these evils, we think that a remedy may be applied by the establishment of a synagogue in the western part of the metropolis, where a revised service may be performed at hours more suited to our habits, and in a manner more calculated to inspire feelings of devotion, where religious instruction may be afforded by competent persons, and where to effect these purposes, Jews generally may form an united congregation under the denomination of British Jews.


A return to the Ghetto in 2013?
If you live in a demonstrably Jewish area, your kids are likely to have a stronger Jewish identity than if you don’t. But we live in a multicultural society and you are increasingly closing yourself off from that. British Jews are not as visible and present across the country. That raises all sorts of questions about integration and how engaged we will be.

When does that become problematic?

Are Jews ‘foreigners’ in the UK? To what or whom are we loyal?

Contemporary Jewish Identity in the UK – do you agree?
The Jewish Daily Forward – March 2014
Jews under 40, for example, are inclined to downplay the significance of ethnocentric and ethical aspects of Jewishness — combating anti-Semitism, Holocaust remembrance, support for Israel, donating to charity, support for social justice causes — and instead place emphasis on such things as prayer and belief in God.

Meanwhile, although the rate of intermarriage is leveling off, almost two-thirds of self-identified secular and cultural Jews have a non-Jewish spouse. Within intermarried couples, there is an evident slackening of Jewish identity. Under half of intermarried Jews attend a seder every year, compared to over 90 percent of in-married Jews, while only one third of intermarried Jews fast on Yom Kippur either every year or most years. Intermarried Jews are far less inclined to support Israel or share Jewish values with their families.

Do you think circumcision is barbaric? Do you see how someone could? What does it say about a sense of belonging to the Jewish people? Do you think it matters if you do or don't?

When do you feel most uncomfortable about being Jewish?

Are you proud to be Jewish? Are you proud to be British? Always? Sometimes?

Being outside the mainstream

Jem Stein, London Field Director of Habonim, thinks so. "As a small community in Britain, Jews have always had to be creative about how we express our messages and how we pass on our tradition, by keeping it fresh and entertaining. And that included having a sense of humour about ourselves, satirising our situation as a minority community and parodying our own community."

David Baddiel is wary of labouring the connection between Habonim's Judaism and its success in producing comedians. "It is a huge generalisation, but there may indeed be something about being Jewish that means you are 5 per cent outside the cultural mainstream here, and that that can mean you are quite expressive. We are not completely like everyone else. But I don't believe there is a tradition of Jewish comedy in Britain as there is in America with shows like Seinfeld. If it is developing, it has only happened very recently. I was one of the first comedians, for example, to stand up on stage and talk about getting on with being happy Jewish, not talk about being a suppressed, struggling, beaten Jew, because I'm not. I'm just doing my Jewish thing."

RSY-Netzer is a Zionist youth movement in Britain – do we create a sense of dual loyalty?

Dual Identity? In his book, "Roots Schmoots" (1993, pg 283), Howard Jacobson describes the following scene...

"The country got to him when he landed… neither of us identified with Israel. We are both middle-aged and this is our first visit – that’s how much we care! But yet, we both get off the plane at Ben-Gurion gulping. Ros (his wife who is not Jewish) too got a lump in the throat. For me! What could an airport mean to a Jewish or Catholic, you may ask? But as we got off the plane, she clapsed my hand and whispered, ‘Welcome home Howard’. We could feel each other shiver. This is how deep the idea of return runs. This is how much of a foreigner she thinks I am in England."
Youth Movements and the Shoah (The Holocaust) by Lucy Stubbs

This year Sarah and I were lucky enough to go on the March of the Living UK trip to Poland. In the cross-communal environment of the youth movement bus, with fellow madrichim from BBYO, Habonim, LJI-Netzer and FZY, we explored the history and role of youth movements in the Shoah. Here, I will briefly share some themes we explored on the trip and how they are relevant today to us, as individuals, as Reform Jews, and as members of a youth movement.

The **Warsaw Ghetto Uprising** is one of the most famous Jewish revolts, led and fought by youth. In October 1940, all of Warsaw’s Jews were forced to live in a walled-off ‘Jewish Quarter’, the Warsaw Ghetto. From here mass deportations began to concentration camps. As deportations continued, for some, physical resistance, no matter how unlikely to succeed, seemed preferable to passivity. In July 1942 a handful of Zionist youth leaders from Dror and Hashomer Ha’Tza’ir set up the Jewish Fighting Organisation (ZOB), consisting of 500 fighters, grouped into 22 politically-defined units. On Seder night, 19th April, the Nazis entered the Ghetto to burn it down block by block. Three long days of battle took place. The Nazis greatly outnumbered the resistance which consisted of just a few hundred Jewish fighters, with simple weapons like hand revolvers. The fighting continued for two weeks until 8th May when the Germans broke in to the headquarters of the ZOB. Many youth movement members took their own lives rather than surrender. There were some key individuals who played a major part in coordinating the youth movements’ resistance:

**Mordechai Anielewicz** was the commander of the Warsaw ghetto uprising and member of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement. When the war broke out, he was among the **first volunteers that went back to Warsaw**. From Jan 1940, Anielewicz became a professional underground activist. As a leader of his youth movement, he organised cells and groups, instructed, contributed to underground publications, and organised meetings and seminars and visited groups in different cities. When news about the mass killings of Jews in Eastern Europe became known Anielewicz became active trying to organise self-defence groups inside the Warsaw Ghetto. From Jan to Apr 1943, under his command, intensive preparation began. In the first days of battle after the uprising began he commanded the resistance forces. On 8th May, Anielewicz was killed in the headquarters’ bunker together with a few colleagues.

‘**first volunteers that went back to Warsaw**’. – What does it mean to volunteer to go back to something you know is dangerous?

**Yitchaz (Antek) Zuckerman** moved to Warsaw in 1938 to work for the Dror movement. From the beginning of the war, Zuckerman worked in Warsaw where he was **sent by the movement** to launch a clandestine press and build an underground organisation. Dror activists formed a commune on Dzielna Street. When the Germans launched mass deportations from Warsaw during the summer 1942, Zuckerman called for armed resistance. During the uprising, Zuckerman supplied his comrades with arms, and in the revolt’s final leg, along with others he set up a rescue team that saved fighters by leading them through the sewer system. In his memoir Zuckerman notes how comradeship was at the core of social life in the ghetto and was a natural vehicle for underground organisation. ‘None of us died of hunger or disease’, which he attributes to the **solidarity and mutual aid that was at the core of the movement**. Resonating throughout his memoir he still asks ‘**What should we have done that we didn’t do?**’

This is a question many of us grapple with... ‘What should we be doing that we aren’t doing?’ – do you feel you are doing everything you can? Are we doing everything we can as a youth movement? What else can and should we be doing?

**Zivia Lubetkin** was a member of the Dror movement, who was involved in underground movement from 1939. In Jan 1940 she reached Warsaw and continued her underground activity in the Dror House at 34 Dzielna Street, which served as a support and information centre for members of Dror. In the ghetto, Lubetkin was responsible for the organisational system and communication with the outside. She also helped found the ZOB participating in the Warsaw ghetto uprising April 1943. She went between the various bunkers and maintained communication between the leadership and the fighters who remained in the ghetto. The day before they were discovered by the Germans, the ZOB command, located at 18 Mila Street, **decided Lubetkin should set out in order to find a connection to the outside via the sewage tunnels**. On 10th May she went through the sewers with a group of fighters – to the end of her days she was haunted by the thought she had abandoned her remaining friends leaving them to die.

‘**decided Lubetkin should set out...**’ – in the midst of the Uprising Lubetkin was told by the ZOB to do this. Is this fair? Should the movement have been able to make this decision? What does this show about Lubetkin and the kind of person she was?

**Frumka Plotniczki** was the first to return to Warsaw to assist her comrades and from Jan to May 1942 visited Vilna, Kovel and Bialystok where she led a Dror seminar. She was also involved in ZOB from July 1942. She was the first to travel to isolated towns and serve as their contact with the movement. She was a driving force in the struggle to keep the organisation alive and lay the groundwork for resistance operations. In Dec 1942 she was faced with a dilemma between continuing preparations for uprisings and obtaining a passport in case it became impossible to leave Poland. She decided not to abandon the plans for resistance but to see to it that every member of the movement had a passport should the need arise. Despite pressure on her to relocate to a neutral country she **rejected the idea and chose to remain with her comrades**. On 3rd Aug, 1943 in the liquidation of the Bedzin Ghetto she died together with her comrades.

‘**rejected the idea and chose to remain with her comrades**’. – She chose to remain with her comrades when given the opportunity to leave and escape to safety. How do you imagine this decision was? Bravery?
These individuals’ experiences, courage and heroism bring up many issues for us to consider...

**JEWISH IDENTITY**

Looking at the situations and decisions Anielewicz, Zuckerman, Lubetkin and Plotniczki had to face, we are fortunate to not have to face these today. But how does the Holocaust affect our Jewish identity today? How do we comprehend living as Jews in a way that honours and commemorates and remembers these people and the Holocaust? Without letting it overshadow us and our Jewish identity? Does the Holocaust form part of your Jewish identity or your family history?

In a few years there will be no Holocaust survivors and questions about how to keep the Holocaust prominent in Jewish memory are apparent. Even the British Government is thinking about this, you can get more information on this here: [http://tinyurl.com/pxojt9z](http://tinyurl.com/pxojt9z)

**ACTIVISM**

What does it mean to have an ideology? Can you call yourself ideological if you’re not doing anything to enact what you believe in? Activism can be fitted into the “critique, vision, method” model.... what is your critique of the world around you? Do you have a vision for how it should be? How are you going to make that happen?

In the Shoah, there were clear criticisms and an urgent need to do something. Many of the activists knew their “vision” did not consist of survival, but rather meant pride, courage, teamwork and fighting to the end.

**Role of youth movements**

Why is this relevant for us in RSY-N today? Think about how important community and identity are to our movement. How much of your identity is based on the community in which you live? What weighs on these decisions – responsibility, commitment to Jewish people, morality?

What is our role as a youth movement? What do we think we should do/need to do in the world? Did you know how big a role youth movements played in the Shoah? How do you feel about this? Is this something that could even happen now?

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**Dilemmas and Decision making**

Here are four different people who in the Holocaust were one of bystander, victim, collaborator, upriser, victimiser or rightous gentile. Can you see who played what role from these extracts? Is there anything about their brief life stories which indicate what role they might have taken? If so, what are these indicators? If not, what do you think played a part in the decision they made? Why do people make the decisions they make? Think of a decision you made in which you felt in a dilemma? What decision did you make and why?

- **Frumka Plotnizka**
  - Born in 1914 in a small village in southern Russia. Her family’s livelihood was growing and selling cattle. She had three brothers.
  - Frumka was a very quiet teenager, who did not attend school because her family could not afford to send her to one. Her sister, who did study in high school, taught her how to read and write. At the age of 16 she started working as a seamstress apprentice. In 1930 she lacks formal education; she is introverted and quiet and doesn't stand out in a crowd...

- **Albertos and Elitia Zpat**
  - Were born at the beginning of the century in a small village in Holland. Grew up in poor farm-owning families, and they get married in their twenties. They build a small hen farm and raise a family. Two of their girls die as a result of a disease, a huge tragedy for them.

- **Abraham Ganzvich**
  - Was born in Poland at the beginning of the century. Graduated from high school and joined a Zionist movement. Later on he became part of the Po’alei Zion party, and even learned Hebrew. He arrives in Warsaw at the beginning of the war in a good economical situation and becomes the head of The Office against the Black Market and Smuggling...

- **Karl Koch**
  - Born near Frankfurt. When he was 8 years old his father died and shortly after his mother remarried. He studied in school until the age of 15 and then he was sent to one of the factories in the area to work as a messenger and an apprentice in the accounts department. When he was 17 WW1 broke out and two years later he was recruited into the army. He was injured twice and was held captive in Britain. At the age of 22 he was released and went back home. He got married and had a son...

As you’ve learnt in this choveret, informed decision making is a crucial element of Reform Judaism. How must we “inform” our decisions about such huge moral issues? How often do the decisions we make have such serious life/death implications? Can we apply similar decision-making frameworks to ethical questions as to religious practise questions?

**Morality**

An idea when sikkuming this topic could be to look at the overriding broader theme of morality in today’s society.

**Morality** = *Principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour; a particular system of values and principles of conduct; the extent to which an action is right or wrong.*

**Look at morality today and basic moral principals –**

- It is bad to steal, to kill, to lie. How much further does our morality extend?
- Is it ok to kill the enemy in war? For a businessman to do the best for himself to the detriment of others? For a lawyer to argue professionally for a position he would personally reject?
- Does the complexity of modern society require the rules to be somewhat flexible according to the context - personal relationships, science, law, business, politics and war?
- How much can and should we bend these rules of morality? How important is morality in modern society?

**ANSWERS:** Frumka Plotnizka was an upriser, Albertos and Elitia Zpat were righteous gentiles, Abraham Ganzvich was a collaborator and Karl Koch was a victimizer (the Nazi commandant of Madjanek camp).
JUDAISM AND TECHNOLOGY

By Debs Blausten

The teenagers of the 21st century are what we call ‘digital natives’, growing up in a world full of technology. How does this impact their relationships with themselves, each other, and their Judaism? How can Judaism help us to navigate the issues that the use of technology brings up?

‘Technology’ really just means the application of knowledge to achieve a goal. This normally involves making or creating something to help us do that.

‘Social Media’ are technologies which enable us to interact online and they embody the values of web 2.0.

Social media and Jewish values

Take a look at the passages below—each of them can be used as a trigger for a conversation about responsible behaviour online. Can you come up with ten commandments for online life? Are there already unwritten rules that you observe when interacting with people on the internet?

“That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary” Shabbat 31a

“Know before whom you stand” Brachot 28b (this is often found above the ark in a synagogue)

“Tzim Tzum” (kabbalistic idea of drawing in to make space for something else)

“Do not separate yourself from the community” Pirke Avot 2:5

“Who is wise, the one who learns from others” Pirke Avot 4:1

“Say little and do lots” Pirke Avot 1:15

Technology—what’s it really about?

In this extract from ‘The Sabbath’, Abraham Joshua Heschel is describing the task of ‘technical civilisation’...

“Technical civilisation is the product of labour, of man’s exertion of power for the sake of gain, for the sake of producing goods. It begins when man, dissatisfied with what is available in nature, becomes engaged in a struggle with the forces of nature in order to enhance his safety and to increase his comfort. To use the language of the bible, the task of civilisation is to subdue the earth, to have dominion over the beast.”

Does technology achieve what it sets out to do? This extract from the book ‘Walden’ by the American philosopher Henry David Therou contains an important idea (in bold). Are we slaves to the tools we created to free ourselves?

“The very simplicity and nakedness of man’s life in the primitive ages imply this advantage, at least, that they left him still but a sojourner in nature. When he was refreshed with food and sleep, he contemplated his journey again. He dwelt, as it were, in a tent in this world, and was either threading the valleys, or crossing the plains, or climbing the mountain-tops. But lo! Men have become the tools of their tools. The man who independently plucked the fruits when he was hungry is become a farmer; and he who stood under a tree for shelter, a housekeeper. We now no longer camp out at night, but have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven... We have built for this world a family mansion, and for the next a family tomb. The best works of art are the expression of man’s struggle to free himself from this condition, but the effect of our art is merely to make this low state comfortable and that higher state to be forgotten.

HOW MIGHT YOU MANAGE THE POSITIVES OF TECHNOLOGY AGAINST ITS PITFALLS?
SHABBAT – A DAY OF UNPLUGGING

Let’s return to Heschel’s ‘The Sabbath’- “To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence of external obligations, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilisation, a day on which we use no money... Is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man’s progress than the Sabbath?”

Can you imagine your world without technology? (without your phone, or facebook etc)
Why is it so hard for us to unplug? How might you incorporate this into your life?

Technology – the big questions

Do (and why do) people behave differently online to the way they behave in person?
Talmud Yoma 4b demonstrates an example of how we might know what is for sharing and what isn’t. In this text, we know that something is for sharing when the person who shares it gives permission for it to be shared with others. Are these cues clear or agreed on in the online world? Rabbah said: Whence do we know that if a man had said something to his neighbour the latter must not spread the news without the informant’s telling him ‘Go and say it’? From the scriptural text: The Lord spoke to him out of the tent of meeting, lemor [say it to others].

Another direction to take this in is to talk about ‘filters’ on our lives. Does the internet help us to create the lives we want ourselves to lead rather than to live the lives we actually do? Have a read of this blog on kveller http://www.kveller.com/blog/parenting/we-need-to-quit-telling-lies-on-facebook/about how our online lives can distort our reality. Do you live your life through an instagram filter? What pressures does the constant need to share put on everyday life? Would your family recognise you from your online life? Does that matter?

If we have the technological capacity to do something, should we?
Technology gives us the power to do things we once thought unimaginable. There are many great uses for this e.g. medical advances, space and air travel, computers. There are also applications that are more complicated e.g. sophisticated and powerful weapons, cloning, the ability to spy on others.

What does ‘privacy’ mean in the technological age? Who has the right to know things about us?
A great primer on the issues around privacy can be found here http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/06/24/130624fa_fact_lepore?currentPage=all. You might want to talk about this in terms of Lashon Hara (gossip) or by using the piece of Talmud quoted above. Questions you might ask chanichim are, ‘is privacy important to you?’, ‘who do you trust with information about you and how do you know to trust them?’, ‘some people say that you don’t need privacy if you don’t have anything to hide, do you agree?’.

Can technology replace people?
The 2014 film ‘Her’ by Spike Jonez poses the question as to whether it’s possible to have a relationship with a piece of technology that is as fulfilling and ‘real’ as a human relationship https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzV6mXI0VI4. Why do people need other people? When we interact with people online, how do we know how real they are being? What would the impact of this be on the Jewish community?

helping our generation change the world
Below are some recent examples of how technology and the values of web 2.0 (collaboration, non-hierarchiy) have had a big impact in our society.

• After the Boston bombings to help people find somewhere to stay
• When looking at Satellite photos to try and find the missing plane MH370
• To organise Israel’s social protests #J14
• In powering revolutions in countries like Egypt and helping rebels in Syria communicate with the world
• Hashtags like #everydaysexism which give voices to people’s stories

Is it always good? (see #kony2012) How can we use technology in Judaism? Should we?
So what is Reform Judaism?

**Naomi Ackerman (RSY-Netzer movement worker):** Reform Judaism enables people to live with a proud and positive sense of Jewish identity and culture, to live a Jewish life while being an integrated part of a wider worldwide community alongside others of different faiths and backgrounds. Being a Reform Jew means being a person who is willing to embrace new ideas and different views, new tunes and a changing world.

**Rabbi Rick Jacobs (president of the URJ, the American Reform Movement, in a speech in December 2013):** Our Judaism is for everyone. Our Judaism is inclusive, egalitarian, intellectually rigorous, joyful, passionate, spiritual, pluralistic, constantly evolving and relevant. Soul elevating spiritual practice, life-altering Torah study, courageous practice of tikun olam, loving care for our community, especially the most vulnerable—that's what we are.

**Rabbi Laura Janner Klausner (Senior rabbi to MRJ):** Reform Judaism is a meaningful, enjoyable way of living that has integrity and improves our own lives and the lives of others in the world.

**Rabbi Mark Goldsmith (rabbi of Alyth):** Reform Judaism is Judaism with a greater amount of compassion (rachmanut) than law (din). It responds to the individual, Jewish or non-Jewish, with care and empathy within the context of Jewish law and tradition. It responds to our tradition of Jewish law within the context of the need for meaning and community for the individual. Reform Judaism is a kind of Judaism that dates back millennia to the origins of the Jewish people—but only in the past 200 years has it been organised and institutionalised.

**Mike Mendoza (Mazkir of RSY-Netzer):** If a nation is a body of people that are conscious of their unity, then Reform Jews are part of the wider Jewish nation and yet we define ourselves as different. Regardless of tradition, there is something I feel connected to about being Jewish. So regarding the “Reform” I believe it is about taking the texts and rabbinic debate and exploring when and where it is relevant to my life and the world around me without entirely separating myself from the nation.

**Adam Overlander-Kaye:** A modern understanding of an ancient heritage. Reflecting on the multiplicity of traditions of ‘our people’ through the prism of our experiences to bring goodness to ourselves, community and world. Being a stiff-necked people; a light unto the nations; challenging assumptions, creating change; celebrating; giving hope and acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with your God. Not doing something which is hateful to you to someone else because this is Torah. The rest is commentary—go study.

**Rabbi Rick Jacobs:** We believe that our understanding of Judaism is right: that God did not literally hand down sacred laws in the Bible and the Mishnah at Sinai, but rather that from our encounter with the Divine, Jews have written our sacred texts, striving to understand in their own time what God called them to do. That process has continued through the centuries, and it continues today. We are not the way out, but the way in, the way to being fully Jewish and modern, Jewish and inclusive, Jewish and universal, Jewish and compassionate, Jewish and deeply committed also to science, the arts, and the human community in its constant evolutionary spiral toward sustaining the planet and bettering life for everyone who lives upon it.

Your answer...?
Your vision for Reform Judaism in the future

The world today is constantly changing and when you google the word ‘apple’ it’s not a piece of fruit that comes up! We are used to a society where things change all the time, there is always a new piece of technology whether it has just been updated or is a new gadget that has never been necessary before, but now people just can’t live without. But how does that affect our Judaism?

This section of the choveret isn’t going to tell you exactly what the future of Reform Judaism is, but it will hopefully give you some food for thought!

Synagogue

• With things constantly changing and evolving and being able to pick and choose and move so easily in so many aspects of our life is the future of our community in the Synagogue or is there another way?

• Technology has spread far and wide, yet it hasn’t yet reached our Synagogues, how would you feel praying from an iPad on Shabbat morning, or even on Rosh Hashanna?

• How will Synagogue be relevant to people of the future?

Jewish Practice

• Will we become closer or further to the idea of God?

• When you sit around the table at Pessach who is the one leading you through the process and remembering all the songs, who will be able to lead us in the practices and prayers in our homes in the future?

• With heightened awareness of our food industry – will we get more kosher or less? What happens if it becomes illegal to kill animals in a kosher way (shechita) in the UK – how would you react?

• RSY-Netzer only just became officially bi-lineal (Judaism being passed on through either parent). What does the future look like for people in mixed faith relationships? Will they be able to get married in Synagogues? Will this help Jewish community numbers or damage them?

• How will Reform Judaism relate to other Jews in the UK?

• America now has the largest Jewish population – how does this impact on Judaism’s relationship with the world?

• Will Reform Judaism enable us to preserve the importance of community or will we only care about ourselves?

What do you think can definitely not be changed in Judaism and what will stay the same forever?
With schools and offices modernising their buildings all the time – do you think there is a way that the Synagogue building should look and feel in the future? Design a synagogue of the future below.

With us being able to update our lives constantly through social networks and the internet what is the future of Jewish practice? Will we recognise how people celebrate Shavuot, Chanukah or other festivals in the future? Draw your own representation below…
Find out more about the wonderful educators who have contributed to this choveret, and be in touch with them if you'd like to take the conversation further - they'd love to chat!

Naomi Ackerman (Naomi.ackerman@rsy-netzer.org.uk) is currently a movement worker for RSY-Netzer and after that, who knows? She studied Ancient Greek and English at King’s College London and UC Berkley. Her first RSY-Netzer experience was on Course Hadracha in 2007, she has taught at Sinai Synagogue and WLS, has been involved in interfaith work since she was 16 and now enjoys being able to help coordinate incredible RSY-Netzer experiences for others. She would love to talk to you about literally anything to do with Tikkun and social action, and especially LGBTQ, Gender and Inclusion as she has been learning a lot about these topics this year.

Miriam Berger (rabbimberger@frsonline.org) has wanted to be a rabbi since her teens but had to wait until the summer of 2006 to receive s’micha - her rabbinic ordination. Before that she read Theology at the University of Bristol and then studied at the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem before her training to become a rabbi at Leo Baek College in London. Having spent her final year as a student rabbi for Finchley Reform Synagogue she stayed on to take up a fulltime post there, which in 2008 changed from associate to Principal Rabbi.

Debs Blausten (debs@jeneration.org) is the student fieldworker for Jeneration, our very own Reform student organisation. She has been involved in RSY-Netzer since 2000, did Shnat-Netzer in 2008 and has roshed camp and Course Hadracha. She studied medicine at UCL, and has taught regularly in a number of Reform synagogues and at Jewish conferences over the past 6 years. When not travelling the country visiting students, she is involved in Pro-Zion and Arzenu, two exciting Reform Zionist organisations, and loves shopping, running, diet coke, and twitter.

Libby Burkeman (libby.burkeman@reformjudaism.org.uk) is the Informal Education Director at the Movement for Reform Judaism and working at the MRJ with youth and young adults is really like coming home as a bogeret of RSY-Netzer from Shnat-Netzer 1999/2000. She started her professional career as a movement worker for RSY-Netzer and has managed to carve out a career path in informal education working in the JCC, the Science Museum and Tzedek.

Malcolm Cohen (rabbi@templesinai.lv) is an RSY-Netzer graduate who moved to Las Vegas because the Mojave desert reminded him of the Arava. Las Vegas provides him with the chance to continue social justice work form his movement days through interfaith grass-roots organising. He is the rabbi of Temple Sinai, having received s’micha (rabbinic ordination) from the Leo Baek College in London.

Joe Grabiner (joegrabiner@hotmail.com) has been involved in RSY-Netzer since he was 12. Last year he spent the best 8 months of his life in Israel on Shnat-Netzer. Joe believes whole-heartedly in the power of our ideology and lives for the moment when we can turn around and say: “Look! The world has changed for the better. We changed it!” You can find Joe studying Politics and Philosophy at LSE, eating through his mother’s humus supply, or tending the Netzer Farm. If you want to be involved (with either The Farm or humus eating) then contact Joe.

Josh Levy (josh@alyth.org.uk) is delighted to still be a little bit involved in RSY Netzer just short of 30 years since he went on his first Shemesh. He is now one of the rabbis at Alyth, where he continues to use many of the skills he first learned in hadracha, along with a whole lot of other knowledge he has picked up along the way. He passionately believes that Reform Judaism is the authentic Jewish voice of our time, enabling us to live our lives with integrity and holiness.

Ben Lewis (ben.lewis167@ntlworld.com) is a super-keen boger of the movement and this summer will be traversing Israel with the intrepid Tour 6. When not on RSY-Netzer events (rare), Ben is attempting to survive studying Chemistry at Cambridge. He is also a university triple jumper and has a 25m backstroke swimming badge.

Robin Moss (robin.moss@ujia.org) is the Israel Engagement Educator in the UJIA Informal Education Department. He works with a wide range of organisations to increase the quality and nuance of Israel programming aimed at Jewish young people. Amongst other things, he leads on the educational preparation for all British Israel Tour madrichim. He has experience working with young people from Jewish and non-Jewish schools, was a cheder head teacher, teaches the Bnei Mitzvah class at Finchley Progressive Synagogue, was a movement worker for LJY-Netzer and is a Trustee of Liberal Judaism. He consistently pushes for an agenda of showing Israel as “complex, colourful and cacophonous”.

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Adam Overlander-Kaye (aok@reformjudaism.org.uk) is the Director of Fundraising at the Movement for Reform Judaism having previously worked for UJIA, UJS, the Jewish Agency for Israel and Bnei Akiva. He has an MA in Jewish Studies from Leeds University, and is a Fellow of Brandeis University’s Institute of Informal Jewish Education. His daughter Ayala had an amazing time on day camp last summer, his wife Jessica and his brother/sister-in-law are all ex-RSY Netzer movement workers and his little boy Eitan likes to dress up as Spiderman.

Gabriel Pogrund (gabriel.pogrund@gmail.com) first had contact with RSY Netzer in 2009. One night, as a foul storm poured down on Llyn Gwynant and his inadequate tent, Gabriel realised promoting RSY’s ideology allowed him to be self-righteous and change the world at the same time. Ever since, he’s been working night and day with his toolbox and some elbow grease to bring about the prophetic vision of Tikkun Olam. Having returned from Shnat-Netzer last year, Gabriel now studies Geography at UCL and tends the Netzer Farm. The Talmud says "Every blade of grass has its angel that bends over it and whispers "Grow, grow" - but Gabriel knows those plants in Finchley aren't going to water themselves!

Haim Shalom (haimshalomeducation@gmail.com) is the rabbi of Menorah Synagogue, Cheshire Reform Congregation. He is an exceptionally proud boger of RSY Netzer, forever stricken with terrible nostalgia for “the good old days” when he was in the movement, but overwhelmed with admiration for the incredibly focused, committed and professional organisation it has become.

Sybil Sheridan (sybil.sheridan@virgin.net) was given s’micha and became a rabbi in 1981. She was previously a university chaplain in Roehampton and served at Wimbledon District Reform Synagogue until this year. She is currently the chair of the Assembly of Reform Rabbis UK and has been involved in many issues and projects, from music for the Reform movement to feminism and gender issues, and from the Jews of Ethiopia to interfaith dialogue.

Frankie Stubbs (frankie.stubbs@reformjudaism.org.uk) currently works for the Movement for Reform Judaism and RSY-Netzer as the Community Youth Development Worker, which she loves! She travels around the country working with all of our amazing Reform Communities and helps them with their youth provision. She also really enjoys creative prayer and exploring different ways that different people engage with their Judaism. Be in touch with Frankie if you want to chat about what you could do to get more involved with our communities around the country!

Lucy Stubbs (lucy.stubbs@rsy-netzer.org.uk) is one of the RSY-Netzer Movement Workers and is all set for a second year. She developed a passion for studying History and African Studies at university. She was thrilled to write an article for the choveret after going on March of the Living and experiencing some of the best informal Holocaust education she had ever had. She hopes you find the article interesting and would love to chat to you more about anything Holocaust, History or African related (or other!) anytime.

Raphael Sylvester (raphael.sylvester@gmail.com) has held many positions in RSY-Netzer, from rosh movement worker, and from educator to welfare officer. In his everyday life he is a teacher, but is also keenly involved in a number of different synagogues and Jewish organisations like Limmud.

Jeremy Tabick (jeremy.tabick@gmail.com) works for Mechon Hadar in New York, where he has been studying Talmud and other Jewish texts for the past two years. In a previous life, he was an RSY-Netzer boger and rosh of Atid 5771. His great loves are Judaism, coffee and Science Fiction (in that order). You’ll see him in the UK on and off, for example at Limmud!

Rhea Wolfson (rhea@uknif.org) currently works at the wonderful New Israel Fund doing Communications and Young Adult Outreach. In the past she was Mazkira of RSY-Netzer and before that, a disgruntled Law student. Rhea is passionate about issues surrounding refugees and asylum seekers in Israel and around the world and she is also very involved in UK politics through the Labour Party. @rheacaroline

Debbie Young-Somers (debbie.young-somers@reformjudaism.org.uk) grew up in RSY-Netzer and now works as the Community Educator at the Movement for Reform Judaism, a rabbi, a blogger, a tweeter, a wife, a mum, an interfaith dialoguer and a tikkun olamer. Not necessarily in that order!