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Humanistic Judaism, 1990-1994.

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# Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
10425 OLD OLIVE STREET ROAD, SUITE 205, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63141 (314) 997-7566 FAX #: (314) 997-4041

MIDWEST COUNCIL  
Rabbi James L. Simon  
Regional Director

February 6, 1991

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
UAHC  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

Thanks for your good letter of January 24. I have waited a bit to respond because I wanted to speak again with Rabbi Bob Barr of Beth Adam in Cincinnati before I got back to you.

As you know, since you wrote to me at the end of January Beth Adam has gone ahead (at their own expense) and professionally published and distributed close to 2000 copies of the Mihaly Responsum. I have a feeling that they did not feel comfortable allocating additional funds to also distribute Dr. Meyer's letter to Dr. Mihaly!

The bottom line is that (as I suspected) there is not going to be an application in the near future. As I mentioned to you in a previous letter, Bob Chaiken and I met with the board in early December and had a very candid and spirited discussion. We focused on a number of different questions, and it became very clear at the meeting (and I have mentioned this to you before) that they sought membership in the UAHC in order to increase their visibility in the community as well as their credibility as a congregation. It also came out at the meeting that they very much want to be part of the successful and prestigious Reform Community High School, which is currently open only to students from congregations that belong to the UAHC.

We left the meeting with the understanding that when they were ready to file an application they would let me know and then Bob and I would outline a formal and detailed process that would permit anyone who wanted to participate in a full and meaningful manner. Bob and I have agreed that we want to do everything in accordance with your requests as well as handling this in a sensitive and a constructive manner. The other day Rabbi Barr confirmed to me that there is no application that is forthcoming and we may not see an application for another four to six months. He also indicated to me that the purpose of publishing the Mihaly Responsum was to try to raise the consciousness level of an issue that they think is a very important issue. I am not sure I agree with that, but in some ways it may not be so bad that this Responsum is being distributed.

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① Thank Jimmy  
② cc: g. l. r.  
letter to  
ABG  
MM



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Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
February 8, 1991

That is where everything is now. I cannot or will not do anything more until I receive a formal application. When I do receive one I will let you know immediately and Bob Chaiken and I will consult with you as to our ideas as to how the process should unfold.

If you have any questions or need additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to seeing you next month when I come into town for the Budget hearings. Naturally, if you would like to put in a good word for the important work that we are doing here in the Midwest Council I will not object to this form of favoritism! I am sure you could do this featly!

B'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg



August 3, 1994  
26 Av 5754

Mr. Joseph Lane  
3020 Burnet Avenue  
Cincinnati, OH 45219

Dear Mr. Lane:

Your letter of July 1 reached my office but, as you were told by my associate, while I was out of the country, and in consequence it came to my attention only now.

Your thoughtful note deserves something more than a cursory answer.

First of all, in regard to the greater traditionalism of the current crop of rabbinic students. While I myself do not respond to all of these more traditional ritual and liturgical practices, I do believe that they are a response to the felt need of many of our congregants, especially the younger generation. You see, there has been a change in the spirit of our times and Reform has been compelled by the principle of change inherent in it to respond to this changing zeitgeist. Early Reform was hyper-rational in its approach but the experience of the last century, what with two World Wars in one generation and their fearsome aftermaths of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, has dethroned reason as the saving grace of humankind. An ever increasing number of people have come to realize that the future of humankind cannot be entrusted to the mindscape of a scientific rationality, that as the spirit within us withers so does everything we build about us. A greater appreciation of the non-rational and the emotive in worship patterns is the inevitable result of that change.

What divides Reform from Orthodoxy is not a question of ritual quantity but one of principle and that principle is the willingness to change when changing needs demand a different approach. This is why we call ourselves Reform and not reformed, the latter suggests a task that is completed; the former reflects that dynamism for which we stand.

Mr. Joseph Lane  
August 3, 1994  
Page -2-

Insofar as Beth Adam is concerned, the vote at our Board meeting was quite overwhelming. Of the nearly 200 Board members attending, only 13 voted for admission.

The reasons for this vote are clear: the quest for God, the wrestling with God, defines us as a people. It is our mission, our historic calling.

Yes, God is a symbol, a vessel, if you will, into which we can pour divergent theological conceptions but when that vessel is not there, such a pouring is foreclosed. Whoever has a symbol has thereby the beginning of a spiritual idea, absent a symbol spiritual ideas are stifled and die aborning; symbol and reality together alone furnish the whole.

Most of our members and I, too, were particularly troubled by the deletion of the Shema and the Kaddish from the liturgy of Beth Adam for we consider these erasures not just a severing of our ideological roots but also of our historic roots as a people. If Judaism has any overarching affirmation of faith it is the Shema, the assertion of God's unity. It certainly was the one prayer which was central to Reform Judaism's liturgy from its very beginnings and this is why I strongly suspect that Rabbis Heller, Wohl, Phillipson and Reichert far from "turning over in their graves," would undoubtedly have joined the present generation of Cincinnati's Reform rabbis who were unanimous in their rejection of Beth Adam.

All of this does not mean that the members of this congregation are not fine people and that their quest for spirituality is not valid. It manifestly is most meaningful. I regard its members highly and I embrace them as my fellow Jews, but I do believe that our movement had no other choice in the final analysis. Reform Judaism is not a religion where anything goes.

I know that my words will not persuade you but at least we can agree to disagree agreeably.

With every good wish for the coming New Year, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



JOSEPH LANE, INC.  
3020 BURNET AVENUE  
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45219

*Get copy of  
my commentary*

July 1, 1994

President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Dear Sir:

I am taking advantage of your franked envelope to express my concern and disappointment with the UAHC. I feel your current decisions are leading to the demise of Reform Judaism as we have known it in Cincinnati for the past seventy to eighty years. The HUCJIR is now teaching or allowing ritual to be practiced that is getting closer to Conservative ritual and liturgy every day. Many of the students wear Yarmulkas and observe the dietary laws while at the College. Their orientation is toward more Hebrew in the service, carrying the Torah around the congregation and other such actions. They then go out into the various communities and promulgate these rituals. As a matter of fact two recent graduates of HUCJIR have now taken positions as Rabbi in two Conservative Congregations in Cincinnati. I am sure Rabbi Heller, Wohl, Phillipson, and Reichert are turning over in their graves.

The ultimate disappointment came when I read that the Humanistic Congregation of Rabbi Barr, Beth Adam, was rejected for membership in the Union. In these days of intermarriages, anti-Semitism and general decline in membership to turn away a vital and intelligent group of people, many of whom are the leaders of the Cincinnati community, because their liturgy is not to your liking is a travesty. These people fit into Rabbi Reines's definition of Reform Jews (see Polydoxy) and are no further away from the Reform Movement than the graduates of HUCJIR. UAHC is a mere simulacrum of Reform Jewish leadership and at this juncture they do not have my philosophical or financial support.

Yours truly,

*Joseph A. Lane*  
Joseph A. Lane, M. D.



איחוד  
ליהדות  
מזקדמות  
באמריקה

# Union of American Hebrew Congregations

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MIDWEST COUNCIL  
Rabbi James L. Simon  
Regional Director

November 21, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
UAHC  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

I am faxing this to you today not so much because of the urgency of the letter but I did want to make sure that I send this to you while my memory is still fresh from my recent trip in Cincinnati. It is my hope that we will have a few minutes in Rye to talk about this so you can give me your advice and counsel as to how we should continue to proceed.

I wanted to give you a brief update on the situation with Beth Adam in Cincinnati and indicate to you that while the process is moving along you should know that the situation is beginning to heat up considerably and I anticipate that this application may engender much more controversy than previously imagined.

To briefly review, we have been in contact off and on with this congregation for close to two and one-half years. Following your advice, we had an informal discussion about the general issue of a Humanistic congregation at our Spring 1990 Board Meeting and I felt it was a very candid and fruitful preliminary discussion. Obviously, no decision was reached because we have not received any application. During the spring and the summer of 1990, Bob Chaiken and I have been in touch with Rabbi Bob Barr and other leaders of the congregation and have continued our discussions on an informal basis. At the same time as a matter of courtesy we have informed the Rabbis and the Presidents of the four Cincinnati Reform congregations that we area involved in this process of discussion.

Last Monday, November 19 Bob Chaiken and I met with the board of Beth Adam and had a most intense and lively discussion which lasted over two hours. It is clear that they are going to pursue this application and they feel very strongly about the fact that they wish to be a part of the UAHC. It is also clear that in the private discussions that Bob Chaiken and I have had with Rabbis in Cincinnati

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Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
November 21, 1990

that there is strong sentiment against the idea that Beth Adam would become part of the UAHC. I am sure that once we receive the formal application and invite the four congregations of Cincinnati to comment on the application that we will most likely receive from at least three of the boards very strong letters which indicate the fact that they do not believe that Beth Adam should be part of the UAHC. There are many, many reasons as to this opposition and I do not want to try to guess at what they are now but rather would want the congregations to speak for themselves in the future. There might be a few things I could share with you privately when I see you.

I also wanted you to know that they were very much concerned with respect to the Responsum authored by Rabbi Plaut and the committee and they will probably want to write some type of a formal response that would then be sent along to all members of our board along with the Responsum and other materials. I have indicated to them that I will make sure that all relevant materials are made available to the entire Midwest Council Regional Board and in all likelihood we will invite representatives of Beth Adam to come and speak to the board at the next meeting to be held in Colorado in April. We will also set aside sufficient time so as to have a full and meaningful discussion on this very sensitive and important issue.

One final note. Unlike other congregations that wish to join the UAHC, there are a few interesting wrinkles in this situation that go beyond the very fascinating ideological issues. First, you should know that even though Beth Adam has been in existence for well over a decade, they see that membership in the UAHC will help to validate their identity and their credibility within the context of the Cincinnati Reform community. They were very candid in indicating that it is their hope to secure the services of a Rabbinic intern from Hebrew Union College, and it is also their hope that once they are a member of the UAHC that they will be permitted to be part of the successful and growing Reform Jewish Community High School which is currently a joint effort of the four Reform synagogues. While it is true that they are desirous of utilizing some of the services and benefits of the UAHC, it is equally clear that they have very little interest in most of what we produce and they clearly have no interest whatsoever in any of our materials which pertain to Jewish education and the like. Finally, you should know that a few of their members sit on the Board of Overseers of Hebrew Union College and that Dr. Gottschalk has indicated to the leaders of the congregation that it might be nice if the congregation is part of the UAHC so that those overseers and Beth Adam itself could continue to make contributions to institutions of the Reform movement. (Obviously the majority of those contributions would not come to us!)

At any rate this is where we are right now. It is my feeling that an application will arrive in our office within the next month or so and then we will begin to compile a packet of materials which will be mailed out to all of the board members of our Region. It is our hope to include not only materials pertaining to Beth Adam but copies of



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Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
November 21, 1990

the CCAR Responsum as well as some of the other letters that have been accumulated from other Rabbis throughout the country. I will probably put together some type of cover memo as well.

I am very much interested in some of your thoughts and ideas as to how we should proceed during the next few months . . .

B'shalom,

  
Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg





COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

April 5, 1994  
24 Nisan 5754

Professor Eugene Borowitz  
19 Reid Avenue  
Port Washington, NY 11050

Dear Gene:

Thank you for your note. I found it extremely helpful. I certainly expect to use it or have one of our speakers use it. The name Isaac Mayer Wise still carries great weight and persuasive power for many of our older Board members and they are the one who are most inclined to consider our religious community as all inclusive and in no way exclusive.

I still have not come up with a rabbi who will be passionate enough and is free to speak, for many have B'nai Mitzvot on a Shabbat morning.

If you have any more thoughts, send them along. I am profoundly grateful for this.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

Cincinnati • New York • Los Angeles • Jerusalem

19 Reid Ave

Port Washington, NY 11050

March 28, 1994

BROOKDALE CENTER  
ONE WEST 4th STREET  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10012-1186  
(212) 674-5300

Dear Alex,

It occurred to me that, while not wanting to commit you to a Bohr-like legal position, it might be useful to ask about whatever ambiguities there are in the UAHF charter: what was the intent of the authors? Is it conceivable that they wanted to welcome atheists & agnostic congregations in their Union?

For Isaac Mayer Wise the issue is quite clear. The enclosed, under the Museum imprimatur, makes out anything other than a pro-God position.

I was unable to check out at home another thought. In 1899 Louis Ginzberg came to the US in response to an invitation to teach at HUC which was then withdrawn. So much is fact, as per the E.J. What I could not check was whether the widely retold reason for that withdrawal is substantiated by some date, namely, that his views on God were unacceptable. Silberman in the HUC centennial history says, in passing, that it was his views on biblical criticism. Wise believed the Bible to have been revealed & since Ginzberg taught at the Seminary later, where Torah criticism was not taught until recently, the matter remains unclear. Perhaps Eli Ginzberg's

1897  
acc. to Lou.



biography of his father has some better data. But  
there may -- if this version is correct -- be data that  
as late as the end of the century Weiss was firmly  
against any hint of atheism or agnosticism.

For what it is worth --

I have a joyous Pesach --

Gene

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES



TEMPLE  
**KOL AMI**



Rabbi Janet B. Liss  
Cantor Seymour Schwartzman

Rabbi Sheldon J. Harr

Martzi, Wolkove, Administrator  
Tirza Arad, Educator

May 28, 1992

Mr. Stanley Loeb  
Chairperson, New Congregations Committee  
c/o Spears, Lubersky, Campbell & Bledsoe  
800 Pacific Building  
Portland, Oregon 97204

Dear Mr. Loeb,

Ever since the UAHC Convention in Baltimore, at which time I was introduced to the concept of membership in the UAHC for a "Humanist" Congregation, I have given this subject much thought. I can tell you that when I initially heard of their interest in joining the Union, I was unalterably opposed to it. But I felt it was important to listen to discussions, engage in some research, talk to my own congregants, and develop a more thoughtful response. I have done so, and have come to the same conclusion: I am unalterably opposed to the Humanist Congregation being a member of the UAHC.

I am not in disagreement with the very clear and plain theological fact of life that God-concepts can and do vary widely within our movement. Of course, we know that historically, ideas about God (communally and individually) have always reflected a wide range within Judaism. This has led to a non-dogmatic approach to Judaism, which is one of the great appealing factors (and, indeed, even a unifying factor) within a variegated Jewish community. Nonetheless, there are some expressions, the proponents of which may wish to call Jewish, that seem to me not to be within any reasonable stream of Jewish theology.

What are these expressions to which I am referring and how can we identify them? In truth, these expressions are difficult to pre-define and pre-identify. But there is a "subjective knowing" to which practically all would subscribe, as a community, given exposure to the issue. That is to say, as one of the Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States ruled regarding pornography, that though he could not define it, he sure recognized it when he saw it! Similarly, though I am hard-pressed to define the outer limits of acceptability in contemporary Jewish life, I (and most others) "subjectively know" when those limits have been breached. This "subjective knowing" is based on some objective reality, and not simply on a "feeling" of impropriety.

One such example would be a person who accepts the divinity of Jesus, still claiming himself/herself to be a "good and fulfilled Jew." While halachah may, in fact, dictate that this person is indeed a Jew (if he/she were born of a Jewish mother), the reality of Jewish life (historically and contemporaneously) is that this person would not be considered to be "Jewish" any longer. That person's theology has gone beyond the bounds of acceptability. And, to be sure, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations would not (I trust) welcome the membership of that person's "Jews for Jesus" 'Temple.'

In a parallel manner, the abrogation of the possibility of "God" (no matter one's God conceptualization, definition, or idealization) within a organized and recognized congregation flies in the face of the manner in which Jewish life throughout the ages has tried to deal with the challenges of our very being, as humans and as Jews. While Judaism has always had an important ethnic, cultural, social, and celebratory aspect to it, often unrelated to theology or philosophy, Judaism taken as a whole has always had an important theological element to it that has made Judaism more than an "ethical cultural" idea, or an ethnic/cultural heritage. To attend a Jewish worship Service, without the permissibility of reciting the "Shema" or the "Kaddish" smacks of an orthodoxy which is contrary to the spirit of Reform Judaism, and a theology which is contrary to the spirit of a Jewish spiritual quest, no matter what the 'denomination' or movement within Jewish life.



In a time when many of our leaders are calling for "guidelines, boundaries, and limitations," it is implausible to me that we would welcome a Congregation whose very "guidelines, boundaries and limitations" would be drawn in such a manner that is historically and contemporaneously contrary to Judaism and Jewish life and exclusionary in a manner which does not create or engender community within the Family of Reform Judaism or the wider Community of Israel.

Please understand that I am not talking about excluding individual Jews from our ranks. That is an entirely separate issue, used only to obfuscate the institutional/communal issue herein addressed. But I am talking about our Reform Jewish community beginning to have a greater recognition that, liberal though we are and pluralistic as we try to be, we are not and can not be all things to all people. If we stand for everything, we stand for nothing.

I am not advocating a classical theism (to which I personally do not subscribe). But I am advocating a stance, to be taken by our Reform Jewish community, which recognizes that there is a spiritual element that helps make us human (and, but little lower than the angels) and in our quest for a spirituality, and in our quest for making meaning in our lives (for, "making meaning" places us above the other animals of this world), excluding some concept of God as a possibility in the "meaning making process" is contrary to any Jewish understanding of our world, past or present. Individually, we can find that meaning in a variety of places and through a variety of means. Institutionally, there are strictures which must be in place to both maintain and create "community." While it is admittedly difficult to know what strictures (guidelines, boundaries and limitations) should be in place [and it is infinitely more difficult for us to agree on those strictures!], some things, I believe, we instinctively know to be the outside of our circle of Jewish communal acceptability. That is why I would oppose the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, under the circumstances that I understand to be in place, accepting the "Humanist Congregation" as part of our Reform Jewish community.

Very sincerely yours,

*Rabbi Sheldon J. Harr*  
Rabbi Sheldon J. Harr

cc: Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
Rabbi Frank Sundheim  
Mr. Arthur Grant  
Mrs. Jan Epstein  
Mr. Samuel Steen







RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

November 27, 1990  
10 Kislev 5751

Dr. Eugene Mihaly  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
3101 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Gene:

Be assured that I did not address a formal question to the CCAR Responsa Committee with the purpose of receiving the answer which I indeed anticipated. I sent my inquiry to Plaut ad personam and its subsequent enlargement into a formal inquiry occurred by "happenstance."

I have no intention of acknowledging the final authority of the CCAR Responsa Committee as far as policies of the Union are concerned. This issue will be determined by duly constituted committees, which will be widely representative to be sure.

I wrote to Gunther more recently concerning the procedures he employs in his committees. I enclose a copy of his answer to me as well as my response to that answer. I do so confidentially and see this as an opportunity of taking the first step toward that synod idea which we discussed. If a dramatic improvement of the Responsa process is called for, then why delay in asking for it? What do you think?

By all means, write the Responsum on the Cincinnati congregation itself and advance your reasons for its admission. I assure you that it will be widely circulated, even as your original letter concerning the congregation was given to the leadership of our Midwest Council.

Dr. Eugene Mihaly

-2-

November 27, 1990

I do understand from Jim Simons, though, that the leaders of the other Cincinnati congregations are very firm in their opposition to the admission of this particular congregation.

For your information, the admission of a congregation to the Union is first discussed on a regional level, then brought to the national New Members Committee, and finally to the Board of the Union as a whole. I told Jim Simon not to limit his new congregation to its usual composition but to enlarge it considerably to allow for a greater geographic as well as ideological divergence.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler







In the interim, Rabbi Barr addressed a formal question to me on this subject, in the name of Cong. Beth Adon. I am enclosing a copy of his letter for your confidential information. Since the matter is now a public issue, and the question involves, in my view, principles central to Reform Judaism and its future direction, I have decided to write an extensive response on the subject. As soon as I have completed it (hopefully next week) I shall send you a copy.

I am more than ever convinced, as I wrote you last February, that Beth Adon qualifies for membership in the Union and that there is no objective basis for rejecting their application. I base my conclusion on significant, traditional halakhic principles, the essential nature of Reform Judaism and UAHC, its constitution and by-laws. The details are fully discussed in my forthcoming response. I hope that you will agree with my conclusions.

א.ד.א. א.ד.א. א.ד.א. א.ד.א. א.ד.א.

Gene

I can be reached all of this week (until Dec. 2)  
at 415-453-2733



# Beth Adam

The Cincinnati Congregation  
for Humanistic Judaism

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

November 8, 1990

Dr. Eugene Mihaly  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
3101 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220

Dear Dr. Mihaly,

I am writing to you on behalf of myself and Beth Adam, the congregation I have served as rabbi for approximately ten years. I turn to you because of your scholarship and knowledge of Reform Judaism. You have interpreted and helped to clarify the values and philosophy of Reform Judaism as a member of the faculty of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, your involvement with the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and your numerous committee appointments and publications.

As you know, I was ordained from the College-Institute in 1981 and upon ordination accepted a position with a newly organized congregation. The congregation and I were committed to exploring and creating an environment in which we could celebrate our Jewish identity with intellectual honesty and theological openness. I held and expressed these same values and attitudes while a student at the College-Institute. Though not all on the faculty were comfortable with my ideas and the services I conducted, I was ordained and continue to be involved with the College-Institute. Most recently, I served as adjunct faculty teaching a practical workshop to second year students. It should be noted as well, that upon ordination I was accepted for membership into the CCAR and remain a member in good standing.

Since its inception, Congregation Beth Adam has identified itself as a humanistic congregation. Though never affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism or any other congregational association, it is our belief that the term "humanistic" best reflects our approach to liturgy, theology, and the Jewish experience. In

1720 Section Road, Suite 107, Cincinnati, Ohio 45237  
(513) 396-7730



translating our philosophic precepts into action our services do not contain traditional prayers. It is our belief that liturgy should clearly articulate the values and philosophy of our congregation. Drawing upon the rich traditions of our people, contemporary sources, and the writings of our own members, we create a liturgy which enriches our lives by giving expression to our Jewish identity. Our services attempt to capture, in a manner consistent with our philosophy, our deepest religious aspirations and beliefs.

Within the last two years, the fact that Beth Adam is unaffiliated with any national religious association has become a matter of concern for the congregation's Board of Trustees. Many in the congregation, myself included, feel it important that Beth Adam become associated with a larger body. Following much investigation and lengthy conversations, it was thought that this association would be most logically made with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. This realization arose from the congregation's sense of its Jewish identity, historic and current ties to the institutions of Reform Judaism which I have and which exist amongst the membership, and my understanding of the nature and philosophy of Reform Judaism. It is our belief that the philosophy and practices of Beth Adam fall within the broad spectrum of Reform Judaism.

In light of the above information and official publications of the congregation which are available to you we pose for your consideration the following question:

In light of the purposes and goals of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, as stated in its constitution and by-laws, does Congregation Beth Adam qualify for membership?

Thank you for considering this question.

Sincerely,

  
Robert B. Barr  
Rabbi



RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
-PRESIDENT- 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 212/249-0166

July 14, 1992  
13 Tammuz 5752

Mr. Allan B. Goldman  
347 Conway  
Los Angeles, CA 90024-2603

Dear Allan:

Thanks for your memo in response to mine regarding Beth Adam.

I usually follow your good counsel but in this instance I disagree with you. This application and the issues which it raises deserves more than a routing consideration. It deserves a blue ribbon jury, with several sessions and hearings, and not just the kind of attention which can be given when it is but one item of a larger agenda and must be dealt with in an hour or two before the Board meeting itself. The matter is too weighty for that!

This is precisely what happened in the case of the gay and lesbian congregation -- albeit, then the "expansion" took place on the regional level. The S.P. New Congregations Committee was enlarged to make it more widely representative, hearings were held, several meetings were scheduled -- and because everyone had a voice in the decision making process, the acceptance of this recommendation was given greater weight because of this more careful inquiry.

Granted, this was not the approach that we used in the case of the Pennsylvania Prison congregation, but just maybe, if we had, the result would have been different and as you and I would have wished ... (remember the vote? ... handled routinely, the New Congregations Committee approved, the Board went along, with something of a yawn, as I recall it, and only the headtable -- you and I and Al Vospan and Danny voted NO).

Why don't we discuss this come Executive Committee time. The region won't have finished its processes before then. In any event, we will have plenty of time to make a determination how we should proceed on a national level.

Hope you and yours are faring well ... it's mighty hot hereabouts.

Sincerely,

*cc's Recipient*

Alexander N. Schindler



#13

# MEMORANDUM

From Allan B. Goldman Date 6/22/92

To Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

Copies Melvin Merians, Stanley Loeb, Rabbi Daniel B. Syme, Rabbi Allen Kaplan

Subject Temple Beth Adam - Schindler Memo of 6/18/92

Although you and I discussed this general subject before you sent your June 18, 1992 memo, there is one item contained in your memo that was new to me and which in my humble opinion is a mistake.

At the top of page two of your Memo you state, "We will undoubtedly enlarge the National New Congregations Committee to consider the Beth Adam application, since it is scarcely routine. It will be up to Mel to select this Committee, but I would imagine that he will include some leaders of the CCAR, perhaps from its Response Committee [how could that be after that Committee has already voted on the subject?], and some members of the College Faculty, etc. In other words, it should be a kind of Blue Ribbon jury whose decision will be reflective of a movement-wide consensus."

I strongly recommend that there be no such "expansion" of the National New Congregations Committee. I doubt that the UAHC engaged in such expansion when it considered the application from the first congregation with special outreach to the gay and lesbian community, and I know that there was no such expansion when it considered the application from Graterford State Prison in Pennsylvania.

The New Congregations Committee can call witnesses to testify, but to change the composition of the Committee could violate all kinds of potential rights. I assume that you, and Mel and Stanley and Allen have no idea how the present Committee members feel about this issue, and that is the way it should be. Why subject the UAHC to the charge (by either side) that it "stacked the deck"?

Moreover, as you point out (or as you point out that I pointed out), it is the UAHC Board of Trustees that ultimately decides this question, you are not going to change its composition, and all that goes before is commentary.

Another constitutional point: I assume that the Chairman of the UAHC Board of Trustees, the Chair of the Midwest Region, and the Chairs of both the Regional New Congregations Committee and the National New Congregations Committee have not expressed publicly their views on the substance (i.e. should Beth Adam be admitted or



not). To the extent that any of these people may already have done so or subsequently do express an opinion, I recommend that each such Chair turn over the presiding during consideration of the issue to a Vice Chair (or Vice President, as the case may be) who has not expressed herself or himself on the issue.

I leave it to your judgment whether to pass these thoughts and recommendations along to Bob Chaiken and Rabbi Pinsky.





The congregational office at 1720 Section Road in Roselawn serves as the hub of its activities. It houses the rabbi's study, the Congregational Library, general office facilities, and a chapel which accommodates up to 80 people. Included among the activities held there are Bar/Bat Mitzvah classes, Committee and Board Meetings, Mid-Week Adult Education classes, and informal services. Larger facilities are rented for special occasions.

Beth Adam's Religious School is currently housed at the Doherty School in East Walnut Hills. The school's extensive facilities allow for a tremendous amount of flexibility in classroom assignments.

#### RABBI

Rabbi Robert B. Barr was ordained in 1981 from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. Following his ordination, he assumed full responsibilities as rabbi of Beth Adam, having worked with the congregation since its inception.

Rabbi Barr's activities within the Jewish community include serving on the boards of Jewish Family Service, Jewish Community Relations Council, Jewish National Fund, and the Principal's Council of the Bureau of Jewish Education. Rabbi Barr is a member of the Cincinnati Board of Rabbis, Association of Humanistic Rabbis and a member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Rabbi Barr was in Class XII of Leadership Cincinnati and serves on its steering committee. He has been a delegate at the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati (MARCC), a member of the Interreligious Roundtable, and a member of the Ohio Advisory Board of People for the American Way.

He has published many professional articles and has spoken extensively in Cincinnati and nationally. Rabbi Barr is a graduate of Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan where he majored in philosophy and psychology. He earned his Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters from the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion in 1980.

#### HISTORY

In the fall of 1979, a small nucleus of people gathered to discuss their views of Judaism in the modern world and their desire to give expression to their ideas. Their awareness of Humanistic Judaism led them to Robert B. Barr, who was then a rabbinic student at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Following a series of discussions, they decided to organize a religious school for their children and to conduct High Holiday services.

The response from the community to the first high holiday services was much greater than anticipated, and many of those who attended expressed a desire to become actively involved in the group's future. As the size of the congregation increased, so did the activities, programs, services and publications.

The congregation was formally incorporated in 1980, and shortly thereafter elected its first Board of Trustees. In the spring of 1981, Robert Barr was ordained from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and was elected Beth Adam's first rabbi.

In May of 1984, Beth Adam received, on permanent loan, a 140-year-old Czechoslovakian Torah Scroll - one of the many seized by the Nazis. Members of the congregation designed and created four Torah covers and a wimple which expressed both the humanistic tradition and the Torah's Czechoslovakian origin. The Torah and its covers were presented at an emotion filled Shabbat Service shared with the entire Cincinnati Jewish community.

As the congregation continues to grow, so does its involvement in the Greater Cincinnati community. Beth Adam and its rabbi continue to be involved in a variety of interreligious and Jewish concerns, both locally, nationally and internationally.

Beth Adam serves those who can best express their Jewish identity within the humanistic framework.

## Beth Adam

The Cincinnati Congregation  
for Humanistic Judaism



1720 Section Road  
Suite 107  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
45237  
(513) 396-7730  
Robert B. Barr, Rabbi



## PHILOSOPHY

Beth Adam is dedicated to creating a community in which people of diverse ages, backgrounds, and lifestyles can affirm, share and celebrate their Jewish identity in an environment of mutual respect and support.

The philosophy of the congregation affirms the values of human dignity, creativity, integrity and reason. It is through these qualities and ideals that we can fashion a strong and healthy Jewish present and future. These values are articulated and taught through our liturgical and educational materials.

By employing the best of Jewish wisdom and thought in the expression of our modern Jewish identity, we affirm our relationship with the continuing Jewish experience.

The philosophy of Beth Adam also affirms and is dedicated to the belief that each individual has the right and responsibility to determine the purpose and course of his/her own life.

## SERVICES

Beth Adam's services are unique and varied, combining the ancient and modern in prose and poetry, song and silence, lessons and legends, all to create a religious experience that both teaches and challenges.

Beth Adam has both formal and informal services which often focus on a specific theme and include a lively and informative discussion led by Rabbi Barr.

Specially designed services for our children play an important role in our congregational life. These services provide the opportunity for both young and old to share and celebrate together.

Please consult the congregational calendar for dates and times.

## EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

We, the members of Beth Adam are committed to a religious philosophy that affirms our Jewish identity and the right to determine the purpose and course of our lives. It is because of our philosophy that we are dedicated to the learning process through which one learns more about oneself as an individual, as a member of the world and more specifically the Jewish community. In an effort to achieve our ideals we design the Beth Adam Educational Program with the following goals in mind.

Our first goal is the personal growth of each student. The student is an unique individual entitled to be educated in an atmosphere where self-respect is enhanced. In this environment, the student will have the support needed to become an autonomous individual.

Our second goal is to help the student develop an accurate and wholesome Jewish identity. We hope to encourage our students to understand their relationship to, and continuing role in the Jewish experience.

The third goal is to help the student develop a personal religious philosophy based on the human experience in particular. This philosophy and system of ethics will prepare the student to live in an ever-changing world.

Our fourth goal is to foster within our students a feeling of responsibility to the human community, and particularly a strong commitment to the Jewish people.

In keeping with our philosophy and goals, our students are urged to examine, question and re-examine, and make their own decisions based on reason and study. With this type of approach, the courses will be taught in an atmosphere of intellectual honesty and open inquiry.

## PROGRAMS

**RELIGIOUS SCHOOL** - For Children and Adults. This program is unique because it is designed for all members of the congregation (ages 3 through adult). A systematic curriculum has been designed to span the entire age range which allows for age-appropriate instruction covering a wide range of subject matter. An atmosphere of intellectual, honest and open inquiry is fostered. (See Religious School Handbook for further information.)

**BAR/BAT MITZVAH PROGRAM** - This program is available to children of members who wish to celebrate this important life-cycle event. The two year course of study includes six months of independent research culminating in an original paper to be presented during the student's Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. An adult course leading to bar/bat mitzvah is also taught. (See Bar/Bat Mitzvah Handbook for a complete description of the program and its requirements.)

**YOUTH GROUP** - This group promotes social, charitable, and intellectual activities for students under the guidelines of a team of youth group advisors. The group is involved in intra-congregational events locally.

**ADULT EDUCATION** - Mid-Week Evening Adult Education is a component of Beth Adam's Educational Programs. During the congregational year, Rabbi Barr generally teaches two six-week classes. The topics in past years have included, *Concepts of God, Introduction to Torah, Secular Humanism: Why All the Fuss?, and Yiddish Literature.*

Rabbi Barr also teaches *Jewish Customs and Cuisine*, one night seminars designed to examine a specific Jewish holiday's origins and practices. The goal of the seminar is to enable participants to celebrate and enjoy the holiday more fully.

**EVENING WITH THE RABBI** - *Evening with the Rabbi* is for those individuals interested in learning more about the philosophy and practices of Beth Adam. In this informal setting, Rabbi Barr has the opportunity to address a wide range of topics, while also answering specific questions raised by those present.

**SOCIAL ACTIVITIES** - Social Activities which allow the members of the congregation to relax and enjoy one another's company are an important facet of Beth Adam. Each year the Social Committee schedules a variety of activities, some specifically for the adults and others for adults and children together. All the Social Activities promote fun, friendship and food.

**FACILITIES** - Recognizing the changing nature of a growing congregation as well as its fiscal realities, Beth Adam has chosen to maintain an office, while reserving the flexibility of holding selected activities in various locations throughout greater Cincinnati.



For more information please contact

**Beth Adam**  
**The Cincinnati Congregation**  
**for Humanistic Judaism**  
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# Beth Adam

The Cincinnati Congregation  
for Humanistic Judaism

## A Concept of God



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Robert B. Barr, Rabbi



## A CONCEPT OF GOD

Jews throughout the ages have tried to understand God and God's relationship with their world. These questions are addressed in the Bible and Talmud, and have been contemplated by many great Jewish thinkers, including Philo, Maimonides, Spinoza, and Kaplan. Thus, we as Humanistic Jews are carrying on a tradition that was begun many centuries ago.

The concept of God has undergone constant modification in Judaism. The God of the Prophets is different from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; certainly the God of Maimonides is different from them both. It is impossible to examine here the myriad of concepts for the term God, for that would take volumes. Every Jewish thinker has suggested an understanding of the term, redefining how God interacts and participates in the affairs of this world. Many feminist theologians are trying to reconcile traditional male interpretations of God and modern feminist thought. There has always been and continues to be great diversity in the Jewish understanding of God.

Changes in theological concepts have never been readily accepted. Spinoza, whose theology was considered a heresy in his day, is today proclaimed by many as one of the greatest Jewish thinkers of all times. Over the years, ideas that were regarded as radical or heretical have come to be accepted by the community. Consequently, the entire spectrum of Jewish theology today is diverse and at times contradictory.

To be a Jew has never meant that one must accept some predefined concept of God. Each Jew has always had the right to understand the term as he/she determines. This is evidenced by the fact that the classic definition for the term Jew—one who is born of a Jewish mother or who converts according to traditional law—does not mention belief. It is clear from this definition that belief is not the primary factor in determining who is or is not a Jew. Lacking any definition of what one must believe to be a Jew, a Jew can accept any theological stand and still remain a Jew.

Humanistic Judaism's approach to theology is a source of confusion for many. Because our services do not incorporate prayers, many falsely assume that humanism is atheistic. As stated in

Article IV (Purpose) of our constitution and reaffirmed in our educational philosophy, Humanistic Jews affirm our right and responsibility to control our own destiny based upon ethics and morals arising out of the human condition. This definition of Humanistic Judaism does not preclude one's having a concept of God. In fact, there are many views of God that are compatible with Humanistic Judaism. The basic criteria for determining if a view of God is compatible with Humanistic Judaism are whether it allows for the belief that the ultimate authority for what a person does rests with that individual, and the belief that the events in our world are the product of human action and natural law. Humanistic Jews also affirm that ethics/morals are the product of human thought and experience.

There are in fact many Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God, but not a God that intervenes or manipulates the events of this world. Such a God does not hand down, dictate, or decree, and does not regulate or direct the actions of human beings. Neither would this God act in a way that would contradict or be inconsonant with natural law and scientific truth. Prayer, which presupposes a God who intervenes in and manipulates the affairs of the world, is contrary to this world view; thus, the use of prayer in services would be incompatible with such a theological system. Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God affirm their Jewish identities in services which focus upon human beings, strengths and weaknesses, hopes and fears, pasts and futures. They recognize that prayer is not essential for declaring one's membership with the Jewish people and that a service can affirm both their world view and their Jewish identity.

Of course, there are those Humanistic Jews who do not accept a concept of God at all; the term God does not reflect their views or attitudes about the world. However, they affirm their Jewish identities and their right and responsibility to control their own destiny based upon ethics and morals arising out of the human experience. Their desire to participate as Jews in a service which reflects their views is possible only in a Humanistic Jewish setting.

Whether or not a Humanistic Jew has a concept of

God is not the central issue. What is central to Humanistic Judaism is agreement upon a philosophic system which is based upon human reason and experience. One's Jewish identity is a function of one's commitment to the Jewish people. Through public acts or statements individuals declare their membership in the Jewish community.

The liturgy which has been formulated by humanistic congregations reflects this philosophic system. Upon hearing these liturgical changes for the first time, many immediately find them to be an articulation of their own long-held world views, and find their clarity refreshing. Others who are comfortable with and understand the philosophic nature of Humanistic Judaism nevertheless are uncomfortable with the unfamiliar liturgy. Yet with time the humanistic liturgy becomes a natural expression of their philosophic beliefs.

The removal of God from the liturgy does not preclude examination and discussion of concepts of God in other congregational settings. The fact is that in many humanistic congregations, the issue of God is addressed often and in depth. Once the concept of God becomes open to question and discussion, people feel free to express and examine their ideas.

At Beth Adam, no one is judged based upon his/her theological system. Consequently, God is discussed, examined, questioned, and explored with an open and inquiring mind. Some may find this endeavor uncomfortable. They may prefer not to open the concept of God and God's role to discussion. But for Humanistic Jews, the ongoing search for truth and understanding is paramount. There is no issue too sacred to be discussed.

The goal of Beth Adam is to enable people to work within our philosophic system to struggle and search for an understanding of the world in which they live, while affirming their Jewish identities.





**Beth Adam**  
The Cincinnati Congregation  
for Humanistic Judaism

# Rosh Hashanah Evening Service



**Robert B. Barr, Rabbi**

This is the opening of a new gate,  
*and the closing of another*  
This is the beginning of a new season,  
*and the closing of another.*

תכלה שנה וקללותיה  
Tichle shanah vekilelotelah.  
The closing of a year and its troubles.

תחל שנה וברכותיה  
Tacheil shanah uvirkotehah.  
The beginning of a year and its joys.

As our ancestors have done for thousands of years at this season, we now enter into a period of self-reflection. The Jewish people set this interval apart from and above the routine of everyday life. So that this celebration would serve as an intense period of self-scrutiny, every aspect of one's life was considered. Given momentum by the power of this tradition, we are propelled to do no less.

This is the opening of a new path,  
*and the closing of another.*  
This is the beginning of a new life,  
*and the closing of another.*

תכלה שנה וקללותיה  
תחל שנה וברכותיה

Comparing our past actions to our ideals cannot be a comfortable nor painless effort. When we look at what we have done over the past year, we are at times heartened, at times humbled. Looking within we may feel alone, and then

looking up and seeing others, we realize we are not. The path of self examination we each take throughout the High Holy Days is necessarily a private one, but not a solitary one. We can absorb strength from walking it, as we do tonight, in the company of friends.

This is the opening of a new journey,  
*and the closing of another.*  
This is the beginning of a new year,  
*and the closing of another.*

תכלה שנה וקללותיה  
תחל שנה וברכותיה

Each of us comes here tonight from our own prompting. Some of us are here out of habit, the habit established for us by our parents and grandparents, to adhere to the tradition of Jews gathering to celebrate the New Year.

Some of us are here out of reverence, a reverence for the tradition of our ancestors who found joy and meaning in this celebration.

Some of us are here out of duty, a sense that we owe to others a respect for tradition.

Some of us are here to find meaning for our lives. We find enrichment, renewed energy and purpose from these services.

It is for all these purposes that a community is formed. Our gathering together assures us of a place among the peoplehood of Israel, assures us of continuity. It allows us to reach beyond the mundane, to view the universe with a sense of wonder, to transcend the ordinary, to appreciate the mystery of life.



We come here as individuals, but the moments spent here transform us, bring us together, lifting us beyond ourselves. It is the assurance of community that offers us security, meaning, continuity. Without the community, our lives as Jews - as humans - would be impoverished.

Like a garden which offers shelter from the heat of day, a place of beauty and calm, so a congregation offers a place for spiritual refreshment and renewal.

הלל אומר, אל-תפרוש מן-הצבור.

Hillel taught: Do not separate yourself from the community. And thus we ask ourselves:

Am I proud to call myself a member of the Jewish community?

*Or do I shrink from identity, preferring anonymity?*

Do I let myself feel a part of the community?

*Or do I hold myself aloof, protecting against engagement?*

Am I willing to make a commitment to my community?

*Or do I take from it with no thought of return?*

Am I willing to take action as a member of my community?

*Or do I sit passively, allowing others to act in my stead?*

Have I been less than I can be?

*At this time of self reflection, I stand in judgment.*

How good and how pleasant it is  
that people sit together.  
It is like fine oil on the head  
running down onto the beard,  
the beard of Aaron,  
that comes down over the collar of his robe;  
Like the dew of Hermon  
that falls upon the mountains of Zion.

Psalm 133

הנה מה טוב ומה נעים שבת אחים גם יחד.

*Hi-nay ma tov u-ma-na-yim she-vet a-cheem gam ya-chad.*

We live our life as travelers in a journey, choosing among the many paths which lie before us. For some, it appears planned, the paths carefully marked, well defined, often by others. For some, the journey flies in haphazard directions, starting, halting, changing directions, out of control. And for others, it is a challenge, beckoning toward growth, prodding our intellect, promising adventure.

The way we make for ourselves is not easy. We have no reliable map and our guides can be uncertain. Our lives are often filled with confusion and anxiety, difficult decisions and regrettable mistakes. But still we must chart our own way.

Each year on Rosh Hashanah we pause to assess our life's journey. We study the route we have chosen and challenge ourselves to continue to explore life's greater possibilities.

We are here to review our past, to examine the paths we have taken.

*We are ready, for today is Rosh Hashanah.  
We must honestly evaluate our actions.*



We are here to ask ourselves essential questions about the nature of our lives.

*We are ready, for today is Rosh Hashanah.  
It is a time to reflect on the values we hold.*

We are here to seek out new directions that promote greater dignity and self respect.

*We are ready, for today marks the New Year.  
Rosh Hashanah means an opportunity for change.*

We are here to begin a new path, one that enriches and strengthens the integrity of our lives.

*We are ready, for today is the beginning of a new year.  
Rosh Hashanah signifies the possibilities of our lives.*

*silent reflection*

*He doesn't know the world at all  
Who stays in his nest and doesn't go out.  
He doesn't know what birds know best  
Nor what I want to sing about,  
That the world is full of loveliness.*

*When dewdrops sparkle in the grass  
And earth's aflood with morning light,  
A blackbird sings upon a bush  
To greet the dawning after night.  
Then I know how fine it is to live.*

*Hey, try to open up your heart  
To beauty; go to the woods someday  
And weave a wreath of memory there.  
Then if the tears obscure your way  
You'll know how wonderful it is  
To be alive.*

*Anonymous  
Terezin Concentration Camp 1941*

## CANDLE LIGHTING

A candle's flame is a wondrous and mysterious event. Though frail and easily extinguished, it has the power to light the darkness. A small candle can cast light where none has existed before, and its penetration is greatest where the darkness is most deep. Yet all the while, that flame is fragile and transient. A slight breeze will extinguish the light. A drop of dew will bring back the darkness. We value the candle's flame for its fragility as well as its power to ignite other flames.

Similar to the candle's flame, each human life is minute compared to the world around us. We know well the limitations and transience of our physical selves. Yet a single act of compassion is like a flame's ray. It basks our surroundings in light and warmth, having its greatest effect just where indifference was the deepest. A single person has the power to push back the darkness, to bring clarity and understanding where none has existed before. Just as the candle's flame brings light to other candles and erases the darkness, so too each of us can be inspired by others and together our actions will illuminate our world.

As we light these candles, may we use this light to reflect upon our lives and the year just ending.



ברוך האור בעולם.

*Baruch ha-or ba-olam.*

*Blessed is the light within the world.*

ברוך האור באדם.

*Baruch ha-or ba-adam.*

*Blessed is the light within each person.*

ברוך האור ביום טוב.

*Baruch ha-or ba-yom tov.*

*Blessed is the light of this season.*

It is Rosh Hashanah, a time to sit up, take notice, pass judgment on ourselves. We need this time, before moving into the new year, to reflect on who we are, what we have accomplished, what we have left undone. We should not, like a bird fluttering into the night, fly onward, heedless of the past. We must not cut ourselves off from the past, flinging ourselves thoughtlessly into the future. It is at this time that we subject ourselves to an inner search, measuring our deeds against our ideals, our accomplishments against our hopes, our realities against our dreams. We consider the hours we have spent in boredom, in dullness, in unsatisfying routine. We remember the cutting remarks, the coldness, the unconcern we have offered others. We reflect on our moments of fear -- afraid to meet the challenges of life, clinging to repetition, the safety of the known.

*This is a time for truth -- a time to respond to difficult questions.*

Have I accepted the challenge of new ideas, or do I cling blindly to the old?

*I want to hide in the familiar warmth of what I already know. New ideas make me feel less protected.*

Have I responded to others honestly?

*Honesty often means personal sacrifice, calling for engagement and commitment, yet it leaves me whole.*

Have I put off important decisions?

*I am too agreeable to going along with the flow of events before I decide.*

Have I burrowed in the narrow rut of comfortable routine?

*I usually feel safe and secure, but somehow untested and dulled.*

Have I grown too sophisticated to be amazed by the universe?

*Sometimes I have to stop what I am doing out of habit and experience it anew.*

Has my imagination become stale?

*Mundane daily thoughts sustain me, yet limit me, leaving little time for carefree flights of fantasy.*

*At this time of self reflection, I stand in judgement.*

We use this time, this Rosh Hashanah, to reflect upon our past. It can remind us of the many moments we have fallen short of our potential, have failed even to attempt a reach. We do this not to sink into despair, but to climb toward a brighter future. Our honest reflection prods us, challenges us, directs us. It allows us to become more than we have been, to create new paths, to truly live in the coming year.



Sing with joy a new beginning.

רבי אימר, איזו היא דרך ישרה שיבור לו האדם  
כל-שהיא תפארת לעשה ותפארת לו מן האדם.

Rabbi Yehuda Ha Nasi taught: What is the right path that a person should choose? That which is an honor to the one who does it and which also brings honor to humankind. And thus we affirm:

*We acknowledge that we are not perfect, but perfection is not our goal.*

*We know that we are not omnipotent, but we do not strive to rule the universe.*

*We accept the fact that we are finite; we do not ask for more.*

We recognize that, as human beings, we must assume responsibility for our lives. Acknowledging our imperfections does not mean adopting mediocrity. Knowing we are not omnipotent does not mean we fail to strive for understanding and mastery. Accepting our finite nature does not limit our quest.

Because everything we do changes the nature of things, even in very small ways...

Because we are all here, together on this planet, sharing a common fate...

Because our every act radiates and has meaning throughout our community and beyond...

We do have an obligation and a personal interest in creating a better world. We cannot rely upon a moral authority to enforce righteous values. We are accountable only to ourselves.

*Each of us leaves a legacy. Our legacy must be that we cared and that we made a difference...That our moment in history was significant...That we took responsibility for the world we left our children.*

It is incumbent upon us to feed the hungry and to lighten a poor person's burden. We are duty bound to clean the rivers and clear the air. We are obliged to lessen the pain and suffering and to add to the compassion in our world.

Our humanistic values instruct us to not be content with our inheritance. The world's problems do not belong to others;

*We cannot isolate ourselves in a society in which we depend so much one another. To open our hearts to the world and its plight is to raise the spirit of our own lives.*

הוא היה אומר, לא עליך המלאכה לגמור  
ולא-אתה בן-חורין להבטל ממנה.

Rabbi Tarfon taught: It is not up to you to complete the task, but you are not free to desist from it. And thus we ask:

Have I worked for the betterment of our world?

*Like so many others my excuse is that I am just too busy to give of myself.*

Have I opened my heart to those less fortunate?

*Sometimes I forget the luck of my circumstances and remain indifferent to the fate of others.*



Have I indulged in a feeling of superiority towards those I view as less able?

*Ranking myself against others is my pleasure and my pain.*

Is my courage spent?

*Often, I must reach deeply to find my confidence, my faith  
in myself.*

Have I been less than I can be?

*At this time of self reflection, I stand in judgment.*

In our silence we can hear  
the cry of hungry children,  
the weeping of the living for the dead.

In the silence we can hear  
the pain of human suffering,  
the anguish of human degradation.

*Let us listen to the silence--*

In the silence we can hear  
the misery of the downtrodden,  
the struggle of those who are weary.

In the silence we can hear  
the agony of wasted lives,  
the suffering of those forgotten.

*Let us listen to the silence--*

In the silence we can hear  
the hate of prejudice,  
the violence of mistrust.

In the silence we can hear  
the absence of human concern,  
the curse of human indifference.

*Let us listen to the silence--*

In the silence we can hear  
the hope for our future,  
the cure to the pain.

In the silence we can hear  
the compassion of the human heart,  
the comfort of the human touch.

*Let us listen to the silence--*

In the silence we can hear  
the strength of the human soul,  
the durability of the human spirit.

In the silence we can hear  
the laughter of children,  
the dawning of a new day.

*Let us listen to the silence.*

As has been done for thousands of years at this precise time of year, we compare our present reality with our ideals, our actions with our aspirations. The cyclic arrival of the New Year reminds us that while the movement of time through the universe is without boundaries, the limitations of the human mind leads us to see divisions: an hour, a day, a year. Sitting here and once more celebrating Rosh Hashanah, we are aware of the bounds of our lifetime, now shortened by the sudden arrival of another year. Shocked by the face of our own death, our opening eyes glisten to re-view life. For this one moment we are overwhelmed with gratitude. In this one moment our loves are deepened. Out of this one moment our courage becomes more firm.

The old year is finished. What is part of the past can never be changed. The gifts of our ancestors, given across the barriers of the years, are ours to savor. The gifts we offer the future are the choices we make today.

אין בידי המות הכח  
לעקר מה שטמון  
בלב

Death cannot take  
that which is locked  
in our hearts.

*With our tears  
In our sorrow  
We remember.*

*With our courage  
And our strength  
We do not forget.*

*Acts of kindness  
Deeds of courage  
Will remain.*



*Beauty created  
Wisdom shared  
Is not lost.*

*With our tears  
In our sorrow  
We remember.*

עם דמעות בעינינו  
בעת אבלנו  
נשמור על זכר אהובינו

With our tears  
In our sorrow  
We remember.

*May the memory of good people bless our days.  
זכר צדיק לברכה.  
Zeicher tzadik live'rachah.*

Upon Israel and upon the rabbis  
and upon the disciples and upon all the disciples of their  
disciples  
and upon all who study the Torah in this place and in every  
place,

*to them and to you  
peace;*

upon Israel and upon all who meet with unfriendly  
glances,  
sticks and stones and names--



on posters, in newspapers, or in books to last,  
chalked on asphalt or in acid on glass,  
shouted from a thousand thousand windows by radio;  
who are pushed out of class-rooms and rushing trains,  
whom the hundred hands of a mob strike,  
and whom jailers strike with bunches of keys, with  
revolver butts;

*to them and to you  
in this place and in every place  
safety;*

upon Israel and upon all who live  
as the sparrows of the streets  
under the cornices of the houses of others,  
and as rabbits  
in the fields of strangers  
on the grace of the seasons  
and what the gleaners leave in the corners;  
you children of the wind--  
birds  
that feed on the tree of knowledge  
in this place and in every place,

*to them and to you  
a living;*

*upon Israel  
and upon their children and upon all their children of their  
children  
in this place and in every place  
to them and to you  
life.*

As we come to the end of this Rosh Hashanah evening service, we realize that we have completed but the beginning of our travels. For this service marks the starting point of our journey throughout the High Holy Days, an ancient marker that signifies both the ending of the old and the beginning of a new year. We have before us a path to ascend, one that brings us to further scrutiny, self awareness, serenity. It is a time set aside for us, as Jews, to become more aware, alert, and alive to the possibilities that life affords.

*We have recalled the past, remembering the happy and sad moments, the good and bad times. We have sung together and been silent together; we have dreamed of the future and what it can be; we are thankful for this time we have shared.*

During the remaining High Holy Day Services, may we examine the paths we have walked, so that we can plan a course for the coming year. The many roads we have taken lie behind us and we are at a new moment of possibility. We resolve to make this year's journey one we travel with integrity, self respect, and dignity. This year we will try to choose our paths wisely, responding to the challenge and adventure of life, seeing its possibilities for growth, for friendship, for hope.

May we know blessings those who are near,  
May we know blessings those who are far,  
May the New Year bring its goodness  
To everyone soon, wherever they are.

May we know blessings through the day,  
May we know blessings through the night,  
May health be for our children  
And all things soon be right.

May we know blessings in our comings,  
May we know blessings when we depart,  
May we begin this New year  
With peace and wisdom in each heart.

Let it be. כן יהי

Ken yehi.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Upon Israel - Charles Reznikoff

Lyrics to - This is the opening

by Bonia Shur and Robert Barr

Original Music by Bonia Shur - "This is the Opening"

"Sing With Joy"

"May the Memory"

"Ken Yehi"

Original Music by Jay Gilbert - "Baruch Ha-or"

This service was written by  
The Ritual/Life Cycle Events Committee  
of Beth Adam

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# PASSOVER HAGGADAH

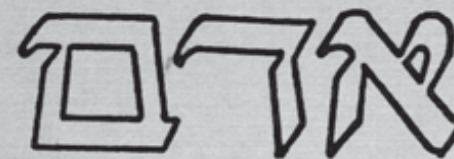


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**The Cincinnati Congregation**  
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**Beth Adam**  
The Cincinnati Congregation  
for Humanistic Judaism



## WELCOME

We invite you to join us in using this Haggadah to celebrate Passover, one of the most important celebrations of the Jewish calendar. The Seder provides a setting of warmth and unity in which all Jews can rededicate themselves to the ideal of human freedom.

The Seder means "order, a sequence", and the ritual of this holiday requires the use of symbolic foods.

MATZAH	unleavened bread
MAROR	bitter herb (horseradish may be used)
PESAKH	roasted lamb bone
CHAROSET	condiment of apples, wine, cinnamon, nuts
KARPAS	parsley
BAYTZA	hard-boiled egg
YAYIN	wine

These symbolic foods are displayed on a special Passover plate and set before the leader of the Seder. All foods (except the lamb bone) are both displayed and eaten. Other elements of the Seder include:

holiday candles  
a bowl of salt water  
a plate with three matzos on it

CUP OF ELIJAH A large cup of wine in honor of Elijah the Prophet

Passover is a time to relax, leisurely retell the story of the Exodus, and enjoy the good food, the wine, and the companionship of those who share the Seder. We welcome you to enjoy this Passover celebration with us.

Written by  
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## CANDLE LIGHTING

On this night, our companionship and friendship fill the room with warmth, shutting out the chill of loneliness and isolation. The bright flames of the candles will cast a welcoming glow, inviting us to celebrate the Passover festival together.

We rejoice in the celebration of this holiday with family and friends. As we light these candles, we pledge ourselves anew to work for peace and freedom.

(Light candles)

*Blessed is the light within the world.*

*Baruch ha-or ba-olam.*

ברוך האור בעולם.

*Blessed is the light within each person.*

*Baruch ha-or ba-adam.*

ברוך האור באדם.

*Blessed is the light of Passover.*

*Baruch ha-or ba-pe-sach.*

ברוך האור בפסח.

The candles' glow dispels the shadows and fills the room with brightness. In the same way, we hope that freedom's light will triumph over the darkness of slavery and oppression. The Seder teaches us that just as we protect these fragile flames to preserve their flickering light, so must we protect the spirit of liberty throughout the world.

*How good and how pleasant it is  
when people live together as one.*

הנה מה טוב ומה נעים  
שבית אחים גם יחד.

*Hi-nay ma tov u-ma-na-yim  
she-vet a-chim gam ya-chad.*



## INTRODUCTION

The long history of our people is one of contrasts -- freedom and slavery, pain and joy, power and helplessness. Passover reflects these contrasts. Tonight as we celebrate our freedom, we remember the slavery of our ancestors and realize that many of our people are not yet free.

Each generation changes -- our ideas, our needs, our dreams, even our celebrations. So has Passover changed over many centuries into our present holiday. Our nomadic ancestors gathered for a Spring celebration when the sheep gave birth to their lambs. Theirs was a celebration of the continuation of life. Later, when our ancestors became farmers, they celebrated the arrival of Spring in their own fashion. Eventually, these ancient Spring festivals, together with the Exodus from Egypt, became a new celebration of life and freedom. As each generation gathered around the table to retell the old stories, the symbols took on new meanings. New stories of slavery and liberation, oppression and triumph were added, taking their place next to the old. Tonight we add our own special chapter as we recall our people's past and dream of the future.

(Reader lifts matzah and reads)

*This is the bread of affliction,  
the bread which our ancestors ate in Egypt.  
All who are hungry - come and eat.  
All who are needy - come share our Passover  
dream, a dream which only we can create.*

*Ha lach-ma an-yah di-a-cha-lu  
a-ha-va-ta-nah b'ar-ah d'mitz-ra-yim.  
Kol dich-fin yei-tei v'yei-chul,  
kol ditz-rich yei-tei v'yif-sach*

*Ha-sha-tah ha-cha l'sha-nah ha-ba-ah  
b'ar-ah d'yis'ra-eil, ha-sha-tah  
av-dei, l'sha-nah ha-ba-ah  
b'nei chor-rin.*

הא לחמא עניא די אכלו  
אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים.  
כל דבסינ ייתי ויכל.  
כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח.  
השתא הבא. לשנה הבאה  
בארעא דישׂראל. השתא  
עבדי. לשנה הבאה  
בני חורין.

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Beginning our Seder, we drink the first cup of wine to celebrate the bounties of nature, the many joys of life. Wine brings warmth, pleasure, and happiness to our lives.

Awake, O North wind,  
Come, O South wind.  
Blow upon my garden,  
that its spices may flow out.  
Let my beloved come into the garden,  
And eat its delicious fruit.

עורי צפון ובואי תימן  
הפסיחי גני יזלו בשמי  
יבא דודי לגנו  
ויכל פרי מגדיו:

U-ri tza-fon u-vo-i tei-men  
ha-fi-chi ga-ni yi-z'lu v'sa-mav  
ya-vo do-di l'ga-no  
v'yo-chal p'ri m'ga-dav.

Song of Songs 4:16

*As we lift this cup of wine, let us affirm the wonder and beauty of nature, the promise of spring.*

*Blessed is the life within the world.*

*Baruchim ha-cha-yim ba-olam.*

ברוכים החיים בעולם.

*Blessed is the life within us.*

*Baruchim ha-cha-yim ba-adam.*

ברוכים החיים באדם.

## KARPAS

Once again life springs forth from the earth. The season of gray silence has ended. Blossoms burst forth in a brilliant array of colors. The songs of birds fill the air. The world is reborn with new strength and hope.

Lo, the winter has passed,  
The rain has ended.  
The flowers appear on the earth,  
The time for singing has come.

Ki hi-nei has-tav a-var  
ha-ge-shem cha-laf ha-lach lo.  
Ha-nitza-nim ni-ru va-aretz,  
eit ha-zamir hig-gi-a

כי הנה הסתו עבר  
הגשם חלף הלך לו:  
הנצנים נראו בארץ  
עת הזמיר הגיע.

Song of Songs 2:11-12

This Karpas is a symbol of rebirth, of new life. It reminds us of a world at peace, a world we can create.

As we dip the Karpas into the salt water - the tears of our ancestors - let us not forget their struggle. For it is by remembering our past that we gain wisdom to create our future.

(Dip greens into salt water and eat.)

#### FOUR QUESTIONS

(Youngest at table asks the following questions)

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין חמץ ומצה. הלילה הזה כלו מצה:

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין שאר ירקות. הלילה הזה קרור:

שבכל הלילות אין אנו מטבילין אפילו פעם אחת.  
הלילה הזה שתי פעמים:

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין בין יושבין ובין מסבין.  
הלילה הזה כלנו מסבין:

Why is this night different from all other nights?

On all other nights, we eat leavened bread or matzah. Why, on this night, do we eat only matzah?

On all other nights, we eat vegetables of all kinds. Why, on this night, do we eat bitter herbs?

On all other nights, we do not dip herbs at all. Why, on this night, do we dip twice?

On all other nights, we eat an ordinary meal. Why, on this night, do we hold a Seder, lingering at the table with stories and songs?

*Ma nish-ta-nah ha-lai-lah ha-zeh mi-kol ha-lay-lot?*

*She-b'chol ha-lay-lot a-nu och-lin cho-meitz u-matzah, ha-lai-lah ha-zeh ku-lo ma-tzah?*

*She-b'chol ha-lay-lot a-nu och-lin sh'ar y'ra-kot, ha-lai-lah ha-zeh ma-ror?*

*She-b'chol ha-lay-lot ein a-nu mat-bi-lin a-fi-lu pa-am e-chat, ha-lai-lah ha-zeh sh'tay f'a-min?*

*She-b'chol ha-lay-lot a-nu och-lin bayn yosh-vin u-vayn m'su-bin, ha-lai-lah ha-zeh ku-la-nu m'su-bin?*

#### THE STORY OF PASSOVER

WE WERE SLAVES OF PHARAOH IN EGYPT. עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים.

Deuteronomy 6:21

*Avadim ha-yinu l'faro b'mitz-ra-yim.*

So begins the tale of our people's quest for freedom. Legend, myth, and history woven together, create for every generation a memory not to be forgotten.

WE WERE SLAVES OF PHARAOH IN EGYPT. עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים.

The Torah relates a familiar tale of oppression in which a leader with absolute power fears those he does not understand. A new Pharaoh arose "who knew not Joseph" and his services to Egypt. He feared that Joseph's people "were too numerous." This Pharaoh enslaved them and set taskmasters over them, embittering their lives with forced labor.



A young Hebrew boy, though raised by Pharaoh's daughter and spared the taskmaster's whip, could not help but feel the pain of his people's suffering. He was to become their leader, and go before Pharaoh and demand "let my people go." But Pharaoh's heart was unmoved by the pleas, and legend teaches that Ten Plagues were visited upon Pharaoh and his people.

As we recite these plagues, custom teaches that we diminish our wine, the symbol of joy, as we too are diminished by the suffering of others. For even the pain of our enemies lessens each of us. In our struggle for freedom, we risk becoming like the enemy we fight. The drops of wine reminds us that in our anger we must not sacrifice our humanity.

Blood polluted the River Nile, Oh Pharaoh...  
*Yet you did not let our People Go!*

Frog infested your field, Oh Pharaoh...  
*Yet you did not let our People Go!*

Lice brought filth and infection upon your subjects, Oh Pharaoh...  
*Yet you did not let our People Go!*

Gnats and flies swarmed upon your cities, Oh Pharaoh...  
*Yet you did not let our People Go!*

Disease destroyed your herds, Oh Pharaoh...  
*Yet you did not let our People Go!*

Boils and wounds that would not heal weakened your subjects, Oh Pharaoh...  
*Yet you did not let our People Go!*

Hail rained cold upon your lands, Oh Pharaoh...  
*Yet you did not let our People Go!*

Locusts devoured your crops, Oh Pharaoh...  
*Yet you did not let our People Go!*

Darkness brought despair upon your kingdom, Oh Pharaoh...  
*Yet you did not let our People Go!*

Yet Pharaoh didn't listen. The Jews then marked their doorposts and death "passed over" their homes, taking only the children of the people of Pharaoh. Only then did Pharaoh let the people go, and thus Moses led the Children of Israel out of the House of Bondage. But the hostile desert proved stronger than their resolve to be free.

Those who had known only the security of slavery now longed to return to Egypt. They

had forgotten the sting of the whip and the humiliation of slavery. They only remembered the fish, cucumbers, and melons they had eaten and the huts in which they had lived (Numbers 11:4-6). Some turned against Moses, willing to return to slavery rather than face the challenges of freedom.

Consequently, the rabbis explained, the Children of Israel were forced to wander in the desert for forty years until a new generation had arisen. This new generation was reared on challenge and strengthened by freedom. Only then were our people ready to enter a new land and begin a new life.

We carry within us the memories of that ancient event. We are the descendants of that new generation.

*Once we were slaves.  
Today we are free.*

עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ  
עַתָּה בְּנֵי חוֹרֵין.

*A-va-dim ha-yi-nu,  
atah b'nei chor-rin.*

## SECOND CUP OF WINE

In every generation all of us  
must look upon ourselves as if  
we personally had come out of Egypt.

בְּכָל דּוֹר וְדוֹר חַיִּב אָדָם  
לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ בְּאֵלוֹ  
הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרָיִם.

*B'chol dor va-dor cha-yav  
a-dam lirot et atzmo  
k'ilu hu ya-tza m'mitz-ra-yim.*

Pesachim 10:5

We remember the pain of slavery  
*Our world must not know it again.*

We remember the cruelties of injustice  
*Our world must not know it again.*

We remember the hatred and anger of prejudice  
*Our world must not know it again.*

We remember  
*And we will act.*



We will create a world  
in which no person  
will know the pain of slavery  
the cruelties of injustice  
the hatred and anger of prejudice.

We remember and we will act.

(Lift cup)

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruninghooks;  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
nor ever again shall they train for war.

V'chit-tu char-vo-tam l'itim  
va-cha-ni-to-tei-hem l'maz-me-rot  
Lo yisa goi el goi cherev  
lo yil-me-du od mil-cha-ma.

## MATZAH

*What is the meaning of Matzah?*

Matzah is both a reminder of our past and a symbol of our future. It was first used to celebrate the spring festival as our farming ancestors threw out their sour dough and baked unleavened bread to usher in the New Year.

Later, the Matzah became associated with the Exodus from Egypt. As the Torah says, "And they baked unleavened bread from the dough which they brought out of Egypt. There was not sufficient time to allow it to rise, for they were fleeing Egypt and could not wait." In this way, Matzah recalls the slavery of our ancestors, their struggle to be free, their triumph over tyranny.

In our own generation, Matzah has become a symbol of hope, urging us to speak for those who do not yet know freedom. We who are free to celebrate Passover set aside a portion of this Matzah and commit ourselves to the continuing struggle against oppression. We who know freedom must become the voices for those locked within dark prison cells, for

those exiled from their homes, their families, their communities. We who know freedom must give voice to their struggle, become the guardians of their ideas.

Matzah, while reminding us of our ancestors, compels us to pursue the goal of freedom for all people.

(Eat Matzah)

## CHAROSET

*What is the meaning of Charoset?*

The Charoset, like many Passover symbols, is rich with meaning. This mixture of apples, nuts, and wine is a reminder of the bricks and mortar which the Israelites made when they were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. Yet its taste recalls the sweetness of freedom when our ancestors left Egypt as well as the freedom we enjoy as we celebrate this Seder.

(Eat Charoset)

## MAROR

*What is the meaning of Maror?*

Maror is the bitter herb which we taste to help us recall our ancestors' pain. It suggests the bitterness that was so often a part of their lives. We remember not only those who were slaves of the Pharaohs, but Jews throughout the ages who have suffered.

The intensity of suffering cannot be measured in numbers of people. We become numb to the pain of the masses.

As we taste the Maror, we understand that the pain of one soul is as bitter as the pain of many.

(Eat Maror)





### HILLEL'S SANDWICH

Eating the bitter herbs and Matzah together follows the practice of Hillel. He made a sandwich of bitter herbs and Matzah to fulfill the Biblical verse that reads, "with Matzah and bitter herbs they shall eat." Numbers 9:11

Another custom teaches that a second "sandwich" was made, combining three symbols of Passover - Matzah, Maror, and Charoset. We eat these together as our ancestors did so many centuries ago.

(Eat Matzah, Maror and Charoset together)

### PESACH

*What is the meaning of Pesach?*

Pesach refers to the shankbone of a lamb. Many years ago, our ancestors were shepherds who depended upon sheep for their survival. In the springtime, when the sheep gave birth to lambs, the shepherds held a special feast to celebrate, for it meant they would not starve. The shankbone is a symbol of that feast.

Even though we live in cities and the changes of seasons have become less significant, we still rejoice upon the arrival of Spring. It is the season when nature is released from the harsh grip of winter and life is renewed.

### BAYTZAH

*What is the meaning of the Egg?*

The Egg is the symbol of life. Just as spring is a time of rebirth in nature, so does Passover commemorate the resurgence of the Jewish people from the winter of slavery into a new life of freedom. The Egg also reminds us of the wholeness of the earth, and of Spring's promise of a universal reawakening.

*If we only have our freedom.  
Die-yay-nu.*

*If we only have our Seder.  
Die-yay-nu.*

*If we only have our hope.  
Die-yay-nu.*

*Eem yash la-nu hay-roo-tay-nu.  
Dei-yay-nu.  
Eem yash la-nu sim-ha-tay-nu.  
Dei-yay-nu.  
Eem yash la-nu tik-va-tay-nu.  
Dei-yay-nu!*

### FOUR CHILDREN

The retelling of any story can, over time, cease to have significance. Repetition will transform a vital celebration into an empty ritual. But when the desire to learn and willingness to question is present, the story links us to our past and provides insights for the present.

We have already heard one set of questions from the youngest at our table. But the asking does not end there. For the rabbis have taught that there are four types of personalities, all of whom ask about the Seder in their own way. And to each of them, it is necessary to give an answer.

One child asks, "What is the meaning of the traditions and customs which we share this night? What is the meaning of our celebration?"

To the inquiring mind, we must answer the questions with completeness and honesty. We must relate how our festival has evolved and changed over time and how we remain a vital link in its continuity. We must teach that freedom is not only an historic remembrance, but a challenge for all generations.

Another asks, "What is the meaning of this celebration to you? "

By saying "to you" and not "to me," it is clear that this child feels distant and separate from the community. To this one we must teach the value of community, and why our sages taught, "Al tifrosh min ha- tzibur - do not separate yourself from the community."



For a third child who is unsure of what to ask:

We briefly retell the story of the Exodus. Long ago the Jewish people were slaves in Egypt. A leader named Moses led our people out of Egypt, away from slavery, to live a life of freedom. Tonight Jews all over the world have a Seder meal to tell that story and to think about the importance of being free.

(This is an appropriate place for adults to make sure that the children understand the story and significance of our celebration.)

The fourth child asks, "What is the importance of these rituals? How will our Seder help people who are not free?"

To this one we say, "You are right! Our Seder will be of little importance if we only taste the foods, drink the wine, and forget what we have learned. But, when we allow the message of freedom to touch our souls we will not be content until all people live with dignity. Thus our rabbis have taught, 'Study leads to action.' Our Seder has meaning because it leaves us dissatisfied with what is and striving for what can be."

### THIRD CUP OF WINE

During the Seder we recall the slavery of our ancestors, those in the Passover story who were released from Egyptian bondage, and those who have been oppressed throughout the ages.

What about ourselves, citizens of a free land, who become victims of our own enslavement? We enslave our minds through bigotry, through ignorance, through intolerance, through laziness, through boredom. Too often we oppress ourselves by our own fears, by our blindness to opportunity, by the narrowness of our vision. We allow inertia to claim us, becoming trapped in the narrow confines of our self-made prisons.

*As we lift this cup of wine, let us determine to throw off our individual yokes of oppression.*

*Let us seek life.  
Let us value freedom.*

## YACHATZ - BREAKING THE MIDDLE MATZAH

In one more way, this night is different "from all other nights." At other festivals we serve two loaves of bread; at the Seder we serve three, substituting Matzah for bread. We break the middle Matzah, replacing the smaller piece between the other two. This reminds us of the poor who must always set food aside to ensure that there will be another meal.

The larger piece of Matzah, the Afikomen, is often hidden. The meal cannot be concluded until it has been found and tasted.

Tradition tells us that it is the larger piece which is hidden, because in life, much is left to be discovered. As we look for answers and understanding within ourselves and within our world, we are profoundly aware that in spite of all we have learned, there is so much more to be uncovered.

..... MEAL .....

### THE NUMBERS GAME

Who knows one?

*I know one: One is all the Universe!*

Who knows two?

*I know two: Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows three?

*I know three: Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows four?

*I know four: Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows five?



*I know five: Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows six?

*I know six: Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows seven?

*I know seven: Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books in the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows eight?

*I know eight: Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows nine?

*I know nine: Nine Festivals\*. Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows ten?

*I know ten: Ten Commandments. Nine festivals. Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

\*Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Simchat Torah, Sukkot, Chanukah, Purim and Shabbat.

Who knows eleven?

*I know eleven: Eleven stars in Jacob's dream. Ten Commandments. Nine festivals. Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows twelve?

*I know twelve: Twelve tribes of Israel. Eleven stars in Jacob's dream. Ten Commandments. Nine festivals. Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

Who knows thirteen?

*I know thirteen: Thirteen years to Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Twelve tribes of Israel. Eleven stars in Jacob's dream. Ten Commandments. Nine festivals. Eight lights of Chanukah. Seven days of the week. Six points in David's star. Five books of the Torah. Four matriarchs -- Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Three patriarchs -- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Two people in the Garden of Eden. One universe!*

### ELIJAH'S CUP

Elijah's cup stands at the center of our table. We remember him as the prophet who denounced oppression, challenged injustice, and reached out to those in need. Legend teaches that Elijah never died, and that he will return to usher in a time of peace and freedom. We welcome him by opening our doors in the hope that his vision will soon be realized.

We are hopeful that the door to freedom and human dignity will always be wide open, but we do not forget the many doors which were once closed to our people. Where the door remains shut, let us find the courage to force it open. As we welcome Elijah, we commit ourselves to his dream.



Elijah the prophet.  
Elijah of Tishbi.  
Elijah of Gilead.

Ay-li-ya-hu ha-na-vi.  
Ay-li-ya-hu ha-tish-bi.  
Ay-li-ya-hu ha-gil-a-di.

אליהו הנביא.  
אליהו תישבי.  
אליהו גלעדי.

#### AFIKOMEN

We conclude our Seder with the sharing of the Afikomen. The "breaking of bread" together forms a bond of fellowship. Sharing this Afikomen is a sign of our friendship with those at this table and our connection with Jews the world over. Just as children traditionally search for the hidden Matzah, so must we continue our search for truth, justice, and freedom for all people.

(Share Afikomen)

#### FOURTH CUP OF WINE

Lingering after our meal to sing another song, we sip the last glass of wine together. The candles burn low, the evening fades, but we stay on to complete our task, recounting the tale of the Exodus of our ancestors.

Our special moment is ending, leaving us relaxed and at peace. We lift the fourth and final cup of wine in toast to this Seder, anticipating the ones to come.

*This year many people of different lands  
do not know freedom. Next year may all  
people of every land be free.*

Ha-sha-ta av-dey.  
L'shana ha-bah  
b'ney chor-rin.

השתא עבדי.  
לשנה הבאה  
בני חורין.

#### CONCLUSION

Passover is the Festival of Life.

*Passover is the Festival of Freedom.*

Passover is the Festival of Hope.

L'shana Ha-ba, לשנה הבאה.

In the year to come --

*May Jerusalem know peace.*

L'shana Ha-ba. לשנה הבאה.

In the year to come --

*May the world know peace.*

L'shana Ha-ba. לשנה הבאה.

In the year to come --

*May all people know freedom.*



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**'A Fundamental Rejection Of God'**

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The clincher for him was a story presented by the congregation in which a 13-year-old girl wanted to say the Shema -- Judaism's touchstone prayer of God's oneness -- at her bat mitzvah and was talked out of it after discussion with the rabbi. "Their starting point is not a questioning but a fundamental rejection of God," Yoffie said.

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# UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

May 25, 1994

Ms. Sybil Schwartz  
3662 Forbes Trail Drive  
Murrysville, PA 15668

Dear Ms. Schwartz:

Thank you very much for your very thoughtful letter and essay concerning the issue of the Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. I appreciate your thoughts and concerns and I am distributing your letter to several of the officers of the Union.

Sincerely yours,

*Melvin Merians*  
Melvin Merians

MM:da

cc: ✓ Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
Rabbi Daniel B. Syme  
Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie



Sybil Schwartz

3662 Forbes Trail Drive

Murrysville, PA. 15668

(412)327-3715

**Dear Mr. Merians:**

Two years ago when the issue of a congregation with a humanistic perspective indicated their interest in becoming associated with the Reform Movement, I was mystified as to reasons their group was seeking affiliation with the UAHC. This bewilderment prompted me to visit their congregation in Ohio during a business trip, meet with their Rabbi and delve into their philosophy and liturgy.

I found the people of Beth Adam and the Rabbi to be warm, caring individuals, whose philosophic system reflect their empathy for the Jewish people, and their commitment to service and a strong moral and ethical code.

However, I continued to be perplexed, and continue to be so, as to the rationale for why this congregation covets an affiliation with the UAHC, as it was my understanding that UAHC's roots are implanted in a religious and spiritual foundation. Consequently, two years ago I wrote a letter-essay to the UAHC Board, discussing, as it seemed to me, the greater issues that are confronting the Reform Movement.

This letter was never mailed, as the issue became dormant. However, recently I was informed that Beth Adam was indeed seeking affiliation with the UAHC; this prompted me to search through my computer disks to rediscover the enclosed essay.

In this paper, I attempted to solidify my thoughts regarding the significance of the application by the Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism to become affiliated with the Reform Movement. I realize my paper lacks scholarly credentials, however, it does speak from the heart of one who is affiliated with a Reform Congregation, Temple David in Monroeville, Pennsylvania. The essence of this paper strives to underscore that- *separating the Reform Movement from its spiritual nucleus is akin to disconnecting the human heart from a portion of its blood vessels-the heart may beat temporarily of its own accord, but it can't nourish and sustain life.*

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

  
Sybil Schwartz



Today, the Reform Movement confronts a challenge to its Jewish identity as never before, " How shall we respond to the application of a Humanistic Congregation seeking membership in the Reform Movement? Shall the Reform Movement continue to define itself as a Jewish movement rooted in a religious foundation?"

**TO ATTEMPT TO EVEN RESPOND TO THIS QUERY, I FOUND MYSELF ASKING THREE QUESTIONS:**

*How can an ant can carry a load far too heavy for its tiny body?*

*How the human being can become so in awe of his or her own powers that they can come to believe they can carry the whole load alone?*

*How Judaism can continue to respond to the call "Where art thou?", if the men and women hide from God behind the shrouds of human reason and experience?*

Human reason and experience were Plato's and Aristotle's responses to the theological dimension of mortal existence. When Plato called for an answer to "What is man?", he responded in 'search of himself every moment of his existence'. In this context, there is no need to respond to the cry to "Where art thou?" For one is in a vacuum, alone!

Today, you the members of the UAHC's Board of Trustees are responding to the ageless Jewish query, "Where art thou?". Will you stand on the brim, look down and contend the world is void of meaning except as defined by man, or will you stand on the precipice and look forward to answer "Here I am-I am Your Partner."

From the beginning our leaders have sought to keep Judaism a strong vibrant force with in each of our lives, and with in the world. These founding mothers and fathers have been visionaries, responding with devotion to a people and flexibility to a rapidly changing tumultuous world. Accordingly, our movement has adapted, accommodated and accorded to the needs of its people.

Our Movement has propagated the concept that Jewish obligation sprouts from the informed will of its participants. Accordingly, we have fostered diversity, openness, questions and modifications. We have been on the forefront of issues that enable our people to be at home in their religion and in the greater society.

But our changes have always been in the realm of fostering the commitment of our people to a more just society, to assuming greater personal and communal accountability, to good deeds, to each other, to our mutual survival and to God. Our platforms, Pittsburgh, Columbus, and the Centenary Perspective have always affirmed that our foundation as Reform Jews is one that is forever bonded with the people Israel, Torah and God.

This God we speak of, can never truly been described, for we have acknowledged that each person in their own hour and place can chose to grapple with the eternal mystery of spirituality and holiness. We have acknowledged that prayer is also a significant component of our relationship with God. Prayer has allowed us the opportunity to monitor our arrogance, nurture our humanity, embrace our humility, and recognize that a greater force than ourselves, or any man or woman, is in some way responsible for the world in which we reside.

## AMERICAN JEWISH

The humanistic congregation that approaches our movement for membership is no doubt comprised of people whose hearts embellish the Jewish commitment to deeds, ethics, continuity, and peace. They probably crave matzo balls, chicken soup and kugel. But their foundation is man centered, rather than implying a "partnership or relationship" exists between man and God.

Within their frame of reference, "prayer is not essential for declaring one's membership with the Jewish people". Their liturgy omits the Kiddush, Shema, Ve'ahavita or Aleinu. Their brochure entitled, "A Concept of God and A Statement on Liturgy " asserts that membership and identity in the Jewish community is attained "through public acts or statements of declaring commitment to the Jewish people. One's Jewish identity, rights and responsibilities arise out of the human experience".

As the largest religious Jewish organization in the world, the question of how we define our ourselves for today and tomorrow, is paramount. Will we as a Community of Jewish people don a new coat, one that accords man center stage and abdicates a relationship between the Jewish people and God, or will we continue to grapple with the mystery of God and our own spirituality?

Your wise counsel and judgment can affirm the dynamic partnership that dawned at Sinai; that each one of us through commitment to Torah can elevate ourselves through study and worthy deeds toward a relationship with God, thereby becoming living sustainers of the Covenant in our time. By affirming the centrality of God and prayer, we can respond to the question of an ancient sage, " Why, of all the body's parts, the ear was selected to bear the sign of permanent bondage that alone establishes full slavery? The ear which has heard at the foot of Mount Sinai the words: "For the children of Israel are mine servants and not the servants of servants."



Each generation is always challenged with free choices of either being the servant of God, and truly free to exercise our free will, or the servant of man and a slave. The Reform Movement, from its conception, has empowered men and women to wrestle with their conscience, spirituality and choices.

Even as the Movement continually asserted its autonomy and re-examined age old Jewish traditions, the roots of its existence remained firmly planted in cultivating a partnership that links a people to its God. Today, each who has been entrusted by a position of leadership on the UAHC's Board of Trustees must chose whether their legacy to future generations will continue to nurture, sustain and uphold that the "Torah results from the relationship between God and the Jewish people".

*How will each of you respond to the three questions. Like so many, will you just wonder in amazement at the heavy load the ant most carry through the ages? Will you view in bewilderment how any man or woman can believe he or she can carry the load alone? Finally, will you respond with affirmation on the brink of the 21st century to the question "Where art thou?" with the answer "Here I am-I am Your Partner Who Will Help Carry Our Load".*

Sybil Roslyn Schwartz  
May, 94



איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

# Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA  
PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
DORAL EXECUTIVE OFFICE PARK  
3785 NORTHWEST 82 AVENUE, SUITE 210, MIAMI, FLORIDA 33166-6630 (305) 592-4792  
FAX (305) 477-7866

SOUTHEAST COUNCIL

Rabbi Frank N. Sundheim  
Regional Director

June 1, 1992

Rabbi Sheldon Harr  
Temple Kol Ami  
8200 Peters Road  
Plantation, Florida 33324-3201

Dear Shelly:

In the interest of continuing the dialogue that you started in your letter to Stanley Loeb, I would like to make some very personal comments to you. These are not the "official" words of a regional director, although I would be the first to admit that sometimes the line between my own thinking and the interests of the UAHC can become blurred. However, as you know from my participation in the dialogue with David Hachen at SEACCAR, I do have some strong opinions, also, I provided there a copy of some correspondence that I had been having for several years on the matter.

As a regional director, one of my main duties is new congregational development. Therefore, I may have a tendency to wish to include when possible. Given that possibility, let me just summarize a few points that I made at SEACCAR with which I personally continue to associate my thinking.

1) Every congregation seeking UAHC membership must state unequivocally that it will follow the constitution of the UAHC. As we know, that constitution does refer to God, even though the wording "benign providence" is, I believe we would both agree, verbal overkill. It is up to the congregation to state whether or not the constitution of the UAHC is acceptable. I would, however, further note, that this part of the preamble which is more Haggadah than Halacha. Nonetheless, I would take that statement seriously.

2) You are absolutely correct that we all interpret God in different ways. Many of us would flunk the test of "benign providence" if it were applied literally. Openness in these interpretations is an absolute for Reform Judaism.

## OFFICERS

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Stanley W. Rosenkranz  
Dr. Richard Shugartman  
Russell Silverman  
Samuel Steen  
Sig Warshaw

UAHC President  
Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

UAHC Chairman of the Board  
Melvin Merians



3) I am still trying to get a copy of the constitution of the Cincinnati congregation. At SEACCAR we were told that they have put into their constitution the idea that the term God may not be utilized in prayer. This would seem to exclude any person who might wish to be a member and who had a different type of belief concerning God. Potentially, I see this to be the most important factor concerning their possible eligibility for membership. To give an analogy, we do not have any gay and lesbian congregations. Rather we have UAHC congregations with an outreach to the gay and lesbian community. If a "straight" wishes to join one of these congregations that person is welcome.

4) I could, therefore, accept a congregation that does not include the idea of God in its own constitution. I could not accept constitutional exclusion of God. To me, the two main criteria for membership would be:

a) Does the congregation state that it accepts the UAHC Constitution (however it chooses to interpret it) and

b) Does the constitution of the congregation exclude either from membership or from the possibility of a prayer service mention of God? Please note that if a congregation chooses to utilize a service without the mention of God, I have no problem. It is the constitutional exclusions that concern me.

If the items mentioned in this last paragraph (#4) were handled satisfactorily, I personally would not wish to exclude this congregation from the UAHC.

A final thought: we are preparing our biennial program and tentatively we have scheduled as part of our Saturday afternoon program, a "town meeting" or "debate" or whatever you want to call it on the subject of humanistic congregations. I would like to use this letter to invite you officially to take the position of opposition to the inclusion of the congregation during this session. Please let me know if you can accept.

Shelly, what a joy it is to share thoughts by correspondence on matters of Jewish content and ideology. It certainly is a change from most of the correspondence I engage in. I suspect that we have not heard the last from each other on the subject.

B'shalom,

*Frank*

Frank Sundheim

cc: Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
Jan Epstein  
Sam Steen  
Arthur Grant  
Rabbi Allen Kaplan  
Stanley Loeb



**BETH ADAM**  
JUDAISM WITH A  
HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

March 17, 1992

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021-7064

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

Thank you for meeting with Jim Cummins and me to discuss Congregation Beth Adam's application to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. While I found your assessment of Beth Adam's chances for acceptance rather sobering, I appreciated your candor. I hope our conversation provided you with further insights into the philosophy of the congregation and our reason for making an application. I believe that many individuals do not understand the nature of Beth Adam and reject it not for what it is, but rather for what they think it is.

As you requested, I have enclosed a variety of materials created and published by Congregation Beth Adam. The materials include liturgical pieces, statements of philosophy, by-laws (which will be further amended at our next annual meeting), our Strategic Plan, and a copy of my Erev Rosh Hashanah sermon in which I addressed my reasons for seeking affiliation. I believe these materials will provide you even greater insight into the nature of our congregation. If I can provide you with other materials, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I also want to thank you for treating Jim and me to lunch. I look forward to speaking with you again.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Barr  
Rabbi

RBB/mc

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

1720 Section Road  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45237  
(513) 396-7730

Established 1980

*Will not make an  
appt with them  
attend w/o you the  
Board meeting  
you said you  
might + I  
agree it's  
a good  
idea*



# MEMORANDUM

COPY

February 10, 1994

**FROM:** Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

**TO:** Rabbi Daniel B. Syme

**BCC:** MELVIN MERIANS

I have your memo of February 7th in which you relay Bob Chaiken's and Nelson Cohen's request that "the Board must know that Beth Adam was rejected several times by the local and regional bodies." I don't think it is appropriate that their letter be included in the packet which we send out for Mel. Don't forget that the regional negative recommendation is to be considered by the National New Congregations Committee on Friday before our discussion and such a letter from the regions might be seen as preempting the work of the National Committee. I think that we ought to send out the items which you suggest in your February 7th memo, that is to say, the Plaut Responsum, the Mihaly Responsum and the covering letter from Mel which will frame the issue, and in this letter, of course, Mel can mention the fact that this matter has been considered by the Local Committee, by the Regional Committee and is now being considered by the National Committee which will bring its report to us. Including a letter from the Region at this point would be seen as preempting the work of the National New Congregations Committee.



**Union of American Hebrew Congregations**

**SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA**

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

## MEMORANDUM

109  
FROM: Rabbi Daniel B. Syme                      DATE: February 7, 1994  
TO: Mr. Melvin Merians, Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

I spoke with Bob Chaiken and Nelson Cohen regarding the Beth Adam debate in June.

They feel very strongly that the Board must know that Beth Adam was rejected several times by the local and regional bodies.

We discussed circulation of a letter from the region, providing a chronology of events leading up to the meeting. I recommend that such a letter be included in the Board packet, along with:

1. Plaut Responsum
2. Mihaly Responsum
3. Cover Letter Framing The Issue

*I don't think we need  
covering letter from region.  
Mel's letter can refer to  
his actions, as well as  
on*



RABBI DAVID POLISH  
BETH EMET THE FREE SYNAGOGUE

2025 SHERMAN AVENUE  
APT. #303  
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS  
60201



Rabbi Alexander Shindler  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

Shalom, Alex,

The late Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia once said, "When I make a mistake, it's a beaut."

AMERICAN JEWISH

My earlier support for the "secular" Cincinnati Congregation's efforts for admission to the UAHC was such a "beaut." It contradicts everything in Jewish life that I stand for.

The Congregation would wish to assert its claim to its integrity by simultaneously undermining the integrity of the Reform Movement at a time when American Jewry is in danger of unraveling.

I relent. I repent. I recant.

All the best.

Shalom,



RABBI DAVID POLISH

DP:kt

# MEMORANDUM

February 5, 1993

FROM: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
TO: Rabbi Alan D. Bregman - Great Lks Council

Thanks for sending me a copy of the letter you received from the 7th grade class of Temple Israel in Minneapolis. It is exceedingly instructive.

From the looks of it, they are getting the right kind of education.

I hope that all is well with you.

Fondly.



**Union of American Hebrew Congregations**  
SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA  
838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100



# Temple Israel

2324 Emerson Avenue South • Minneapolis • Minnesota • 55405 • (612) 377-8680

January 8, 1993

**RABBIS**

Joseph A. Edelheit

Joseph R. Black

Marcia A. Zimmerman

Max A. Shapiro, Emeritus

**CANTOR**

Barry Abelson

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Treasurer

James A. Cohn,  
Secretary

Dear Rabbi Bregman,

The following are responses by the 7th grade "Haskalah" class of Temple Israel, in Minneapolis, to the question of inclusion or exclusion of the humanist congregation to the U.A.H.C. We held a mini-debate on this issue and asked the kids to make a decision.

## Statements For Inclusion

Dear UAHC,

1. We are 7th graders from Temple Israel in Minneapolis, MN. We believe that the Humanist Congregation should be admitted to the UAHC. We don't think that belief in God is required for being a reform Jew. This congregation studies Hebrew, seeks Jewish learning, celebrates holidays, and prays. The fact that they don't believe in God is irrelevant. If Reform Judaism believes in change, why don't we accept this congregations position which has new ideas in place of the traditional belief in God.
2. They do the rituals, but don't believe in God. Many Reform Jews already don't believe in God. You can't say you can't play. The Humanists are helping to expand the Reform Movement. Community and time is the most important part of preserving Judaism.

## Statements Against Inclusion

Dear UAHC,

1. We believe that the congregation that doesn't believe in God should not be admitted to the UAHC. If they don't believe in God, how can they be Jewish? The basis of Judaism is believing in God and praising God. Without believing in God, what would the Torah mean? If they just believe in the values of the Torah, they might as well be a different religion. The definition of a religion is believing in a god, so this congregation is not a religion and therefor, should not be admitted to the UAHC.

2. We are against the synagogue because we don't understand what they are going to pray for besides God. We also don't understand how they can be Jewish and not have someone or something to believe in.
- 

3. We feel that this synagogue in Cincinnati, that doesn't believe in God, should not be given membership in the UAHC because:
- a. You can't be a Reform Jew if you don't believe in God.
  - b. It would split the Reform Movement.
  - c. You couldn't pray, who would you pray to?
- 

4. Reform Judaism believes in God, humanists don't.

Reform Judaism and Humanist Judaism are different things and shouldn't be allowed to be mixed.

If we allow the humanists, they will change things too much.

The humanists are Jews, but not Reform Jews.

Our tradition is fundamentally based on a belief in God. What would Jewish history be without God.

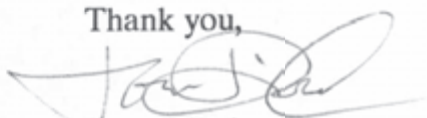
Judaism is based on one God. When Abraham became Jewish, he made a covenant with God.

---

5. We are not for the synagogue, but we think that a place for Jewish people to gather is good, because there are other things that make up Judaism besides God, like mitzvot. But we don't think a sanctuary is necessary.
- 

We hope these statements can be used either by you or the Union. In either case, we would really appreciate a written response, which we will share with our students.

Thank you,



Tom Dikel

7th Grade Haskalah Coordinator for the 7th Grade Haskalah Staff





איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

# Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

100 WEST MONROE STREET, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60603-1902 (312) 782-1477 FAX# (312) 782-1642

## GREAT LAKES REGION

Rabbi Alan D. Bregman  
Director

Gerard W. Kaye  
Director of Camping &  
Youth Activities

Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute

Mimi Dunitz  
Assistant Regional Director

February 1, 1993

7th Grade Haskalah Class  
c/o Tom Dikel  
Temple Israel  
2324 Emerson Ave. South  
Minneapolis, Minn. 55405

Dear Class Members,

Thank you very much for your letter with regard to the membership of a humanist congregation in the UAHC. Let me first say how impressed I am with your concern and clarity of thought. Sometimes people act in a very emotional way. That is not particularly helpful. You have taken the time to think out a position based on Jewish religious values and theology.


Both of your statements, pro and con, reflect the larger debate going on in the Movement right now. In some ways, the debate is between competing positive, Jewish values. This is what makes it so difficult.

With your assumed permission, I am sending your letter on to Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the UAHC. I know that he will be interested in your contribution and more importantly, refer it to the appropriate committees dealing with this issue.

If you will permit me a personal reaction. There is room for Jews who define themselves as humanist Jews. What they have to say can and should be taken seriously. However, there is a danger to a Movement or organization trying to be all things to all people. Sometimes, we end up being very little to a few people. My own personal view finds me to be more sympathetic with those who are against. But it is by no means a clear cut issue.

Again, thank you for the time and concern. This only bodes well for our future.

Sincerely,

  
Rabbi Alan Bregman

Chairman  
Melvin Merians  
President  
Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
President-Great Lakes Region  
Lois Rose  
President-Chicago Federation  
Judith Brody  
B.J.E. Director  
of Reform Education  
Dr. Betsy Katz  
Assistant Camp Director  
Jeffrey Friedman  
Administrative Coordinator  
Audrey H. Goldblatt



COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

November 25, 1992  
29 Heshvan 5753

James A. Salinger  
James Salinger & Associates  
2601 Section Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45222

Dear Mr. Salinger:

I hope you will forgive me if I avoid a direct answer to the question which you pose. It is not that I am in a "tenuous" position regarding the matter of Beth Adam's application for membership in the Union. I have never been one to avoid taking a stance and can show many a lump for the brick bats thrown at me because of it.

In this instance, I actually encouraged the debate which, from the point of view of our nationwide religious community, I consider something more than just a "squabble." Allow me to refer you to the pertinent paragraphs on pages 8 and 9 of my Baltimore Biennial address in which I state my reasons for encouraging this debate. In other words, I want this debate. I deem it important for our inner wellbeing. But herein is also my perplexity, for I have learned that when I state my own views too soon, the debate is usually foreclosed.

I made this quite clear to Rabbi Barr and Jim Cummings when I met with them now nearly a half year ago. I told them that, in a sense, I was "exploiting" them in urging them to make their application; that I certainly could not guarantee its acceptance; that I even deemed this acceptance unlikely.



Since that time, the issue has been discussed in two arenas and I was very much impressed by the level of discussion which ensued which fully fulfilled my hopes on that score. Indeed, the vote in the second meeting, that is to say, at the more recent Midwest Biennial, was much closer than I had intuitively surmised.

Obviously, I will participate in the debate when it reaches the national Board, but even here, not at the very beginning, but rather toward the end of the debate.

And so I really don't know how to counsel you in your effort to counsel the congregation. My own feeling is that this debate, no matter what its result, will not dishonor Beth Adam in any sense of the term. Quite the contrary! Thus far, at least, those who have heard the presentations and arguments, so well conceived and articulated, have learned to understand the approach of your congregation, and in consequence respect its integrity all the more.

With every good wish, I am

Cordially,

Alexander M. Schindler

cc: Rabbi Barr

JAMES SALINGER & ASSOCIATES

*Financial Service*

REGISTERED INVESTMENT ADVISER

2601 SECTION ROAD  
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45222  
(513) 531-3106

November 16, 1992

Dear, Rabbi Schindler,

As a former lay leader of Rockdale Temple and now as an enthusiastic member of Beth Adam, I am very pleased that you came to the U.A.H.C. regional meeting to hear the discussion regarding Beth Adam's application for membership in the Union.

I believe that Beth Adam is aiming to create a better future for our children and our community. If our Reform leaders recognize that the mission of Beth Adam in all respects conforms to Reform history and principle, I would support our continuing quest for U.A.H.C. membership. Otherwise, I would urge our Rabbi and members to move on to more fruitful pursuits.

In these times when issues such as bigotry, fundamentalism, choice, economic hardship and Israel---to name some of our Jewish concerns---, wouldn't our valuable time and efforts be better used to focus on these problems than on an internal squabble about whether or not Beth Adam qualifies for Union membership?

I have attended services regularly during the last thirty five years. More than any others, those at Beth Adam have provided me with more spiritual enrichment, inspiration and a better understanding of Torah, Jewish tradition and history.

Be assured that I realize the tenuous position on this matter in which you find yourself. However if you are opposed to our membership in the Union, I hope that you will express yourself as we would indeed be grateful for your forthrightness.

With best wishes,

  
James A. Salinger

cc: Rabbi Barr



BROWN, CUMMINS & BROWN CO., L. P. A.  
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441 VINE STREET  
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45202

J. W. BROWN\*  
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LYNNE SKILKEN  
KAREN M. McLAUGHLIN  
AMY G. APPLGAYE  
KATHRYN KNUS PRZYWARA  
MELANIE S. CORWIN

TELEPHONE (513) 381-2121  
TELECOPIER (513) 381-2125

**FACSIMILE TRANSMITTAL COVERSHEET**

\*RETIRED

DATE: November 4, 1992

NO. OF PAGES (Including Coversheet): 3

TO: RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

COMPANY:

FAX NO.: 212-570-0895

FROM: JIM CUMMINS

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

NOTE: IF THERE ARE ANY QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS WITH THIS TRANSMISSION, NOTIFY US AT (513) 381-2121.

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*Jim  
Will move  
from his end  
will  
call Bob  
he'll call  
you*



BETH ADAM  
JUDAISM WITH A  
HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

November 2, 1992

Mr. Robert Chaiken  
Aronowitz, Chaiken & Hardesty  
312 Walnut Street  
P. O. Box 5367  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45201-5367

Dear Bob,

Jim Cummins has relayed the substance of your discussion of October 29, 1992 regarding the meeting of the UAHC Regional Board on Friday, November 13, 1992. We are grateful for your efforts in providing our Congregation with an opportunity to present its points of view on Congregation Beth Adam's application to join the UAHC.

We have been told that one or more of the local Cincinnati congregations have suggested Dr. Michael Meyer as a resource to your Board, to speak during the 30 minutes allocated to the point of view in opposition to our application as previously expressed by Rabbi Kamrass.

We would request that you invite Rabbi Gary Zola as an additional resource to your Board to explain a point of view favorable to our Congregation's application. To that extent we will yield part of the 30 minutes otherwise allotted to our presentation so that your Board can hear from Rabbi Zola.

We would appreciate it if you would send a letter of invitation to Rabbi Zola at HUC indicating the time when he should be prepared to make his presentation.

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

1720 Section Road  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45237  
(513) 396-7730

Established 1980



Thank you for your continued efforts. If you have any questions, or need any further information please feel free to call.

Sincerely,

Pat Rosenberg  
President

PR/dg



## ALLAN B. GOLDMAN

347 Conway Avenue  
Los Angeles, California 90024  
(310) 788-4520

August 27, 1992

Melvin S. Merians, Chairman  
UAHC  
838 Fifth Avenue  
NYC, NY 10021

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
President  
UAHC  
838 Fifth Avenue  
NYC, NY 10021

Re: Application of Beth Adam Congregation

Dear Mel and Alex:

I received the July 26, 1992 Transcript of Hearing yesterday and read it last night.

I think that you should authorize Bob Chaiken to give a copy to Beth Adam and a copy to Rabbi Kamrass. They can distribute it as they see fit, since I don't think you should place any strictures on its distribution. *Callan 9/1/92*

I have the following comments for your eyes only:

1. At Page 74 Bob Chaiken promised Beth Adam that he would make available the essence of Rabbi Kamrass' remarks.

2. It was ill-advised of Nelson Cohen and especially of Rabbi Pinsky to make comments to the Cincinnati Reform group about the presentation that Beth Adam made, considering that the Cincinnati Reform group did not want Beth Adam present when they spoke. I refer particularly to Page 119, where Nelson said, "I listened to them and I found that it was just as incredible that they wanted to shift that God problem under the table" and where Rabbi Pinsky said, "It was almost a certain degree of arrogance that said, well, you people are not really qualified to debate theology with our principles." Those were remarks that could be made in Executive Session of the Committee. Ironically, neither Nelson nor Pinsky asked the right questions of the Beth Adam group, so that they did not develop the issues as they should. I hope that Rabbi Pinsky has proven better as a Regional Director than he shows up in this Transcript and that my strong feelings that he should not have been named a Regional Director were "misguided."

3. At Page 120 Rabbi Kamrass says that the UAHC constitution is a "poorly written document" and Nelson Cohen says



that it contains "terrible language." In the words of our modern sages: **NOT**. Although I have previously memorialized to you areas where I think it can be improved when the time is ripe, I believe it is a well-written document. In 1946 the creators of the document purposely referred in the preamble to "benign Providence" rather than to "God", because we are dealing with "congregations . . . attached to Judaism and their adherence to its liberal interpretation." The Day Special Committee on UAHC Constitution, By-laws and Structure, during its deliberations from 1975 to 1979 saw no reason to change this Preamble (and we had HUC-JIR representatives on that Committee).

4. As you know I have vacillated back and forth on whether Beth Adam should be admitted. My mind remains open on that issue. However, I must say that the sophistry and patent weakness of Rabbi Kamrass' theological argument does not serve the cause of those who oppose admission. He and apparently his Cincinnati Reform rabbinic colleagues are attempting to define Beth Adam as a congregation that limits freedom by prohibiting the use of the word "God" and the recital of the S'hma. I did not read the Beth Adam representatives as saying that there were such prohibitions. This points up what I think was a structural mistake in the hearing: Kamrass et al should have been present when Barr et al spoke and should have been permitted to ask questions then, and Barr et al should have been present when Kamrass et al spoke and should have been permitted to ask questions then. Beth Adam could have been confronted with the question: do you or do you not announce and/or enforce such prohibitions? As it stands now, the argument that Kamrass stated as the major one may fall very easily, if Beth Adam responds, "nonsense, we have no such prohibitions, and in fact individuals do speak the name of God in our sanctuary and do recite the S'hma."

5. If Beth Adam concedes that there are such prohibitions, then I think it becomes an easy decision: they should not be admitted. On the other hand, if there are no such prohibitions **and** the name of God is used by "individuals", how can we, protectees of "benign Providence", exclude the congregation from our midst?

6. Therefore, I suggest that you recommend to Bob Chaiken and Rabbi Pinsky that they seek a written statement from Beth Adam regarding (1) Whether the name of God and the S'hma are prohibited from mention or recital in their services, (2) Whether there are any members of the congregation who do mention the name of God and/or recite the S'hma during services, (3) the name and phone number of such members so that Midwest Council Board members can call and question them, etc. If Allan Goldman is a member, and he is called to the Bima, can he vocally recite the S'hma or say

August 27, 1992  
Page 3

"Praise be to God?" If Mel Merians, Chairman of the UAHC, is invited to speak to the Congregation, can he do these things as part of his address? If the answer to these questions is "Yes", is it the policy of the congregation to **discourage** these activities?

7. I also think that the Midwest Council should make it clear to Beth Adam, in writing, that even if at the end of this process the UAHC Board of Trustees votes to admit Beth Adam to the UAHC, the UAHC cannot require the Cincinnati Reform congregations to include Beth Adam or its youth in the Reform High School. I would seek a written commitment from Beth Adam that it has applied for UAHC membership knowing that if admitted it still may not become part of that High School but nevertheless membership in the UAHC is more important to it than obtaining any such rights. This will diffuse the issue of whether the "only" reason for this UAHC membership application is to gain admittance to the high school. In addition, it will avoid a later claim that the UAHC permitted the application to proceed under false pretenses (a later claim that the UAHC "should have known" that the high school rights were most important to Beth Adam and that Beth Adam thought at all times that the UAHC could "order" the Cincinnati congregations to include Beth Adam in the high school after it was admitted to the UAHC). Again, because neither side was present when the other side spoke, the high school issue was not discussed with the Beth Adam representatives.



A handwritten signature, possibly "J", is written in the lower right area of the page.



*Answered  
by Paul*

**Aronowitz,  
Chaiken &  
Hardesty**

*Certified Public Accountants*

**312 Walnut Street, P.O. Box 5367, Cincinnati, Ohio 45201-5367 • (513) 621-8300 • Fax (513) 621-8345**

July 23, 1991

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Bernard Aronowitz, CPA (1928-1991)  
Robert Chaiken, CPA  
Richard J. Hardesty, CPA  
John T. McKinley, CPA  
Richard R. Vestring, CPA  
Jerome D. Kreger, CPA  
William G. Wessendarp, CPA  
Linda Tracy Gill, CPA

RE: Beth Adam Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

Dear Alex:

We had an executive committee meeting yesterday here in Cincinnati, and Jimmy Simon advised us that his most recent conversation with Rabbi Robert Barr indicated that the Congregation will probably be making formal application for membership in the UAHC.

All of those in the attendance at the executive committee meeting felt it would be very appropriate to follow your suggestion of my appointing a task force to deal with the very sensitive theological issue of Beth Adam's admission to the UAHC.

In that regard, I would welcome from you any thoughts and comments that you might have, including recommendation for an appropriate person to chair such a task force, as well as your thoughts on the composition, size, qualifications for participation on such a task force.

I recall your suggestion in our most recent conversation about this matter that the discussion and debate be as broad-based as possible. However, I am wondering whether such a recommendation can be implemented in dealing with a task force to discuss the very deep and emotional issues that will arise.

I thank you for your help in this matter.

Kindest, personal regards.

Sincerely,

ARONOWITZ, CHAIKEN & HARDESTY

*Bob*  
Robert Chaiken

/kk

cc: Rabbi James L. Simon



# Beth Adam

The Cincinnati Congregation  
for Humanistic Judaism

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

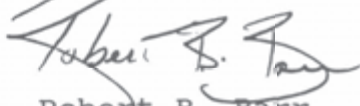
Dear Colleagues, Board Members, Friends, and Concerned Others:

It is with a great deal of pleasure that Congregation Beth Adam has published and distributes the enclosed responsum by Professor Eugene Mihaly. We believe that this responsum is important for all who are interested in Reform Judaism. Dr. Mihaly examines issues which are central to the direction of the Reform Movement and in doing so addresses Congregation Beth Adam's membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Congregation Beth Adam's inquiries to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations have also resulted in a responsum being written by the Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut - Chair. Dr. Mihaly in his work refers to and discusses this document. Rabbi Plaut's responsum is available from the office of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Though this document is being distributed by Congregation Beth Adam, it should be noted that individuals not affiliated with the congregation have contributed their financial support to this project. Those supporting this publication believe that it is important to wrestle with the essential question of what Reform Judaism will become as we enter the new millennium. It is my hope, and that of all those associated with this publication, that this responsum will be one more step in the strengthening of Reform Judaism.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Barr  
Rabbi

RBB/jr  
Enclosure



קהילה קדושה רודף שלום  
Congregation Rodeph Shalom

96 Fredmir Boulevard • Dollard des Ormeaux, Québec H9A 2R3 • Telephone 626-2173

Rabbi Larry Kaplan



May 14, 1991

*For  
humanist faith*

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut  
Holy Blossom Temple  
1950 Bathurst St.  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5P 3K9

Dear Gunther:

I pray all is well with you and yours. I've been reading in the National Jewish Post and Opinion reference the possible application for membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations of the Cincinnati Jewish Humanist Congregation, Beth Adam. I read with interest the reports as found in the periodical of your response to a question(s) posed by the leadership of the Union to you as Chair of Responsa Committee of the CCAR.

I have significant problems with your response as reported. I'm not unaware of the delicate path we tread between the Scylla of Authority and Charybdis of Hefkerut. May I ask a question? Do we have member Congregations of the Union that could be classed as Reconstructionist? Don't we, in fact, accept such congregations as bona fide Jewish congregations? And, don't they, in fact, hold to 'sectarian' views on Judaism? The question then becomes for me, whether we are aiming for a more inclusive frame for the Union or one which is of a more limited nature.

Let me pursue this just a bit further. If we are going to use the criteria you were reported to offer reference a congregation applying for membership in the Union, then what about application for membership in the C.C.A.R., and what about accepting as students to the College-Institute those who hold a humanist, atheist or agnostic theological position upon application to HUC-JIR or who choose it while a student in our Rabbinic School?

My suspicion is that the term 'Humanist' is the source of the difficulty. I further suspect if they had called themselves a 'Polydiox' Jewish congregation, it would not have elicited the same response. A lack of enthusiasm perchance, but not a suggested rejection (as reported).

In order that my position be 'clear', I see myself as a theist. While my understanding of what that means has changed through the years, "God" remains a central belief of my Judaism. I also acknowledge that my beliefs are personal to me using the God language of the Faith of Israel. Therefore, anyone who uses the Faith language of Israel, can, for me, be properly called Jewish. I'm not into genetic Judaism. Karl Marx for me was a Christian as was Heine. I believe it is imperative that we accept the choices people make to leave Judaism as we accept people who choose Judaism.

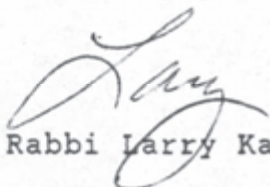
The question then is it appropriate to include the 'God-Talk' of Jewish Humanist Congregations within the parameters of Jewish God-Talk. I believe there is enough evidence in the Midrash, which for me is the area where we can explore the possibilities of Jewish God-Talk not the Halacha, to justify our inclusion of such congregations within the parameter of Judaism.

I have the sense that another element in this discussion is a covert agenda item, to wit: What will the Conservative and Orthodox think and believe about Reform and how will this impact the complex of interactions within the American/Canadian Jewish community and the world Jewish community? I concluded a long time ago that one cannot satisfy the unsatisfiable, and I make no attempt to do so. I have chosen for myself the frame of "What is appropriate" to this (or whatever) set of circumstances as my guiding principle. This may include the considerations others have, without permitting them to be determinative. I refuse to be a hostage to anyone. It would be, for me, a very sad day should our movement permit itself to become a hostage to our acceptance by anyone. Somewhere in this discussion Dr. Eugene Mihaly presented, as found in the 'Post and Opinion', is the question of "the" necessary definition of God as one who intervenes in history. As you well know, Maimonides offered that positive definitions are limiting therefore he developed a negative theology.

I suggest that this exercise will have a stultifying effect. I only see negative value accruing from the responsum given the details as reported in the Post and Opinion.

With warmest regards from House to House, I remain

Sincerely yours,

  
Rabbi Larry Kaplan

c.c.: Dr. Eugene Mihaly  
Rabbi Alexander Schindler



MEMORANDUM

COPY ✓

May 21, 1991

FROM: Edith J. Miller  
TO: Rabbi James L. Simon

The packet of materials on Beth Adam just arrived. I know Alex will be delighted that you were able to put together this collection of publications and services from Beth Adam. Since he is on the West Coast, I am writing to convey heartfelt appreciation.

Fondest regards to you and your harem.





איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

# Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

10425 OLD OLIVE STREET ROAD, SUITE 205, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63141-5923 (314) 997-7566 FAX #: (314) 997-4041

## MIDWEST COUNCIL

Rabbi James L. Simon

Regional Director

May 15, 1991

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
UAHC  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

Now that I have finally had the chance to climb out of a mountain of things that accumulated on my desk during my various and sundry travels, I am sending to you this packet which Edie Miller indicated you might want to have for reference use.

To the best of my knowledge, I think that I have managed to compile all of the various and sundry publications of Beth Adam. You will find on the right hand side of the packet seven pieces of liturgical material and on the left hand side of the packet you will find some philosophical materials that have also been published.

If I receive any new or additional materials I will pass them on under separate cover. As of this date nothing additional has occurred. Bob Chaiken and I have spoken a few times and it is our hope that at one of our meetings during the summer that we will begin to put together the nucleus of a special committee that will be asked to study this question and make recommendations to our Regional board. Bob and I both agree that the committee will not go into operation until such time as an application has been received.

Please keep in touch if I can be of any additional assistance. I send all best wishes for a happy and festive Shavout . . .

Br'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg

enclosure

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Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
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COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

March 26, 1991  
11 Nisan 5751

Rabbi David Polish  
Beth Emet The Free Synagogue  
2025 Sherman Avenue, Apt. #303  
Evanston, IL 60201

Dear David:

Thank you so very much for your letter of March 18th in which you set forth your views concerning the Humanistic congregation.

I assume you do not mind if I share this letter with the others who will be called upon to make a decision.

As you probably know, the process of accepting a congregation into the Union begins on a regional level. Usually this is a pro forma matter involving a small committee of people. In this instance, however, I asked the Regional Director, Jim Simon, to set up a special committee to consider this matter - a committee which will be broadly representative of all of the elements in our constituency as well as of the ideological divergences that obtain among us.

A decision is not imminent by any manner or means. The congregation hasn't even formally applied to the UAHC. When it does, we will begin the process of "a reasoning together" in which your words of advice will play their roles.

To tell you the truth, I myself have not resolved this issue in my own mind. I have been moving to and fro in my position after various opinions arrive on my desk. Our colleagues have a way of being persuasive!

Be that as it may, I thank you once again for your care. Our religious community would not be as strong as it is were it not for your manifold contributions.

With all good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

*copies of this ltr sent to mem. p. Simon ABG*

RABBI DAVID POLISH  
BETH EMET THE FREE SYNAGOGUE

March 18, 1991  
3 Nisan 5751

~~XXXX~~  
2025 SHERMAN AVENUE  
APT. #303  
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS  
60201

Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
Union of American Hebrew Congregation  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Shalom, Alex,

It may appear strange to you that, as one who was less than enthusiastic about the Reform position on patrilineality, and on homosexual rabbis, I stand opposed to any possible efforts to exclude a Humanistic congregation from our movement.

Last August I spent virtually an entire evening discussing this problem with Gunther Plaut, and I urged caution in pressing the issue.

At the outset, I recognize that the Union has a right to deny membership to applicant congregations, something that Eugene Mihaly does not seem to take into account. But this is only a technicality, while my argument is of a different character. First, the applying congregation does not profess atheism. It professes no credal position about God, a position that vast numbers of Reform Jews share. By denying this congregation membership, we would separate ourselves from many of the same fellow Jews whom we harbor and cherish, knowing their position full well. Even more, we preclude the very great possibility that the congregation could undergo a spiritual evolution which we would stifle by closing our doors to them. At a time when the House of Israel is confronted by the direst of threats, are we prepared to share in yet another schism? If a supreme Mitzvah today is the preservation of the Jewish People, which is the sole depository of Judaism, does God really want us to reject those who are not yet sure about Him?

When I was a child, I moved in almost exclusively secular Jewish circles, although my father was an unconventional believer. Today, children and grandchildren of that Socialist-Zionist milieu who could easily have been excluded from the Union, God forbid, are leaders and rabbis in our movement.

It is to the credit of the HUC that in the late twenties, Humanism, which swept the student body, gave way to profound belief among the vast adherents of Humanism in their formative years.

I am currently engaged in a study of 200 Haggadot of kibbutzim from the thirties to the present. Some of them were outright,



Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
March 18, 1991  
3 Nisan 5751  
page 2.

and even flagrantly, secular, but see the Haggadah of the Kibbutz Hameuchad today! It's so traditional you have to look twice.

I agree that there must be limits, but to exclude a society of Jews from Jewish spiritual fellowship would be to shatter the limits we wish to defend. To admit other categories and to deny these?

The Halachah could win hands down on this issue, but would Jewish existence?

Would we be taking risks by admitting this congregation? You bet we would, but which risk would be greater--to admit or to exclude? Better to risk the possibility that the applying congregation may not change, in which case we would have to examine our religious positions much more profoundly.

Shalom,

  
RABBI DAVID POLISH


DP:kt

P.S. In my student days I introduced Clarence Darrow to the student body in these words, "We welcome a famous atheist, and God knows what an atheist he is."

Also, the enclosed should be of interest.

The "needy" are the pressured, the spiritually confused, the psychologically perplexed, the lonely, the aged—all those who have fallen beneath the wheels of our increasingly demanding and abrasive society. At the Seder we offer them an opportunity to share our redemptive experience so that they can take control of their daily lives once again. All of us need food for the body and food for the spirit; the Seder abundantly provides both.

The contrast between the hungry and the needy is masterfully and lovingly described in Shmuel Yosef Agnon's short story "The Passover Celebrants" (*Passover Anthology*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1966). Here is the bitterly poor *shammes* trudging home after evening services to an empty room, to a "Seder" made up only of the bare necessities for which he scrimped and saved for months. And there is the wealthy childless widow, who from force of habit has prepared the same marvelous Seder she always did when her husband was still alive. The Seder plate and the food are waiting on a table gleaming with silver and spotless linen, but the widow is alone and empty in soul and spirit. By chance she discovers the *shammes* on his way home and invites him to share the Seder with her. The time-honored words of the Haggadah and the old, familiar ritual blend into the most wonderful Seder for both of them, the hungry and the needy. At the conclusion, when the widow and the *shammes* recite the *Shir Ha-Shirim* together, there is hope that there will be no more hunger and loneliness at least for these Passover celebrants.



There are also people who have food and companionship but, having moved away from the glorious Jewish tradition, feel that their lives are empty and purposeless. They too are in need. Hence, we say, "Let anyone who is in need—in need of food, in need of companionship, in need of experiencing the glory of the Jewish tradition—come and spend Passover with us." The Seder is thus an opportunity to invite even those who have become estranged from the tradition and reunite them with their heritage.

### *The Disbeliever at the Seder*

In our society the Seder has been so popularized that it is celebrated even in households where few rituals are observed. Occasionally even a Jew who professes no belief in God will find himself



at a Seder. But does the participation of an agnostic (or even an atheist) have any particular religious value, or is it simply a hypocritical act which "makes no sense"?

This question is related to the wider issue of whether the observance of mitzvot is predicated upon belief in God. Stated otherwise, is belief in God the central, underlying basis for all of Judaism, or is it one particular mitzvah out of the 613, albeit a very important one? The Rishonim nearly a thousand years ago debated this issue in connection with the status of the first of the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord thy God who took thee out of the Land of Egypt . . . ." Is this a separate mitzvah requiring belief in God, or is it simply a statement of fact? Most interesting is the view of Nahmanides, who, to explain the omission of belief in God as one of the 613 mitzvot, proposes that this tenet of belief is more than just a commandment; it is the matrix from which all other commandments flow. The great medieval philosopher Hasdai Crescas (d. 1412) wrote in his treatise *Or Hashem* that to even mention the word *mitzvah* ("command") without predicating a *metzaveh* ("commander") is a logical absurdity. Thus, to return to our question, it would appear at the least incongruous to have an atheist or an agnostic participate in a religious ritual such as a Seder. Nevertheless, one can look upon the issue at hand from a different perspective—one that is commensurate with Rashi's interpretation of "I am the Lord thy God [who took thee out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage]." The commentator par excellence does not read this verse as a commandment, or as an introduction to the other commandments. To him it is a statement of experience. He has God saying to the Jewish people, "I am the Lord thy God—in all my manifestations to you I am the same God, viz., the One who brought you out of the Land of Egypt." Whether it be the warring God at the Red Sea or the teaching God at Mount Sinai, it is one and the same God.

For some Jews participation in the Seder is not due to belief in a God who commanded such participation. Rather, their involvement is due to the need to share in a common religious or even social experience or perhaps out of plain curiosity. These Jews are often seekers rather than finders. If they do find God it is not from the wellsprings of belief but from the meanderings of experience. While they may not accept the God of the Sinaitic revelation, they

might discover the God of the Red Sea parting. It is one and the same God. We must, therefore, *not* discourage Jews who are agnostics, or even atheists, from joining with us at the Seder table. If they do not arrive at religious truth in one manner—through Torah—they may arrive at it in another manner—through history, through community, through the beauty of ritual. Let us recall that even the Wicked Son has his place at the Seder.

## THE PASSOVER STORY

מגיד

*Uncover the matzah and lift up the plate for all to see. The recital of the Haggadah begins with the following words:*

This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry—let them come and eat. All who are needy—let them come and celebrate the Passover with us. Now we are here; next year may we be in the Land of Israel. Now we are slaves; next year may we be free men.

הָא לֶחֶמַּא עֲנִיָּא, דִּי אֲכָלוּ  
אֲבֹהֵתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל-  
דְּכָפִין יִיתִי וְיִכּוּל, כָּל-דְּצָרִין יִיתִי  
וְיַפְסֹח. הַשְׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה  
בְּאַרְעָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל. הַשְׁתָּא עַבְדִּי,  
לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין:

*The plate is put down, the matzah is covered, and the second cup of wine is filled. The youngest present asks the Four Questions.*

### The Four Questions

*Maggid* has a dual purpose: to link us to the future as well as to the past. We must thrust into the future to remain human and not to despair. We communicate to our children (the future) the experience of the past in order to inform the present, and through them to shape our collective future. This is the goal of *maggid*.

What does *maggid* consist of? Questions and answers. There are two pedagogical principles that the Seder ritual—and all of Halakhah—presumes and that modern education has begun to recognize. First, you cannot make someone learn something he is



cc: sent to  
mm  
ABG  
J. Simon

# TEMPLE ISRAEL

Longwood Avenue and Plymouth Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02215  
Telephone 617-566-3960

RABBI EMERITUS Roland B. Gittelsohn

20 March 1991

Dr. Michael A. Meyer  
Hebrew Union College  
3101 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220-2488

Dear Michael:

In response to a letter from me on the same subject, Alex Schindler has been good enough to share with me his copy of your 20 December letter to Gene Mihaly. Because of my great respect for you and your integrity, I am dictating this letter of disagreement.

I do not choose to base my attitude only on the grounds voiced by Gene in his Responsum. I prefer rather to make my rejoinder a matter of semantics because I believe that we are in danger here of playing a game with words.

During my active years I frequently gave my Confirmation students an assignment to write a definition of God without using the word God or any synonym for it. I did this because so often when individuals volunteered the information that they were atheists, just a few minutes of conversation convinced me that they were not atheists at all, that in fact they had rejected the concepts of God they gained in childhood but had not yet developed an adult understanding of deity.

Not having seen the liturgy of Temple Beth Adam, I am not qualified to judge it. If, as you say, they deliberately avoid using the word God, I strongly disagree with them but do not believe this is adequate ground to reject any application they may make for membership in the UAHC. My strong suspicion is that if you gave the members of Beth Adam a questionnaire to ascertain what they really believe about the meaning of reality and life, their responses would not differ in any substantial degree from those of any other congregation whose

liturgy does employ the word God. To reject them on such spurious grounds strikes me as renunciation of the basic principles of Reform Judaism.

I feel very strongly that when as and if this congregation applies for Union membership, assuming that they satisfy all other qualifications, they should be accepted and we should then within the Union seek to educate them to a different understanding.

Needless to say, I respect you, your scholarship and your integrity even when we disagree.

On another matter, you will be interested to know that your spur to me nearly a year ago has resulted in a short history of ARZA's beginnings. Unfortunately at the moment no one seems to have the funds to publish this monograph, but my work on it has been completed and as soon as some means of publications has been discovered a copy will be sent to you.

Meanwhile, Bubbles joins me in affectionate greetings for Pesach from house to house and heart to heart.

Shalom,

Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn

RBG:gs

cc: Professor Eugene Mihaly  
Rabbi Alexander Schindler



MEMORANDUM

COPY

March 7, 1991

FROM: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
TO: Edith J. Miller  
COPY:

Please note my letter to Roland Gittlesohn and send him a copy of Mike Meyer's response to the Gene Mihaly Responsum.

*Sam* 3/11/91



COPY

March 7, 1991  
21 Adar 5751

Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn  
Temple Israel  
Longwood Ave & Plymouth St.  
Boston, MA 02215

Dear Roland:

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter to Gene Mihaly. Alas, the matter has not come to the Union Board. In fact, it has not even reached the level of the Regional New Congregations Committee and as I understand it, the congregation will not make a formal application for admission to the Union for quite some time.

There have been several answers to the Gene Mihaly memorandum, some of which are most cogent. Of course the Responsum Committee of the CCAR has written a negative statement.

You might be particularly interested in the letter from Mike Meyer to Gene, a copy of which was sent to me. Unfortunately, Edie Miller is on jury duty and I can't find it - without her I am completely lost. Be that as it may, I will ask her to send you a copy once she returns.

Rhea joins me in sending you and Bubbles all our love.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



# TEMPLE ISRAEL

Longwood Avenue and Plymouth Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02215  
Telephone 617-566-3960

---

RABBI EMERITUS Roland B. Gittelsohn

1 March 1991

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
UAHC  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

It occurs to me that you might like to see a copy of the letter I sent a few days ago to Gene Mihaly regarding his recent Responsum.

Since I haven't attended a Union Board meeting for quite some time, I have no idea what action was finally taken on this matter. I hope, however, that the Board either has already agreed or soon will to the views expressed by Gene, with which obviously I strongly concur.

I can't dictate this without also extending the usual abundant affection from Bubbles and me to Rhea and yourself.

Shalom,



Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn

RBG:gs  
enclosure

# TEMPLE ISRAEL

Longwood Avenue and Plymouth Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02215  
Telephone 617-566-3960

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RABBI EMERITUS Roland B. Gittelsohn

22 February 1991

Dr. Eugene Mihaly  
3974 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220

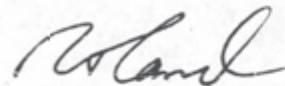
Dear Gene:

Having been away from Boston for six weeks, I have only now on my return had an opportunity to read your Responsum of 7 December 1990. I write now for two purposes: first, to tell you that I agree thoroughly with what you have written and hope that the Union will act in accordance with your decision.

My second objective is to tell you that page 16 of the copy that I received was blank. Assuming that this was not generally the case, I would appreciate your sending me a complete copy, or, if all copies are deficient, please let me have the missing page.

You have performed a service thoroughly consistent with my understanding of the nature and objectives of Reform Judaism. Bubbles and I are among the many who thank you for that and we send you our very best wishes.

Shalom,



Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn

RBG:gs





COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

February 28, 1991  
14 Adar 5751

Rabbi James L. Simon  
Regional Director  
UAHC 10425 Old Olive Street Road  
St. Louis MO 63141

Dear Jim:

I thank you for your letter of February 6. It awaited my return from the meetings of the Jewish Agency in Israel.

I am pleased to know that we have some time now to deal fully with the matter of the Humanistic Congregations requesting membership within the UAHC. Since the Cincinnati group is not going to apply for membership, there is nothing further to do. We do, however, have an impressive file of materials and opinions on what the stance of the UAHC should be in connection with such congregations. We will hold on to the file until the matter comes to the fore once again.

With fond regards and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



# Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
10425 OLD OLIVE STREET ROAD, SUITE 205, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63141 (314) 997-7566 FAX #: (314) 997-4041

MIDWEST COUNCIL  
Rabbi James L. Simon  
Regional Director

February 6, 1991

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
UAHC  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

Thanks for your good letter of January 24. I have waited a bit to respond because I wanted to speak again with Rabbi Bob Barr of Beth Adam in Cincinnati before I got back to you.

As you know, since you wrote to me at the end of January Beth Adam has gone ahead (at their own expense) and professionally published and distributed close to 2000 copies of the Mihaly Responsum. I have a feeling that they did not feel comfortable allocating additional funds to also distribute Dr. Meyer's letter to Dr. Mihaly!

The bottom line is that (as I suspected) there is not going to be an application in the near future. As I mentioned to you in a previous letter, Bob Chaiken and I met with the board in early December and had a very candid and spirited discussion. We focused on a number of different questions, and it became very clear at the meeting (and I have mentioned this to you before) that they sought membership in the UAHC in order to increase their visibility in the community as well as their credibility as a congregation. It also came out at the meeting that they very much want to be part of the successful and prestigious Reform Community High School, which is currently open only to students from congregations that belong to the UAHC.

We left the meeting with the understanding that when they were ready to file an application they would let me know and then Bob and I would outline a formal and detailed process that would permit anyone who wanted to participate in a full and meaningful manner. Bob and I have agreed that we want to do everything in accordance with your requests as well as handling this in a sensitive and a constructive manner. The other day Rabbi Barr confirmed to me that there is no application that is forthcoming and we may not see an application for another four to six months. He also indicated to me that the purpose of publishing the Mihaly Responsum was to try to raise the consciousness level of an issue that they think is a very important issue. I am not sure I agree with that, but in some ways it may not be so bad that this Responsum is being distributed.

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איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

① Thank Jimmy  
② cc: g lis  
letter to  
ABG  
MM -



Page 2

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
February 8, 1991

That is where everything is now. I cannot or will not do anything more until I receive a formal application. When I do receive one I will let you know immediately and Bob Chaiken and I will consult with you as to our ideas as to how the process should unfold.

If you have any questions or need additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to seeing you next month when I come into town for the Budget hearings. Naturally, if you would like to put in a good word for the important work that we are doing here in the Midwest Council I will not object to this form of favoritism! I am sure you could do this featly!

B'shalom,

Rabbi James L. Simon

JLS:bjg



**Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut**

O.C., Senior Scholar  
Holy Blossom Temple  
1950 Bathurst Street  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5P 3K9  
(416) 789-3291 / Fax (416) 789 9697

*2/12 sent MB  
CC: to Jim Simon  
PBG  
return original  
to files*

February 7, 1991/23 Shevat 5751

Rabbi Alexander Schindler,  
President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, N.Y.  
U.S.A. 10021

Dear Alex,

The following comments are offered in response to Prof. Eugene Mihaly's responsum, entitled "Qualifications for Membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations" (December 7, 1990). They are rendered, it should be noted, in a personal and not official capacity.

You have already received the response by Prof. Michael Meyer which, incidentally, was not solicited by the Committee, and his letter will speak for itself. I will therefore not duplicate his arguments. The following, then, are some additional observations which I hope those who will make the decision to admit or not to admit Beth Adam to membership in the UAHC will take into consideration.

1. Prof. Mihaly's opening argument refers to the UAHC constitution. If this were nothing more than a legal question, it would surely be decided by lawyers on whom the UAHC would call. But the fact is that all parties are really agreed that we deal here with a religious and not a legal matter -- else why would Beth Adam apply to Prof. Mihaly, a teacher of Midrash, for a responsum, and why would you and your colleagues write to me and, thereby, to the Committee? Inquiries are addressed to us on issues of Jewish practice and observance and we answer these inquiries by drawing upon the resources of tradition - which means both Reform and non-Reform tradition. We begin by asking whether the long history of halakhic interpretation yields certain answers, and if it does, we ask whether there is a Reform tradition or principle which would have us disagree with the conclusion. In the instant case, of course, only Reform tradition is in question.

Our Committee does not deal with right or wrong, for Reform Jews frequently differ widely amongst themselves on the spirit or essence of Reform -- and in fact, some members of the Committee themselves differed in this instance as well. What we do is try our best to arrive at the most suitable answer from the vantage point of Reform Judaism as we see it. Some of us on the Committee have legal training, but we speak as rabbis and not as attorneys-at-law. Prof. Mihaly is thus incorrect in stating (p. 9) that our discussion is



"irrelevant" to the question of Beth Adam's membership application. Called upon as rabbis to provide a rabbinic answer, we did precisely that.

Prof. Mihaly argues that the Union is precluded from denying membership to a congregation on the basis of "theologic belief, liturgic modes or religious practice" (p. 6). But in fact, Article III of the UAHC constitution makes acceptance of membership contingent upon the approval of the Union's Board of Trustees, which may be granted or withheld - presumably for a variety of reasons, including religious ones.

To be sure, congregational religious autonomy is guaranteed in Article VI, but this refers to "constituent congregations", that is, congregations which are already members of the Union. It may be noted that Prof. Mihaly omits these two key words "constituent congregations" (paragraph B, p. 5). There is, in other words, no constitutional provision which precludes the Board from denying membership to applicant congregations on the basis of whatever principle it deems appropriate and fitting.

(A parallel may be drawn to an application for U.S. citizenship. A U.S. citizen may state publicly that the Constitution of the United States is a silly document, drawn up by idiots. The Constitution allows such freedom of expression. But let an immigrant who applies for citizenship make this statement before the presiding judge. One may be sure that his/her application will be roundly rejected.)

2. At the heart of this entire controversy lies the question of the nature of Reform Judaism, and indeed Prof. Mihaly expresses himself vigorously on that issue, which is proper and meet. The very fact that the entire question was originally submitted to rabbis is an indication that the questioners themselves considered this matter a religious question and not, as Prof. Mihaly argues (pp. 4-6), solely a legal one. The issue is indeed religious in the obvious sense that whatever answer is given -- to admit or not to admit -- will have the effect of defining the limits of Reform Judaism as understood by the governing congregational body of the North American movement. Does Beth Adam's religion fit within the boundaries of Reform Judaism or does it not? This is the central issue of their application. This is the burden of the question addressed to us by the Union's leadership. And this is the inescapably religious question which the Board must answer.

Liberals that we are, we instinctively shrink from drawing limits that exclude Jews from our camp. This is as it should be: tolerance, pluralism and a healthy respect for the questioning religious spirit are hallmark values of Reform Jewish culture. At the same time we must ask: Can we exist as a distinct religious community and maintain our Jewish integrity if we set no limits at all? There are voices within the movement that would go in that direction. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that Reform Jews have in the past engaged in the setting of some limits in order to set themselves off from Orthodoxy on the one hand and Unitarianism and Ethical Culture on the other.

3. It should be understood that the Responsa Committee can make its judgment only on the basis of what Reform Jewish history and sentiment say to us up to this point. We are not a legislative body that makes new rules and defines Reform Judaism afresh. That is the function of the movement as a whole with its own legislative bodies, the Central Conference



of American Rabbis and the UAHC. Their pronouncements form the current limits that may help us to judge where Reform Judaism is. Thus the question of patrilineality was decided ultimately not by our Committee but by a convention of the CCAR, and even if all members of the Responsa Committee would disagree with that decision, they would still have to take it into consideration as being currently normative.

It is then the past history of Reform Judaism, its pronouncements and resolutions, that guide us in determining what limits there are. For instance, they would be the basis for deciding whether the following two hypothetical congregations should be accepted for Union membership.

- (a) Congregation X considers itself a Reform congregation which hopes to develop Liberal Judaism. It has by-laws which provide for separate seating of men and women, and prohibit the engagement of women rabbis as well as offering aliyot for women. Would we admit this congregation or would we consider the religious equality of the sexes as a paramount principle of Reform Judaism and therefore say No?
- (b) Congregation Y's main goal is outreach to the Christian members of the congregation, inasmuch as the majority live in mixed marriages. To accomplish this, the prayer service of the congregation includes significant portions from the New Testament, the Church Fathers and Christian hymnology. All of these selections are phrased in such a way that worshippers may (though they need not) understand Jesus to be not only a prophet but also their personal saviour. The congregation makes this religious outreach a centre point of its existence, and considers itself thoroughly Jewish, Reform and Zionist. Will we accept its application?

If the application of Beth Adam were acceptable on the grounds that no "theologic, liturgical or religious qualifications" may be used to deny membership in the Union, then no principled reason can possibly exist which would justify the denial of membership to either of our two hypothetical congregations, X and Y.

4. To be sure, we do not seek to impose a creed or a theology on our members. Individual Reform Jews may (or are indeed encouraged to) express their doubts and dissents as part of their religious strivings. Still, it is the hope of Reform Judaism as attested in the writings of our movement's greatest thinkers (and as Prof. Mihaly himself states on p. 13) that the end result of these strivings is a deep and abiding appreciation of the reality of God. That is true for individuals.

But the question before us deals with an entire congregation which has a clearly enunciated philosophy that renders God irrelevant to the religious and liturgical life of the community. The omission of such key phrases as "Hear O Israel the Lord is our God, the Lord alone" is in my opinion not an incidental liturgical diversion. Rather, by its very omission, the congregation states "Hear O Israel, there is no God". Such a declaration expressed or implied would be totally unprecedented and catastrophic for the future of our movement. Yet it is unavoidable unless the Board accepts the fact that even Reform Jews must engage in the setting of limits.



Prof. Mihaly objects to our statement that the presence of God is "the limit" on which we must agree. Yet he says (p. 10): "I discuss in another context the limits of Reform and the more vital issue -- not whether Reform has limits, which it surely does, but who is to define those limits..." (my emphasis). If the presence or absence of God does not constitute a limit, what does?

If we must set limits, those suggested in our responsum are, I believe, thoroughly reasonable. They constitute a sine qua non, a common denominator, without which Jews cannot claim to speak a common religious language. Whatever infringement upon religious autonomy they represent, they are our bottom line, the minimal requirement necessary if we are to maintain our integrity as a Jewish religious movement. Admitting Beth Adam would mean that atheism is a legitimate Reform option.

5. Prof. Mihaly adduces Friday night service no. 6 in Gates of Prayer as proof that our prayer book itself anticipates this kind of development. But the word "God" does appear, though primarily in Hebrew, and it is a prayer service. It speaks of a Power beyond us, leaving it up to the worshipper to understand these words as he/she sees fit. Quoting Prof. Meyer (his letter, no. 10): "An atheistic interpretation is not forced on the worshipper by a clearly atheistic English translation as in the humanistic liturgy". Beth Adam states amongst its principles that prayer cannot be part of its services.

6. Prof. Mihaly cites a number of aggadic passages which urge us to accept differing points of view. This is a principle to which I personally and our entire Committee would heartily subscribe. But the rabbis who authored these stories worked within a system which had limits and their acceptance of other points of view was limned by these limits. Thus the principle that "the authority of the permissive opinion prevails (over the most stringent)", which Prof. Mihaly quotes (p. 12)), and the citation of Rashi that "the authority of those who prohibit is not persuasive" are not related in their full context. For they are, as indicated, dependent upon a system, the limits of which are observed by both parties.

In sum, I take the liberty of quoting Prof. Meyer's final statement: "What is being asked is that the Reform movement, through the act of admission, make the symbolic statement: Faith, or lack thereof, is wholly irrelevant to Reform Judaism. I am not in favour of making that statement".

That is the point of view the majority of the Responsa Committee has taken; that is my point of view, and I hope it will be that of the Board of the UAHC as well.

With cordial regards,



WGP/et

cc: Prof. Eugene Mihaly

Members of CCAR Responsa Committee

cc: HBB, BM.

Rabbi David S. Hachen  
27500 Cedar Rd. #307  
Beachwood, OH 44122

February 21, 1991

Dr. Eugene Mihaly  
Hebrew Union College-  
Jewish Institute of Religion  
3101 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Gene:

I have just read your Responsum regarding Beth Adam, the Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. I would like to respond as an individual and in no official way.

In the "Constitution and By-Laws of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations" there is a "Preamble" which reads as follows: "The congregations represented in this Union of American Hebrew Congregations affirm their faithful attachment to Judaism and their adherence to its liberal interpretation, and unite to discharge their responsibilities under the protection of benign Providence."

My dictionary says that "benign" means of a kind disposition, manifesting gentleness and mildness. And "Providence" with a capital "P" means God. Therefore, it seems to me that any congregation which seeks to become a member of the UAHC must believe that it is discharging its responsibilities under the guidance of God. They may believe in any one of the many different concepts of God, but they cannot be humanistic, believing solely in "Adam". Faith in man (and woman): yes; but faith in man alone without God: no.

And to prove that this was the intention of the Constitution and By-Laws of the UAHC, it is spelled out in the sample Constitution and By-Laws for congregations affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. On the very first page, under Article II - Purpose - we read: "The purpose of this congregation is to promote the enduring and fundamental principles of Judaism and to ensure the continuity of the Jewish people; to enable its adherents to develop a relationship to God through communal worship, study and assembly; and to apply the principles of Reform Judaism on the values and conduct of the individual, family, and the society in which we live."



A Humanistic Congregation by its very name commits itself to develop a relationship between persons - and that is all to the good. But it cannot enable its adherents to develop a relationship to God. Otherwise, why call itself humanistic.

Gene, the Union as a group has set out the parameters of its association in a Constitution as every group does. Synagogues wishing to affiliate cannot ask the group to deny or ignore its own mandate. Beth Adam apparently seeks to come under the umbrella of the Reform movement. Instead it would better serve its members and its own integrity by going it alone or seeking other like-minded congregations so that they might support one another.

What seems clear to me, Gene, is that any congregation choosing to affiliate with the UAHC must abide by the spirit of the Preamble of its Constitution and By-Laws, and the purpose spelled out in the sample Constitution and By-Laws for congregations affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

It has been said: "Where does one find God? -----Wherever one lets Him (Her) in!"

Love from home to home.

Sincerely,



David S. Hachen  
Rabbi

cc: Rabbi Robert B. Barr  
Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
Arthur Grant  
Leon Plevin  
Rabbi James Simon  
Rabbi Allen Kaplan  
Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut



RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

February 12, 1991  
28 Shevat 5751

Rabbi Rav A. Soloff  
Beth Sholom Congregation  
700 Indiana Street  
Johnstown, PA 15905

Dear Rav:

I am responding to your February 5th letter in haste, as I will be leaving for Israel in a few hours. I will be attending meetings of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem.

I am not certain what you might be missing in regard to the Plaut responsum on the Humanistic Congregation, however, he has provided some additional comments and I enclose a copy herewith. I also enclose herewith a copy of Michael Meyer's response to Gene Mihaly on this subject. I believe both of these will be of interest to you and will provide additional insight.

With warm regards.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

encl.



# Beth Sholom Congregation

700 Indiana Street  
Johnstown, Pennsylvania 15905  
814-536-0647

Rabbi Rav A. Soloff, Ph.D., D.D.

February 5, 1991

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
U.A.H.C.  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

Dear Rabbi,

*Best personal regards. All good wishes.*

Is there something about Rabbi Plaut's responsum about a "humanistic congregation" which I am missing? Otherwise, the responsum by Rabbi Mihaly entitled "Qualifications for Membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations" seems completely convincing to me. The development of Liberal Judaism in the centuries ahead may proceed toward a belief system or liturgy that is more or less theistic than the mix reflected in Gates of Prayer, but how does that justify denying UAHC membership to an applicant?

We pray for peace.

Sincerely,

*RAS*  
Rabbi Rav A. Soloff

RAS/jl

cc: Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut  
46 Ridelle Avenue  
Toronto M6B 1H8 Ontario

Rabbi Robert B. Barr  
1720 Section Rd, Suite 107  
Cincinnati, OH 45237

*Tell him Jim Joffe to Israel  
Send him copy of Michael  
as well as Plaut's responsum  
Cantor Paul Stone  
ack by [unclear]*

January 4, 1991  
18 Tevet 5751

Mr. Melvin Merians  
10 Bonnie Brair Lane  
Larchmont, NY 10538

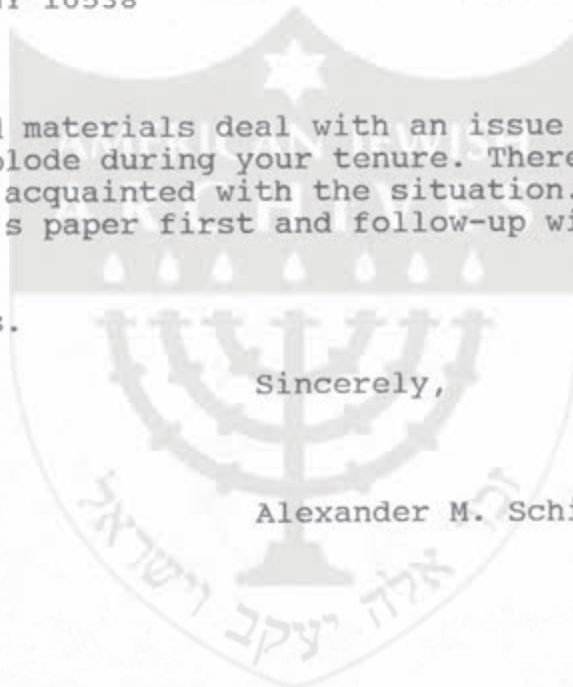
Dear Mel:

The enclosed materials deal with an issue which will probably explode during your tenure. Therefore, you might as well become acquainted with the situation. I suggest you read Mihaly's paper first and follow-up with Mike Meyer's response.

Fond regards.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler





January 24, 1991  
9 Shevat 5751

Dear Jim:

My visit to Oakland was most enjoyable. I met your parents and hope that they were pleased with the complimentary things I said about you publicly. I had to lie through my teeth but I do believe in being kind to parents and feed their misconceptions about their children.

How is the Humanistic Congregation Beth Adam matter going? As I told you, I think that this matter has to be reviewed and fully discussed by your New Congregations Committee. That committee ought to be enlarged to include thoughtful and knowledgeable lay leaders and also members of the regional rabbinate.... here, too, with a spectrum of views. Then this matter will have been properly and fully considered before it reaches the National New Congregations Committee.

Thal told me about his original plans of a special video for the Pacific Southwest Biennial....you're chicken!!!

Bestest to you and your gals.

Fondly,

Alexander M. Schindler

Rabbi James Simon  
UAHC Midwest Council  
St. Louis, MO

bcc JBG



RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER  
PRESIDENT

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

January 3, 1991  
17 Tevet 5751

Michael A. Meyer  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
3101 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Mike:

It was thoughtful of you to share with me your response to Gene Mihaly. It is an impressive rebuttal.

With fond regards from house to house, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

*for GSK  
JS*



December 28, 1990  
11 Tevet 5751

Dr. Eugene Mihaly  
HUC-JIR  
3101 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Gene:

Thanks for sharing with me your responsum on Beth Adam. You make a good case. I hope you don't mind if I give the paper wide distribution. It should be brought to the attention of some of the UAHC leadership.

Your Section E, of course, in a sense tempers your earlier argument. It is elegantly put!

Be assured your views will receive wide consideration.

With repeated thanks and best wishes for the New Year, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



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(513) 221-1875

December 11, 1990

Personal

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

Attached is my responsum on Beth Adam, about which I wrote you. I do hope that you find it convincing. I believe that the issue involved is central to the direction of Reform Judaism. I should of course be grateful for your comments.

With warmest personal greetings, I am

As ever,

*Eugene Mihaly*  
Eugene Mihaly

EM:pg  
Enclosure

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

② Make about 10 copies of  
Mihaly paper  
send to ASB  
Simony  
Art  
DBS  
other book to me.

①  
I don't know. Makes a good  
core - elegant, as usual. I hope  
you don't mind if I go on it  
wide distribution.  
your section is, of course,  
in a sense flippers you  
harsh argument. It  
is elegantly put.  
Be assured that your views  
will receive wide  
consideration



December 26, 1990  
9      Tevet      5751

David W. Belin, Esq.  
2000 Financial Center  
Des Moines, IOWA 50309

Dear David:

Enclosed is the Responsum from Gunther Plaut for the CCAR Responsa Committee on UAHC membership for Humanistic Congregations. You may have received a paper from Gene Mihaly on this subject, if not do let me know and I will share a copy with you.

We do not have any special Responsum in regard to applications from gay and lesbian congregations. We do have a number of Union resolutions on the subject of equality for members of the homosexual community.

Warm regards and all the best for the New Year.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

**BELIN HARRIS HELMICK  
LAMSON McCORMICK**

A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION • ATTORNEYS AT LAW

2000 Financial Center • Des Moines, Iowa 50309  
Telephone: (515) 243-7100 • Telecopier: (515) 282-7615

David W. Belin  
Charles E. Harris  
Robert H. Helmick  
Jeffrey E. Lamson  
Mark McCormick  
David L. Claypool  
Steven E. Zumbach  
Thomas L. Flynn  
Jon L. Staudt  
Sue Luettjohann Seitz

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Dennis P. Ogden

Robert D. Sharp  
Margaret C. Callahan  
William P. Hoyer  
Timothy P. Willcockson  
David D. Nelson

Of Counsel  
Lawrence E. Pope  
Bonnie J. Campbell

*Please send  
this -  
cc: 5 of  
original  
letter*

December 18, 1990

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York NY 10021

Dear Alex:

It is my understanding that there was a Responsum prepared for the UAHC in connection with the application for membership of Beth Adam Congregation in Cincinnati. I would like to have a copy of that Responsum and any accompanying correspondence.

Also, if there was a similar Responsum in connection with the application for membership of any gay and lesbian congregation, I would appreciate receiving a copy of this, also.

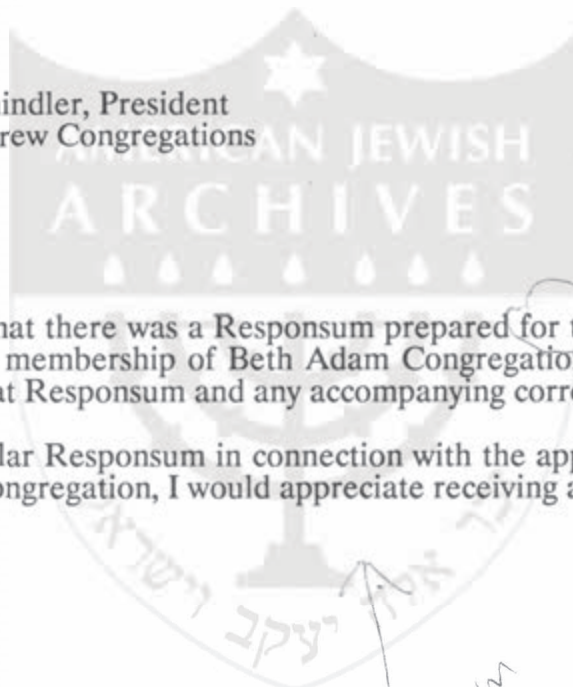
Best regards.

Sincerely,

  
David W. Belin

DWB:cs

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*No new in  
list of*





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Humanistic Judaism, 1990-1994.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the  
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(513) 221-1875

3 Tevet 5751  
December 20, 1990

*alex,  
I thought this  
must be of interest  
will*

Professor Eugene Mihaly  
Hebrew Union College  
Cincinnati, OH 45220

Dear Gene:

Thank you very much for sharing with me your responsum entitled "Qualifications for Membership in UAHC Congregations." I found it both interesting and challenging. Since you asked for my reactions, let me present to you some of the reasons why I do not share your view. They follow in the sequence of the material: the question by Rabbi Barr and then your response.

1. First, regarding Rabbi Barr's question: that he was accepted into the CCAR has nothing whatever to do with the acceptability of his theological position, but only with the fact that the CCAR accepts every ordinee of HUC with no criteria whatever beyond ordination. Also it is not Rabbi Barr, but Beth Adam which is applying for membership. Many CCAR members serve congregations that are not in the UAHC.

2. The reason that Beth Adam wants to join the UAHC is nowhere stated. Yet it is well known that the reason is not identification with the Reform movement but only the desire to utilize its institutions, specifically the local Reform High School. It is apparently only this issue, of recent vintage, that has made the congregation consider membership. Otherwise, why did it not apply when it was first formed some years ago?

3. I do not understand why the congregation is applying to you for a responsum on what the constitution and by-laws of the UAHC state. If that were the whole issue (as you sometimes suggest in your reply), the proper addressee would be an attorney, not a professor of midrash.

4. You begin with a talmudic dictum--but if it is only a matter of what the UAHC constitution and bylaws say, then talmudic dicta are beside the point. If, however, Jewish tradition is relevant, then you can't say at the same time that the congregation should be admitted simply because the UAHC documents don't exclude them.

5. That you feel it is important to mention that the membership includes "men and women who have achieved prominent positions in the professions, the academic and business communities" I regard as not only irrelevant, but totally contrary to what is important about a congregation. If all of its members were men and women who had not made a name for themselves, ~~that would be~~ in that respect--be no less worthy of membership.

6. I do not know how it is that you know that this congregation is "in serious search of the spiritual substance of their Jewish identity." Perhaps some of them are and I do not want to impugn the sincerity of their quest, but you are clearly idealizing what from other perspectives is not that



ideal. In dwelling so much on background information about the congregation, would it not have been at least as relevant to mention that this congregation almost certainly has the highest percentage of mixed couples among its members of any congregation in Cincinnati and that lack of reference to God and lack of basic Jewish liturgical elements is in all likelihood also a response to this characteristic of the membership?

7. If, as the document that you quote indicates, "there are many Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God . . .," why then is the word scrupulously eliminated from the liturgy altogether instead of including it at least occasionally and allowing that different members will interpret it differently. To leave it out entirely is not simply to avoid misunderstanding, but to take a position of dogmatic atheism.

8. The article on membership of the UAHC constitution which you cite says that any Jewish congregation can become a member "upon approval by the Board of Trustees." To me this implies that any Jewish congregation is eligible for membership, but is not automatically accepted. Else what would the stipulation of "approval" mean? To me, it implies that the Board of Trustees is free to apply whatever criteria it may choose to give or to withhold its approval.

9. True its constitution opposes interference by the UAHC in the mode of worship etc. of its congregations. But that does not imply it must accept a congregation with a mode of worship etc. which the UAHC Board regards as beyond the pale of Reform Judaism. Thus acceptance or rejection by theological criteria is not, in contradiction to your interpretation, a violation of the UAHC constitution.

10. The sixth Shabbat eve service of Gates of Prayer does not translate some of the basic responses into English. But the word "God" does occur in one instance in English, and the theistic Barchu and Sh'ma are retained in the Hebrew, leaving it up to the worshipper to understand them in terms of his or her theology. An atheistic interpretation is not forced on the worshipper by a clearly atheistic English translation as in the Humanistic liturgy.

11. Despite your insistence that only the UAHC constitution counts, you do eventually quote the Centenary Perspective. If so, then it is only fair to add the sentence of that document which says: "The trials of our own time and the challenges of modern culture have made steady belief and clear understanding difficult for some. Nevertheless, we ground our lives, personally and communally, on God's reality and remain open to new experiences and conceptions of the Divine." But in Beth Adam the divine is entirely excluded. Neither "light" nor "life" are God. And to bless, not God as the giver of sustenance, but to bless "the bread of the earth," is not even Jewish. It is Christian or pagan.

12. You argue that acceptance would be the "authentic" mode of Reform. But "authenticity" is in the mind of the beholder. Certainly, the history of the Reform movement indicates that there were times when boundaries were set. I am thinking in particular of the "Friends of Reform" group established in Frankfurt am Main in the 1840s, which almost every Reform rabbi of the day considered beyond the pale.

13. Finally, if there were genuine reason to believe that admitting this humanistic congregation to the UAHC would be likely to bring it closer to faith in God, then I might be amenable to the proposal. But I do not detect in the question any desire for that at all. What is being asked is that the Reform movement, through the act of admission, make the symbolic statement: faith or lack thereof is wholly irrelevant to Reform Judaism. I am not in favor of making that statement.

I am confident, Gene, that you will not be offended by my bluntness. Our friendship does not require putting on velvet gloves.

בהוקרה ובידודות

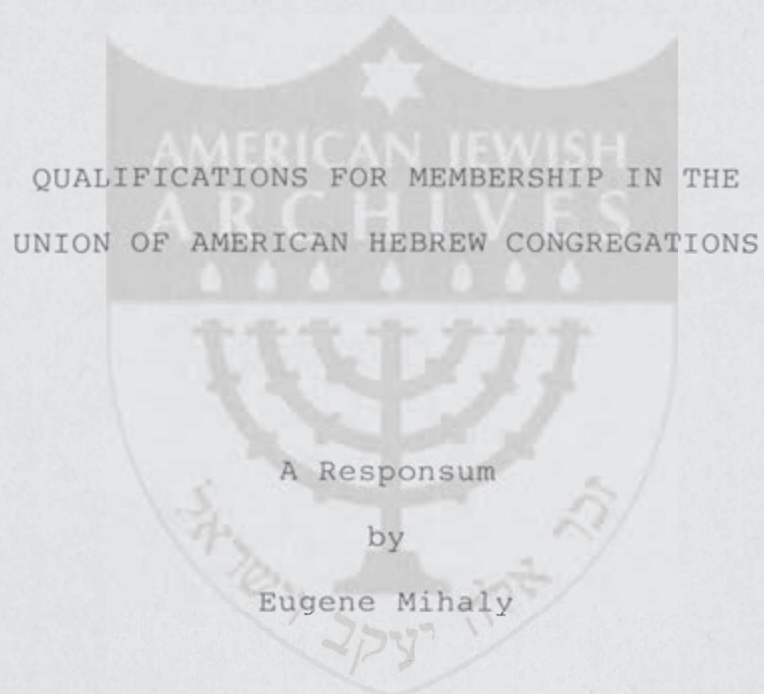
*Michael*

Michael A. Meyer

✓ cc. Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut







December 7, 1990



# Beth Adam

The Cincinnati Congregation  
for Humanistic Judaism

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi

November 8, 1990

Dr. Eugene Mihaly  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
3101 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220

Dear Dr. Mihaly,

I am writing to you on behalf of myself and Beth Adam, the congregation I have served as rabbi for approximately ten years. I turn to you because of your scholarship and knowledge of Reform Judaism. You have interpreted and helped to clarify the values and philosophy of Reform Judaism as a member of the faculty of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, your involvement with the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and your numerous committee appointments and publications.

As you know, I was ordained from the College-Institute in 1981 and upon ordination accepted a position with a newly organized congregation. The congregation and I were committed to exploring and creating an environment in which we could celebrate our Jewish identity with intellectual honesty and theological openness. I held and expressed these same values and attitudes while a student at the College-Institute. Though not all on the faculty were comfortable with my ideas and the services I conducted, I was ordained and continue to be involved with the College-Institute. Most recently, I served as adjunct faculty teaching a practical workshop to second year students. It should be noted as well, that upon ordination I was accepted for membership into the CCAR and remain a member in good standing.

Since its inception, Congregation Beth Adam has identified itself as a humanistic congregation. Though never affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism or any other congregational association, it is our belief that the term "humanistic" best reflects our approach to liturgy, theology, and the Jewish experience. In

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translating our philosophic precepts into action our services do not contain traditional prayers. It is our belief that liturgy should clearly articulate the values and philosophy of our congregation. Drawing upon the rich traditions of our people, contemporary sources, and the writings of our own members, we create a liturgy which enriches our lives by giving expression to our Jewish identity. Our services attempt to capture, in a manner consistent with our philosophy, our deepest religious aspirations and beliefs.

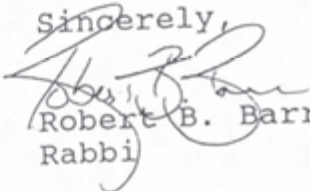
Within the last two years, the fact that Beth Adam is unaffiliated with any national religious association has become a matter of concern for the congregation's Board of Trustees. Many in the congregation, myself included, feel it important that Beth Adam become associated with a larger body. Following much investigation and lengthy conversations, it was thought that this association would be most logically made with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. This realization arose from the congregation's sense of its Jewish identity, historic and current ties to the institutions of Reform Judaism which I have and which exist amongst the membership, and my understanding of the nature and philosophy of Reform Judaism. It is our belief that the philosophy and practices of Beth Adam fall within the broad spectrum of Reform Judaism.

In light of the above information and official publications of the congregation which are available to you we pose for your consideration the following question:

In light of the purposes and goals of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, as stated in its constitution and by-laws, does Congregation Beth Adam qualify for membership?

Thank you for considering this question.

Sincerely,

  
Robert B. Barr  
Rabbi

QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE  
UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

Question: "In light of the purposes and goals of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations as stated in its constitution and by-laws, does Congregation Beth Adam (The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism) qualify for membership? (See attached letter from Rabbi Robert B. Barr.)"

Response:

In consonance with the talmudic dictum that all matters are to be considered and adjudicated in context of the specific circumstances, "in accordance with the time and the place," (hakhol lephi hamakom vehaz'man)<sup>1</sup>--a principle which informs and is the genius of Responsa Literature--I outline the relevant background and details:

I. Background.

A. The Congregation.

Beth Adam was founded over a decade ago. It currently has close to two hundred members, a number of whom have been actively involved in Reform congregations throughout their adult lives, and whose families have been identified with Reform for generations. The membership includes men and women who have achieved prominent positions in the professions, the academic and business communities. One of the active members was recently awarded the first "Outstanding Citizen Award" by the Hebrew Union College. Their general profile may be characterized as that of a group of intelligent, responsible, educated Jews in serious search of the spiritual substance of their Jewish identity, and the means to



articulate it in word and deed--a search pursued with integrity and intellectual honesty. The laity is actively involved in formulating the congregational liturgy, the ritual and ceremonial practice of their worship service and of the celebration of life-cycle events, as well as the curriculum of their religious school.

In a policy statement adopted by the group, they state, inter alia:

"Judaism is a way of life from which rich tradition has evolved. Interpreting and preserving the history and tradition for posterity is a responsibility of Jews in each generation.

"Torah, including interpretation of its text based on modern knowledge, is fundamental to Reform...Torah, Talmud and Midrash are appropriately incorporated into the fabric of the services."

The list of goals of the congregation includes: "To provide meaningful religious services...To continuously examine our concepts by critical reason and to make changes to meet the test of reality...To participate in Reform Judaism and to explore membership in the U.A.H.C."

One of the published documents of Beth Adam, "A Concept of God...." states that "The definition of Humanistic Judaism does not preclude one's having a concept of God. In fact, there are many concepts of God that are compatible with Humanistic Judaism...[and] there are many Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God, but not a God that intervenes or manipulates the events of this world...Neither would this God act in a way that would contradict, or be inconsistent with natural law or scientific

truth...Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God affirm their Jewish identities in services which focus upon human beings strengths and weaknesses, hopes and fears."

Accordingly, the liturgy of Beth Adam does not include traditional forms of prayer like praise, petition, etc. Nor does the term "God" occur. Since they are persuaded at the current stage of their exploration that the term "God" has predominantly supernatural connotations, their sense of honesty dictates that the word "God" be deleted. "As part of an historically evolving people," their Statement on Liturgy affirms, "we choose existing symbols, adapting them to our use. Because what we say defines our community, we seek to balance our desire for tradition with our need to be honest. In short: We must believe what we say. We feel comfortable with adding Jewish ritual and tradition to our lives that are consistent with our philosophic beliefs."

#### B. The Rabbi of Congregation Beth Adam.

Rabbi Robert B. Barr, the spiritual guide of Beth Adam during the past ten years, received ordination from the Hebrew Union College in 1981. During his five years of study at the College, he was a diligent and dedicated student. During his entire student career, from admission to ordination, the HUC community was fully aware of Rabbi Barr's theologic position, which may loosely be defined as a non-dogmatic, anti-supernatural humanism. He was consistently candid about his naturalistic stance. When he conducted services in the HUC chapel, a requirement for all students, he did so with integrity, utilizing a non-theistic or an equivocal liturgy. Upon ordination, he was accepted as a member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. He attends its regional and national conferences, and participates in its deliberations.



Rabbi Barr has pursued his vocation--as authorized by the theologic institution of Reform Judaism--with exemplary zeal and devotion. He is viewed by his congregants and by many others within the broader community as a dedicated, effective, and inspirational spiritual guide.

C. Eligibility for Membership in the UAHC (as defined in its "Constitution and By-Laws," as amended Nov. 1977).

#### Article III--Membership - Section 1

"Any Jewish congregation in the United States of America, Canada or their Territories or Possessions, upon approval by the Board of Trustees, may become a member of this Union by subscribing to its Constitution and By-Laws."

#### Article VI--Congregational Autonomy

(The historic background of this Article and the insistence by a number of founding congregations in 1873 that it be included in the Aims of the Union, indicate that a guarantee of congregational autonomy was a sine qua non for the establishment of the Union.<sup>2</sup>):

"Nothing contained in this constitution or the By-Laws shall be construed so as to interfere in any manner whatsoever with the mode of worship, the school, the freedom of expression and opinion, or any of the other congregational activities of the constituent congregations of the Union."

#### II. Conclusions.

A. From the perspective of formal institutional requirements, Beth Adam certainly qualifies for membership in the Union of

American Hebrew Congregations. Beth Adam is beyond question a Jewish congregation. It is dedicated to the creative development and the perpetuation of a liberal interpretation of Judaism. Beth Adam defines itself as Reform. The functions of the congregation --worship, celebration of life-cycle events, adult study, religious school--are legitimate, historically valid activities of a synagogue. The group's application for membership indicates that they subscribe to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Union. There is therefore no objective, valid basis for denying them membership in the Union. They fulfill all the formal requirements for membership as defined in the Constitution of the Union: A Jewish congregation in the United States or Canada, and subscription to its Constitution and By-Laws.

B. Acceptance for membership in the Union implies neither agreement with, nor approval of the liturgic mode, the ceremonial practice, the theologic views, or the religious school curriculum of Beth Adam, or of any other congregation. These are matters for the individual congregations to decide. They are outside the legitimate purview of the Union. Article VI of the Union's Constitution affirms this principle in absolute terms. The Union must not "interfere in any manner whatsoever" [emphasis in Article II of the original Statement of Aims of the Union, 1873] with the mode of worship, the school, the freedom of expression and opinion, or any of the other congregational activities...."

C. The sphere of jurisdiction of the Union in its relation to individual congregations is further clearly delineated in Article III of the Constitution. The only grounds for termination of membership is the non-compliance of a congregation with its dues obligation, as defined in the Union's Constitution and By-Laws. (See Article III Sections 2, 3 and 4.) No other bases for termination of membership are ever mentioned, nor is a process for such a procedure discussed.



D. Acceptance or rejection for membership on the basis of theologic belief, liturgic modes or religious practice would violate the Union's own Constitution. Even more seriously, such a procedure would undermine the cherished legacy of freedom---the hallmark of Reform Judaism. The Hebrew Union College has no credal tests for ordination, and neither does the Central Conference of American Rabbis have such a requirement for its applicants. It would be anomalous indeed if the one institution of Reform specifically committed to congregational autonomy would arrogate to itself the role of arbiter of Reform legitimacy and orthodoxy.

### III. Obiter Dicta

A. When the questions concerning the "nature and constituency of Beth Adam," and "whether in [my] view the congregation qualifies for membership in the UAHC" were first confidentially addressed to me this past February, I replied informally (February 15, 1990): "My conclusion is that the UAHC should definitely accept this group within the Union. Such action would not only be wise, but a genuine constructive act...in terms of the group's search for its own identity. The rabbinic dictum 'Let the left hand push away, but the right hand bring near'<sup>3</sup> is certainly applicable in this instance."

Subsequently, Rabbis Alexander Schindler, James Simon, and Allen Kaplan of the Union addressed a formal she'elah regarding Beth Adam to the CCAR Committee on Responsa (as reported in the responsum "Humanistic Congregation," signed by W. Gunther Plaut, Chair, CCAR Responsa committee, Oct. 19, 1990). The question is formulated in the Responsum as follows:

"A humanistic congregation is interested in joining the UAHC whose constitution provides in Article III(1) that 'any Jewish congregation may become a member;' and in Article II(d) that it is among the objects of the Union 'to foster the development of Liberal Judaism.' Does this Humanistic congregation comply with these objectives?..."

The formulation of the question is puzzling. It is reminiscent of the old jocular saw current among yeshivah students, "I have an answer; please ask me a question." The response clearly indicates that the CCAR Committee is fully aware that the congregation in question is Beth Adam--The Cincinnati Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. Their literature is quoted throughout the Teshuvah. Yet the question mentions neither the name of the group, nor the "Judaism" in their subtitle. The reference is only to "a humanistic congregation."

Even more puzzling is the quotation of the ostensibly relevant section from the UAHC Constitution which is adopted as the basis for the entire Responsum. The phrase from Article II(d) "to foster the development of Liberal Judaism" is not only a truncated quote, but is taken out of context, thereby distorting its meaning and intent. The full phrase reads, "to foster the development of Liberal Judaism throughout the world under the auspices of the World Union for Progressive Judaism." It is a commitment on the part of the Union to support the work of a sister institution, the World Union. This phrase is part of a series of objectives of the Union to support various institutions beyond the American borders: "to strengthen...the solidarity of Israel in all lands; to foster the development of Liberal Judaism throughout the world under the auspices of the World Union for Progressive Judaism; to enrich and strengthen the State of Israel...."



Furthermore, the phrase quoted in the Question (She'elah) on which the entire discussion and the conclusion in the responsum are based is part of a section of the Union's Constitution headed "Objects," which are non-operative, and irrelevant to the question of a congregation's eligibility for membership. The only sections of the Union's Constitution pertinent and applicable to the eligibility of Beth Adam are the operative Article III--Membership, and Article VI--Congregational Autonomy, which informs the entire document, as discussed above in Sections I.C and II.A, B, C and D. We may be grateful indeed that the American judiciary is not as cavalier in its interpretation of the United States Constitution as is the Responsa Committee with the UAHC Constitution.

B. Contrary to the clear and explicit statements in the UAHC Constitution, Rabbi Plaut perceives the central issue in accepting or rejecting Beth Adam's application for membership to be whether "it [Congregation Beth Adam] can be said to 'foster the development of Liberal Judaism.'" He thus concludes that though "The publications of CHJ (Congregation for Humanistic Judaism) leave no doubt about its being a Jewish Congregation; and even though "there can certainly be no disagreement with the statement that Reform Jews have different conceptions of God -- Our Gates of Prayer in the sixth Shabbat eve service...does not use the word 'God' in the English text--" and regardless of the affirmation of Beth Adam that "The definition of humanistic Judaism does not preclude having a concept of God"; nevertheless, "because CHJ's liturgy deletes any and all mention of God..." and therefore "precludes the people's right to interpret the God concept in their own way..." and because the CHJ liturgy does not include "key liturgical portions" in its services; "we find CHJ's system of beliefs to be outside the realm of historical Reform Judaism." "Persons of various shadings of belief, practice or non-practice may belong to UAHC congregations, as individuals" the Responsum

argues, "and we respect their rights." "But it is different when they come as a congregation whose declared principles are at fundamental variance with the historic God-orientation of Reform Judaism." In response to the question posed in the Responsum, "Are not diversity and inclusiveness a hallmark of Reform," Rabbi Plaut replies, "yesh ge'vul, there are limits. Reform Judaism cannot be everything, or it will be nothing." His final conclusion is: "In sum, we hold that CHJ, as presently constituted breaks the mold of Reform Judaism and does not have a place among the Union's Congregations."

C. As has been demonstrated in the discussion above, the issue in the Union's acceptance of Beth Adam's application for membership, contrary to the perception of the CCAR Committee, is not and must not be one of theology, liturgy or ceremonial practice. All of these are, according to the clear and explicit provisions in the UAHC Constitution and By-Laws, outside the legal limits of authority, jurisdiction, or competence of the Union. The entire discussion in the Teshuvah of the Responsa Committee is accordingly irrelevant to the question of Beth Adam's eligibility for membership in the UAHC.

D. Irrespective of its pertinence, the Teshuvah of the CCAR committee does raise a number of crucial issues which urgently require clarification and informed discussion. The most significant of these issues is what may be appropriately termed "the mood, the underlying attitude" which should inform Reform Responsa. Rabbi Plaut succinctly poses the question in his Responsum, "Are not diversity and inclusiveness a hallmark of Reform?" "The argument that we ourselves are excluded by the Orthodox and therefore should not keep others out who wish to join us," he continued, though it "has an attractive sound to it, must be rejected on the basis of yesh ge'vul, there are limits." Rabbi Plaut defines these limits as "the historic God-orientation of



Reform Judaism." Since Beth Adam is, in the Committee's view, outside these limits, it must not be permitted to join the UAHC.

I discuss in another context the "limits of Reform," and the more vital issue--not whether Reform has limits, which it surely does--but who is to define those limits, and the effective, permissible means to gain the acceptance of and adherence to those limits by the Reform constituency.<sup>4</sup> At this juncture, I discuss only the "mood" of the Responsum, its basic orientation, as exemplified in its conclusion to reject Beth Adam.

It is helpful and instructive to turn for guidance to the most recent formulation of Reform Principles overwhelmingly approved by the Reform rabbinate, "The Centenary Perspective." The section headed "Diversity Within Unity, the Hallmark of Reform" (a section not quoted by Rabbi Plaut) states:

"Reform Jews respond to change in various ways according to the Reform principle of the autonomy of the individual. However, Reform Judaism does more than tolerate diversity; it engenders it. In our historical situation we must expect to have far greater diversity than previous generations knew...We stand open to any position thoughtfully and conscientiously advocated in the spirit of Reform Jewish belief."<sup>5</sup>

Even more instructive is a principle repeated a number of times, not in Reform documents of the 19th or 20th centuries, but in the earliest strata of Talmudic Literature--a principle which contemporary writers of responsa might well ponder with benefit:

"Rabbi Elizer says: God said to Moses, 'I who spoke and the world came into being, I am the One who brings near and does not push away.' As it is said, 'I am a God who welcomes and does not repel' [a play on Jer.XXIII.23--mikarov and merahok

are read mekarev and merahek]...."<sup>6</sup> "Our Rabbis have taught: Always let the left hand keep distant, but let the right hand draw near. Not like Elisha who pushed Gehazi away with both hands [Gehazi is probably a veiled allusion to Saul of Tarsus--Paul],<sup>7</sup> and not like R. Joshua ben Perahyah who pushed away Jesus the Nazarene with both hands."<sup>8</sup>

It is remarkable that these outstanding teachers of the first and second centuries had the temerity--on the basis of what they considered to be the overriding ethical principle, "let the right hand always welcome and bring near"--to censure the prophet Elisha for banning his duplicitous servant, Gehazi (see, II Kings II.20ff), and R. Joshua b. Perahyah, the head of the Sanhedrin, for rejecting Jesus. Yet the Responsa Committee of the CCAR writing in 1990, for Reform Jews, apparently insensitive to the turmoil and confusion, the cataclysmic changes and challenges which are the experience of many of our rabbis and thoughtful laity, would recommend the rejection of a group of Jews in serious, sincere search--a congregation committed "to preserving the history and tradition [of the Jewish people]," to the support of Israel, and much else, as outlined above (Section I.A). And all of this on the basis of a nebulous, shibboleth "yesh ge'vul, there are limits," the rallying cry of every opponent of creative Reform--limits which historically have been left for each congregation, with the guidance of their rabbi, and for each informed individual Reform Jew to define.

In the familiar talmudic story when the would-be proselyte asked the great Hillel to "teach him the entire Torah while the heathen stood on one foot," the loving, embracing Sage responded not with yesh ge'vul. Nor did he expound an elaborate theology of Judaism. God is not mentioned at all. His reply was, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary. Go study."<sup>9</sup>



Another halakhic principle frequently stated in the Talmud is: "The authority of the permissive opinion prevails [over the more stringent]--koah de-heteira 'adiph."<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Sh'lomo Yitzhaki (Rashi), the peer commentator on the Talmud of 11th century France, explains: "The authority of those who prohibit is not persuasive, for everyone can be stringent, even concerning matters that are permitted. It is therefore preferable to cite the one who permits, for he relies on his tradition and is not afraid to be permissive."<sup>11</sup> It is essential that those who assume the awesome responsibility of writing Reform responsa well ponder this principle and its implications.

The traditional halakhists tragically failed in their response to the revolutionary upheavals in Jewish life in the 19th and 20th centuries, in Western Europe, in the Pale, and, with the gravest consequences for the future, in the United States and Israel. An ever greater stringency and an encrusted literalism are the dominant mood of the traditional Responsa Literature. Those who have appropriated halakhah as their exclusive domain are enchained by a fundamentalist literalism, by their own timidity, yir'at hahoraah. Even the more "liberal" are paralyzed by a fear that they may be suspected of being too permissive. They must therefore display their piety by demonstrating that they can be more punctiliously stringent than their colleagues. We of Reform emulate them at our own peril.

Exclusion, ostracism, mindless stringency to appease the traditionalists, institutional coercion are alien to Reform Judaism. They chill and kill. They are the death knell of Liberal Religion. Reform's authentic mode is and must ever remain the sympathetic, loving embrace; gentle persuasion, open, accepting rational discourse; empathic appreciation for the sincere search. Reform responsa must reflect these attitudes if

they are to qualify as authentically Reform.

E. I conclude with an expression of hope and confidence that as the members of Beth Adam pursue their search with the guidance of their rabbi, they will come to appreciate ever more profoundly that, as Chesterton expressed it, "The trouble when people stop believing in God is not they thereafter believe in nothing; it is that they thereafter believe in everything." The realm of the absolute is never empty; a void is too easily filled with godlets of ethnicism, of racial chauvenism, of anthropotheism. The genius of Judaism is best expressed in the declaration: "Only God is God, there is none else"; but God can never be known, for "No man shall see me and live." This is the historic witness of the Jew which rejects every form of idol, and commits him to the eternal quest. The medieval poet phrased it:

I have not seen Thee, yet I tell Thy praise,  
Not known thee, yet I image forth Thy ways."

The deletion of the word "God" from its liturgy after acknowledging, as Beth Adam does, that "the concept of God has undergone constant modification in Judaism" is to revert to a prosaic, naive literalism, and, at the very minimum, deprives the worshipper of the rich experience of poetic metaphor. Moreover, such a stance also eliminates the richest literary treasures of our heritage.

Francis Bacon once made the remark that "a little philosophy inclines one's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion." George Santayana wisely comments that Bacon "forgot to add that the God to whom depth in philosophy brings men's minds is far from being the same [God] from which a little philosophy estranges them."<sup>12</sup>



## NOTES

1. See, for example, Mishnah Bav. Mez. III.7, Taanit 14b, and very often in the classic Responsa and Codes.
2. See, Sefton D. Temkin, "A Century of Reform Judaism in America," American Jewish Yearbook, Vol. 74, 1973, p. 11.
3. See Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yeshm'a'el, 'Amalek, ed. Horovitz, p. 193; Sotah 47a and Sanhedrin 107b. Note especially the uncensored manuscripts and the unexpurgated editions of the Talmud. Cf. R. Rabbinowicz, Dikdukei Soph'rim, Senhedrin, pp. 338f.
4. See my forthcoming proposal for a Reform Congregational Synod, which I initially suggested at the meeting of the National Board of the UAHC in Seattle this past June.
5. CCAR Yearbook, 1976, p. 177.
6. Mekhilta, loc. cit. The Rabbis, because of a textual difficulty, understand the subject of Ex. XVIII.6 to be not Jethro, as it clearly is in biblical context, but God. They interpret "Vayo'mer el Moshe 'ani..." as "God says to Moses, "I am the One...."
7. See, R. T. Herford, Christianity in Talmud and Midrash, pp. 97ff.
8. See references in note 3, above. The reference to Jesus was expunged by the Christian censors. Also, Joshua b. Perahyah lived considerably before Jesus. The legend that he was the teacher of Jesus is not historically tenable.
9. Shabbat 31a.
10. Bezah 2b, and often.
11. Ibid.
12. See, Emanuel Rice, Freud and Moses, pp. 118f.