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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

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Sub-series A: Alphabetical, 1914-1965, undated.

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Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1955-1956.



EMIL W. LEIPZIGER,  
Chairman

COMMITTEE ON ARBITRATION & ETHICS  
CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

4238 St. Charles Ave.  
New Orleans, La.

August 27, 1954

Dear Colleague:

I have been dealing with a difficulty between the Village Temple of Greenwich, N.Y., and its Rabbi, Irving J. Block (up to May 5, 1954), and I am enclosing a copy of the original letter which came to me from the Secretary of the Congregation, making several allegations.

These I repeated, by letter, to Rabbi Block, and I arranged, while I was in New York for the Pike Conference, to meet him and the Presbyterian Minister with whom he was associated in a Brotherhood plan, and also to meet Mr. Ratner, President of the Congregation and a Mr. Glick, a former President. I also had a conference with two or three friends of the Rabbi.

Let me refer you now to the letter enclosed with its allegations, many of them denied by Rabbi Block and the friends of his whom I met

However, the Congregational President has since sent me photostatic copies of material representing the history of the difficulty between Rabbi Block and his Congregation, and also an affidavit made by one of the members of the Congregation, which proves pretty conclusively from the dating that the most serious allegation was true, namely, that before the date of his resignation, May 5, he did participate in discussions concerning the desirability of forming a new temple before he resigned, and also discussed, before he resigned, a letter in which the Village Presbyterian Church was asked to oust the Village Temple and to substitute in place thereof, on the Church premises, the proposed Village Brotherhood Synagogue. The affidavit alleges also that Rabbi Block, at that meeting, asked several persons to sign the letter.

It is pretty clear to me that Rabbi Block, to say the least, acted foolishly in handling the matter of his separation from the Congregation, and I am inclined to believe we ought to recommend to the Conference Board a mild censure of his actions. I say "mild" because this whole question of brotherhood between the Presbyterian group and the Jewish group was conceived by him, in a super-idealistic way. He is a young man and received a good deal of his inspiration from the great stalwart of Reform Judaism, of blessed memory, Steven S. Wise. Unfortunately, many young men who sit under the inspiration of the great get something of the spirit of their leader, but often magnify it. One might call that sort of spirit among young idealistic leaders "a Messiah complex".

It is my belief that we ought to take into consideration this atmosphere which has been created about Rabbi Block and, therefore, make our rebuke one that is not too harsh.

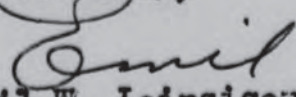
I suppose you could better judge this matter if you had all the material that I have, and had heard all the conversations in which I took part in New York City with the various people involved.

If you do not feel that you can accept my judgment as to the affidavit and as to my own reaction to the photostatic material sent me, explained in a letter by Mr. Ratner, President of the Congregation, I can, of course, have it all copied, except the conversations.

So, please read the letter of allegations carefully, and let me hear from you at your earliest convenience.

With New Year's greetings, I am

Fraternally,

  
Emil W. Leipziger, Chairman,  
Committee on Arbitration & Ethics,  
CCAR

encl.  
ewl:g



C O P Y

THE VILLAGE TEMPLE  
Congregation B'nai Israel of Greenwich Village

139 West 13th St.,  
New York 11, N. Y.  
May 11, 1954

Rabbi Emil W. Leipziger  
Committee on Arbitration and Ethics  
Central Conference of American Rabbis  
4238 St. Charles Ave.  
New Orleans, La.

Dear Rabbi Leipziger:

I have been directed by the Board of Trustees of the Village Temple (Congregation B'nai Israel of New York City) to bring to the attention of the Committee on Arbitration and Ethics the following facts regarding Rabbi Irving J. Block, the former Rabbi of our Congregation.

For the past five years the Village Temple has been sharing the premises of the Village Presbyterian Church for its religious and other activities. In September, 1952, Rabbi Block was called to our pulpit as a student-rabbi. In May, 1953, the Congregation voted to offer him a one year contract from September 1, 1953 through August 31, 1954, which offer he accepted.

In February and March of this year, the Board of Trustees held a series of meetings at which the renewal of the Rabbi's contract was discussed. It was finally determined that the Board would not recommend to the Congregation that the same be renewed.

In accordance with our practice, Rabbi Block was advised of the action of the Board. Without at this time going into all the details, the Rabbi advised Mr. Herman N. Schwartz, the President of the Congregation, that he was going to fight the Board's recommendation.

On April 26, 1954 a meeting of the Congregation was held for the purpose of electing new officers for the ensuing year. At that meeting the Rabbi together with some of the members of the Congregation sought the election of a slate of candidates which they proposed in opposition to that of the Nominating Committee, but this effort was defeated.

On the morning of April 27, 1954, Mr. Robert S. Ratner, the Vice-President of the Temple, called Rabbi Daniel Davis of the New York Federation of Reform Synagogues and advised him of the Congregational Meeting held the night before. Dr. Davis and Mr. Ratner discussed the issues which were involved in the recommendation of the Board of Trustees and Dr. Davis stated that it was his belief that an amicable solution could be worked out. Dr. Davis asked Mr. Ratner whether he was willing to engage in discussions with Rabbi Block and himself in order to arrive at a determination which would be satisfactory to all concerned. Mr. Ratner's answer was "Yes."

On April 29, 1954 Dr. Davis informed Mr. Ratner that he had spoken with Rabbi Block and that the Rabbi felt there was no possibility of any amicable solution. Dr. Davis also stated that Rabbi Block was going to call Mr. Ratner in a day or two to arrange for his resignation and further that the Rabbi intended to form a new Congregation of his own. However, Dr. Davis said that he had advised Rabbi Block to resign immediately, effective as of the end of the active year, and not to take any steps whatsoever to form a new Congregation until after he had terminated his relationship with the Village Temple.

Rabbi Block never called Mr. Ratner and finally on May 2nd Mr. Ratner called him to arrange an appointment for discussions about the future of the Temple. The appointment was set for Wednesday, May 5th.

On the morning of Wednesday May 5th, Mr. Otto Rohrberg, Clerk of Session of the Village Presbyterian Church, called Mr. Ratner and informed him that on Sunday, May 2nd, the Session of the Village Presbyterian Church had met to consider the application of a new Congregation to use the facilities of the Church and that that application had been accepted. Mr. Rohrberg advised that the new Congregation was known as the Village Brotherhood Synagogue and was headed by Rabbi Irving J. Block. Accordingly, he stated that the Village Temple was being asked to vacate its present premises. A copy of Mr. Rohrberg's letter confirming this conversation is enclosed.

On the evening of May 5th, Rabbi Block met with the officers of the Temple and tendered his resignation "effective immediately."

It has now come to our attention that on May 2, 1954 a meeting of a Committee of the new Congregation was held at the Temple premises and that Rabbi Block and his uncle, a Mr. Slotnick, participated in the discussions concerning plans for



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Rabbi Emil W. Leipziger  
5/11/54

the new temple. Besides this, meetings were held prior to May 5, 1954, with Rabbi Block in attendance, for the purpose of forming and developing the Village Brotherhood Synagogue.

It has also come to our attention that Rabbi Block prior to the date of his resignation called members of the Village Temple Congregation and requested that they resign and join his new Congregation; that he took steps to oust the Village Temple from the premises which it had occupied for over five years; and that while on the payroll of the Village Temple and while occupying its pulpit he worked for the destruction of the Temple and the usurpation of its quarters by a rival Congregation which he was instrumental in organizing.

Since his resignation Rabbi Block has moved into a new office on the premises of the Village Presbyterian Church although the Village Temple still occupies the premises and conducts services there.

We respectfully bring the foregoing to your attention and request that the Committee on Arbitration and Ethics of the Central Conference of American Rabbis take such action as it may deem proper under the circumstances.

Very truly yours,

Matthew Brandenburg  
Secretary

MB:r  
Enc.

cc: Rabbi Joseph Fink, President  
Central Conference of American Rabbis

Rabbi Daniel Davis, Director  
New York Federation of Reform Synagogues

Rabbi Albert Goldstein, President,  
Association of Reform Rabbis of N. Y.



CCAR

September 8, 1954

Rabbi Emil W. Leipziger  
4238 St. Charles Avenue  
New Orleans, La.

My dear Emil:

I go along with you on your suggestion that we ought to recommend to the Conference Board a mild censure of the actions of Rabbi Block.

With all good wishes for a happy new year, I remain

Most cordially yours,

ABBA HILLEL SILVER

AHS:rms



ROBERT S. RATNER

ATTORNEY AT LAW

120 BROADWAY  
NEW YORK 5, N. Y.

October 4, 1954

Rabbi Emil Leipziger  
4238 St. Charles Avenue  
New Orleans 15, Louisiana

Dear Rabbi Leipziger:

Since receiving your letter of August 25th, I have been anxiously awaiting the decision of your committee with respect to the complaint of the Village Temple against Rabbi Irving Block. In the meantime certain events have occurred which I believe should be brought to your attention inasmuch as they reflect upon matters within the scope of your investigation.

During the past month the Village Temple has been engaged in an intensive drive for the renewal of memberships and the procuring of new members. To our great surprise, despite the charges brought against Rabbi Block, we have learned that Rabbi Block and his followers have called all of the members of the Village Temple, except those who have taken known positions upon the issues involved in the subject of your investigation, and not only have asked them to join the Brotherhood Synagogue, but in the alternative not to join the Village Temple. Furthermore, persons in the community have been called and told that there are now only two congregations in this area, namely, the Brotherhood Synagogue, which is reformed, and the Charles Street Synagogue, which is orthodox.

The foregoing may seem to be of insignificance or of little consequence, but be assured, it has been very effective in preventing our Temple from becoming fully established in this community. As you may readily perceive, this continued course of conduct by Rabbi Block has only served to keep alive controversy and discord which is harmful to the cause of Judaism in our area.

I would like to comment briefly on some aspects of the events which prompted the investigation by your committee. The opinion has been proffered that Rabbi Block's conduct toward the Village Temple can be excused upon the ground of "mere indiscretion" or "youthful idealism". I disagree.



Rabbi Emil Leipziger  
Page #2  
10/4/54

Firstly, Rabbi Block disregarded the sound advice given to him by his Elders in the Rabbinate, that it would be unethical for him to undertake the formation of a new congregation while ministering to the spiritual needs of the old. Secondly, it has been learned and it can easily be substantiated that Doctor Jesse Stitt in the course of a recent conversation with one of our members stated that for almost a year he and Rabbi Block had been directing their efforts toward the removal of the Village Temple from the Church premises and the establishment of a new congregation, and that this goal had been achieved.

Therefore, it is difficult to understand how Rabbi Block's carefully calculated and planned conduct in this matter can be labelled "mere indiscretion" or "youthful idealism."

I submit that unless the Central Conference of American Rabbis takes a bold and forthright position with respect to the charges which were filed, the men and women who have devoted themselves to the building of the Village Temple will have cause to be sorely grieved and disillusioned.

The charge has always been made that those of us in the professions bend over backwards to protect our own members. I hope that this is not true of the Rabbinate.

As you may know, we are at the most critical point in our entire history. Now we are about to construct our own home, a step which Rabbi Daniel Davis and Mr. Richard Stern, as advisers to our congregation, have urged upon us for a long time. If we have divisive forces working against us in the community we cannot succeed. Therefore, I must stress again how important it is to us as a congregation to have a fair, impartial and forthright decision with respect to the charges against Rabbi Block. This is your responsibility to us.

Very truly yours,

RSR:rp

cc: All members of Committee  
on Arbitration and Ethics



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September 27, 1954

Dr. Abba Hillel Silver  
E. 105th St. & Ansel Road  
Cleveland 6, Ohio

Dear Dr. Silver:

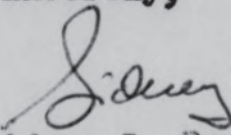
Dr. Brickner has asked me to notify you that he has appointed you to a special Committee to consider methods of improving the procedure of nominating and electing officers, members of the Executive Board and Conference representatives, and to present recommendations for such improvement to the Executive Board.

Dr. Felix A. Levy has been appointed Chairman of the Committee and no doubt you will hear from him.

We shall appreciate your serving.

With warm greetings for the New Year, I am

Sincerely,

  
Sidney L. Regner  
Executive Vice President

SLR:c.



November 23, 1954

Central Conference of American Rabbis  
40 West 68th Street  
New York 23, New York

Gentlemen:

In keeping with my practice, I am enclosing herewith my dues of \$10.00 to the Central Conference of American Rabbis. In the near future, I shall make a contribution to the Conference, but with the clear understanding that it is not part of my annual dues. I am opposed in principle to the taxation scheme adopted by the Conference.

Very cordially yours,

ABBA HILLEL SILVER

AHS:rms

enc.

*sent contribution  
Dec. 15, 1954  
H90*



# CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

40 WEST 68th STREET

NEW YORK 23, N. Y.

November 26, 1954

Dear Colleague:

I am pleased to inform you that you have been appointed a member of the following Conference Committee:

Appeals  
Arbitration and Ethics

Trusting that you will find satisfaction in serving, and with cordial greetings, I am

Sincerely yours,

*Sidney L. Regner*  
Sidney L. Regner  
Executive Vice-President

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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE.....CINCINNATI  
JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION...NEW YORK

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CLIFTON AVENUE · CINCINNATI 20, OHIO

November 24, 1954

Dr. Abba Hillel Silver  
Congregation Tifereth Israel  
E. 105th St. & Ansel Road  
Cleveland 6, Ohio

Dear Abba Hillel:

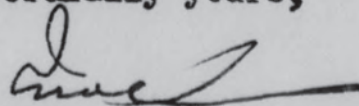
In preparing the program for the forthcoming convention of the C.C.A.R. to be held in Asbury Park, New Jersey, June 20-24, I have been guided by the impression that at this time our men would welcome a closer view of the American Jewish scene. I have, therefore, included among the main features a paper or discourse on the subject: "The American Jewish Community and Its Leadership."

I should like to invite you to discuss this theme, knowing as I do that your analysis and observations could not but bring enlightenment and inspiration to the members of our Conference.

I hope that you will find it convenient to accept the invitation and thus help ~~and~~ enrich our program.

With warmest greetings and best wishes to you and yours,  
I am

Cordially yours,



Israel Bettan

IB/mr



November 30, 1954

Dr. Israel Bettan  
Hebrew Union College  
Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati 20, Ohio

My dear Israel:

I deeply appreciate your gracious note of November 24th and your invitation to read a paper before the Central Conference of American Rabbis convention in June.

I should have been very happy to accept. It is some time since I have read a paper before the Conference. However, it is very possible that I will go abroad some time in June, possibly to Israel. I have not visited Israel since 1951. Under the circumstances, I feel that I ought not to accept an assignment which I might not be able, at the last moment, to see through. I am sure that you will understand.

With warmest regards and all good wishes, I remain

Most cordially yours,

ABBA HILLEL SILVER

AHS:rms



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Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver,  
Cong. Tifereth Israel,  
E. 105th St. & Ansel Rd.,  
Cleveland 6, Ohio

Dear Rabbi Silver:

Sometime ago I wrote you about the preparation of a tape recording in Hebrew on some aspect of Zionism from the liberal Jewish point of view to be broadcast over the Israeli radio. I did not hear from you and assume that you were too busy at the time to follow this through. I hope that you will be able to do so now.

If you do not have time to work it out in Hebrew why not send me the English text and our committee will have it competently translated. Any expense involved in the taping will of course be borne by the committee.

With cordial personal greetings,

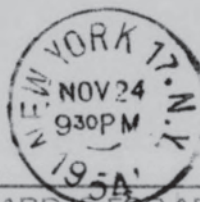
Sincerely yours,

*Harold I.*

Rabbi Harold I. Saperstein, Chairman

January 5, 1955





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GRAND CENTRAL  
STATION



POSTAL CARD

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Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver  
E. 105th St. and Ansel Road  
Cleveland 6, Ohio



CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS  
40 West 68 Street New York 23, N.Y.

Time and Place of Next Convention

Asbury Park, New Jersey  
Hotel Berkeley-Carteret  
Monday, June 20 - Thursday, June 23, 1955

A post-Convention Torah Session is being planned for members who wish to remain Friday and Saturday, June 24-25 - details later.

Sidney L. Regner  
Executive Vice-President



# CCAR *Journal*

CENTRAL CONFERENCE AMERICAN RABBIS

ABRAHAM J. KLAUSNER, D. D.  
*Editor*

August 9, 1955

Rabbi Abba Silver  
Cong. Tifereth Israel  
E. 105th St. & Ansel Road  
Cleveland 6, Ohio

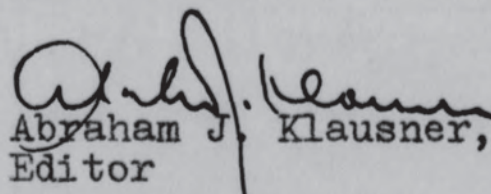
Dear Rabbi Silver:

Greetings and good wishes.

In the forthcoming issue of the Conference Journal, we would like to publish the enclosed statement on, "The Problem of the Festivals," and at the same time a comment by yourself as to the validity of the presentation and such suggestions that you might care to make to the Conference for meeting the problems suggested. If it is at all possible, we would like to prepare these materials for the October issue of the Journal. We would appreciate hearing from you.

With many thanks and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

  
Abraham J. Klausner,  
Editor

AJK:eg  
enc.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE: 63 Hamilton Avenue, Yonkers 5, N. Y.



## THE PROBLEM OF THE FESTIVALS

The meaning, form and observance of the holidays, Sukkos, Pesach and Shvuos (Sholosh Regolim) are in need of clarification. The problems they present, if unresolved, will in brief time reduce these festivals to historic notes on a religious calendar. Reform Judaism can take the initiative, as it has in the past, and so attend the problems of the festivals as to root their meaning in modern Jewish living and give them the form and observance which will afford those so inclined a positive religious experience.

What precisely is the nature of the problem of the festivals? There is an absence of historic continuity in their present day meaning, logic in their form, and excitement in their observances. Though we like to think of "variations in a pattern" as characteristic of Reform Judaism, our analysis will indicate that our people's approach to the festivals eludes even the most obscure pattern. In the main, regardless of religious affiliation, they are oblivious of, indifferent to or confused by the festivals. This condition is motivated by a host of factors, some inherent in the holidays themselves, others in the society of which we are an integral part. We intend by this analysis reason and course for action to be considered by the CCAR if the festivals are to remain meaningful and moving experiences in present day Jewish living.

### Sukkos

The significance of Sukkos is apportioned between the "harvest celebration," the "exodus story," and the "rededication to the Law." As a harvest celebration, it precedes Thanksgiving Day by a few weeks. As a commemoration of the exodus story, Sukkos conflicts



with Pesach. As a time for rededication to the Torah, it strikes a Shvuos note. There is no question, but that each of these concepts has its roots in some historical phase of the holiday. Nevertheless, a holiday so divided as to basic meaning cannot communicate a dynamic concept, without which a holiday cannot survive.

Our Union Prayer Book reflects the absence of a distinct concept in its Sukkos prayers. The insertion for the Sabbath evening service of Sukkos speaks of the harvest season. "The meadows are clothed with flocks, the fields are covered with grain...the earth has yielded her increase; may the Lord, our God, bless us." The Sabbath morning service "recall (s) with grateful heart, "God's "loving providence which guided our fathers in their wanderings" from Egypt. On Shemini Atzeres a third theme is woven into the holiday pattern with the prayer, "We thank Thee for Thy Law which has hallowed our lives...make this our day of rededication to Thy Law."

A first problem then is to spell out the meaning of Sukkos. Instead of using the holiday to preserve historic concepts, we must give to the holiday historic continuity which will take us from the meanings of Sukkos in ancient days to one consistent with tradition and at the same time expressive of modern day Jewish thinking and living. The meaning we give, must in every analysis evoke a willing response in the life of the Jew.

The form or structure of the festivals presents a problem. The calendar records the holiday as consisting of five parts and nine days: Sukkos, chol hamoed, Hoshanah Rabbah, Shemini Atzeres and



Simchas Torah. In the Reform Jewish calendar, Simchas Torah is omitted. The eight day structure of the holiday (with the omission of Simchas Torah) is the same in the Reform and traditional calendars. Whereas with other holidays-Rosh Hashanah and Shvuos-the second day of the holiday has been eliminated, in the case of Sukkos the second day has been retained as some sort of holiday. Otherwise, we could not be celebrating Shemini Atzeres as we do. Though Simchas Torah is omitted from the calendar, its celebration is much in evidence. In some Temples, it is observed on the eve of Shemini Atzeres (following a Chasidic custom?), in others on the Sabbath of Sukkos. In most instances, the scheduling of Simchas Torah is dictated by convenience. Consequently, the observance takes place on a week end during the festival period.

Since the intention of this analysis is to recommend a change in the form of the holiday, it would be well for us to bear in mind that historically the observance of Sukkos was neither consistent nor continuous. The author of the Book of Nehemiah informs us that "since the days of Joshua the son of Nun" to the time of Ezra, the populous did not celebrate the festival.

The first Biblical reference to Sukkos (hag ha-asif) does not specify the time nor the length of the celebration. It merely calls for the observance "at the end of the year." As the festival developed, it was assigned to the seventh month for a period of seven days. In time it was lengthened to eight (Shemini Atzeres) and as late as the tenth century to nine days, the ninth being Simchas Torah. The designation of the seventh day as Hoshanah Rabbah is post-Biblical, probably of the Hasmonean period.



When the patriarch Hillel, and those associated with him, undertook the framing of a new calendar, they were faced with the possibility of Hoshanah Rabbah falling on the Sabbath. This presented a problem. During the time of Hillel, Hoshanah Rabbah was a high point in the Sukkos celebration. As part of the observance, it is recorded, torchlight parades wound through the streets of Jerusalem to the accompaniment of the music of countless flutes. It was a day of much merriment and great excitement. To avoid a conflict and the consequent desecration of the Sabbath, the calendar was framed to make the coincidence impossible.

A problem in need of clarification bearing upon the form or structure of the holiday, is public or secular school attendance, permitted or forbidden during the festivals. In practically all Reform Jewish homes and a good number of traditional homes, the first day (s) of Sukkos and the concluding days are work-days. Nevertheless, the children of these homes, especially those of elementary school age, abstain from attending school for one, two or more days during the Sukkos and Pesach festivals. On these days, it is the practice of the children to don play clothes for a day of free activity. In too many instances, the children find their way to the school playground, timing their arrival for the recess period, to tease those in attendance. Some children spend a good part of the day at the local movie.

There are Temple children's services. Some Temples conduct a children's service on the first morning, which takes the place of the adult service. The children attending are usually of elementary school age, since high school and college students are loathe to miss



a school session. Following a children's service, the holiday ceases to have even its limited significance since parents are not at home observing the day. The child is either taken shopping with mother, or returned to play.

On the concluding day of Sukkos (Shemini Atzeres) it is the practice of a number of Temples to include the Yizkor service. This makes it difficult for the temple to plan for its children with a festival service. Among the large temples where the scheduling of parallel services is possible, it is rare to witness two adult and two children's services on the mornings of the first and concluding day of the holiday.

In formulating a policy of school attendance on the festivals, we might consider that the Cheder or Talmud Torah of the European and early American Jewish community were in session on the Sabbath. In order not to conflict with Sabbath services, sessions were scheduled for the afternoon. The tradition forbidding attendance at a secular school on the Sabbath was motivated by the distinction made between the holy and the profane-the secular being profane. Furthermore, the tools normally used in pursuit of one's studies, were by law forbidden on the Sabbath. We in Reform Judaism do not look upon secular education as profane. "We welcome all truth whether shining from the annals of ancient revelations or reaching us through the seers of our own times." The tools once forbidden are widely used in the classes of our Sabbath schools. If our children are to refrain from attending school on the festival days, we must give reason to our request-reason that fits in well with a sound philosophy of Jewish life. We might also consider a change in the



form of the festival which would bring a solution to this problem. Of this we are certain, a continuation of the present form of the festival and its attendant attitudes will cater to the growing indifference on the part of children and adults towards the significance of the festivals.

The observance of the festival is extremely varied with no climax to excite the religious senses of the individual. The day is ushered in with an early, late or morning service. The temple pulpit is decorated with the symbolic succah. The essrog and lulab are in evidence as items of possible historic interest. Depending upon which day of the week the first day of the festival occurs, a consecration service for children entering the Religious School, yet without general form is incorporated in the service. The concluding days witness, in increasing numbers, the Yizkor and the Simchas Torah services, both excluded from our pattern of observances. The Union Prayer Book provides for a Yizkor service only during the Passover festival. Observing these practices, one cannot help but feel that the complex of observance is vague, bereft of religious objective and excitement.

It might be suggested that change in any aspect of the festival would be in effect serving the convenience of the people. A proper response to such a suggestion would be-why not? Festivals by their definition are willing and convenient expressions of the people. It is not necessary to reason the peoples of the many faiths into the observance of their holidays. They do so willingly. In modern Israel we observe an excitement in connection with the very festivals that pose a problem in our society. During Sukkos, there is great joy in the



land. The fields are full and the farm and settlement workers rejoice in the harvest. If prayer at any time is expressed in the song and dance of thanksgiving, then there is great prayer in the land during the festival of Sukkos. Pesach, the festival of freedom is a zamon cherut. The resorts are booked to capacity. It is man's free week in which he celebrates his freedom. That men celebrate in varying degrees of meaningfulness is obvious to all of us. What perhaps, is not obvious is that there is conflict today between the observance required by the institutions of our religious experience and the religious experience itself.

With the end of the European ghetto, when the Jew gained mobility and found his way into the non-Jewish community, he also realized that the expectations and the demands of the larger society were in conflict with the responses anticipated by his tradition. In order to preserve the holiday in the face of these new difficulties, a philosophy of "sacrifice" as contrasted with that of "spontaneity" evolved. Observances under the new philosophy were not necessarily the willing expression of religious awareness or excitement. It was a proof of loyalty, an act for which one could expect credit. The more difficult it became to observe the festivals, the greater was the credit to be. Observances then, like the washing of hands, was reduced to a mitzvah. With this philosophy, the natural relationship which exists between a man and his holiday was abandoned. It may be said the new relationship was a necessary development aimed at preserving the festivals during a chaotic period until such a time when the Jew would find himself in a position to rethink their significance and give to them the natural relationship essential to their preservation. Shall we agree that this is the time?



## Pesach

The meaning of Pesach is clear. The form and observance pose problems. The first day of the holiday with its clarion call for freedom expressed in the service and symbolized in the seder is a source of religious excitement and exaltation. The six days that follow, however, are of little or no religious significance. The seventh or concluding day takes on some meaning with the Yizkor Service, but not sufficient to give it an importance in consonance with the first day. The concluding day also poses, as does Shemini Atzeres, the problem of school attendance.

The high point in the Passover observance is the Seder. The Haggadah, the story of the struggle for freedom should be brought up to date.

The original intention of the Haggadah

אין חגגתם את חג העצמאות  
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seems to have been overlooked. We have pruned and patched the Haggadah, but we have not "added" to the story of freedom. Some of our patchwork reflects our confusion in presenting the holiday as a religious experience. In the riddle of numbers the number eight previously signified the eight days of circumcision and now reads eight days of Chanukah. The number nine has been changed from nine months of pregnancy to the nine festivals. In a footnote listing the nine, Simchas Torah is included. This holiday, however, does not appear on our Reform calendar. What philosophical or theological concept prompted these changes? Is it conceivable that these changes were motivated by the desire to desex the Haggadah? And why the cavalier use of Simchas Torah?

That the problems pertaining to the festival are general, faced in



degrees by all grouping in Jewish life, is made evident by the Reconstructionist Haggadah edited by Mordecai Kaplan. Here a similar confusion is reflected in the presentation of the festival. The answer to the question, "who knows the meaning of number eight" in the Hebrew, is eight days of circumcision. In the English, it is eight Chanukah lights. A footnote indicates that the Hebrew and the English do not correspond. The question we ask is, why? Shall we assume that the child who can read and understand Hebrew is satisfied with circumcision as the answer, but the child who cannot read Hebrew must have Chanukah as the answer? For the number nine, the Hebrew offers nine months of pregnancy. In the English, nine represents half holidays.

Another interesting bit in the Haggadah is the Had Gadyo folksong fashioned after a popular German ballad introduced as a device to keep children interested in the Seder Service to its end. The need to keep children awake is not as great today as it was in the time when the Seder Service began after the late evening service and continued into the early hours of the morning. Furthermore, a folksong that had meaning for a child of the sixteenth and seventeenth century does not excite the modern child. It is also surprising to observe that the sensitivities that effected the deletion of circumcision and pregnancy from the riddle of numbers did not bring about the elimination of the "angel of death who killed the butcher, who killed the ox that drank the water, etc."

It may be suggested that we are making too much of minor details. After all, "The Riddle of Numbers" and "The Only Kid" are really not an essential part of the story of Passover. That may be true,



but the approach to these items is characteristic of the Haggadah and the Festivals generally. We have done much in the way of pruning and patching, but nothing towards continuing the story of freedom so that it would reflect our endless struggle for what man deems to be of greatest significance in life.

### Shvuous

The meaning of Shvuous, like that of Pesach, is clear. Coming as it does at the conclusion of our academic year, it lends itself admirably to the Confirmation Service. It might be suggested that the Confirmation Service has preserved Shvuous, but it has also created a number of problems. The service itself has lost its communal character, consisting as it for the most part does of a program in which the confirmands participate. Attendance is "by ticket only." Unlike high holy day tickets which are distributed to the congregation, Shvuous tickets are distributed through the confirmands, while the congregation is discouraged from attending the service. The service itself is not one of prayer. The reasons for this development are obvious. The size of our congregations, the pride taken in confirmation, and the desire of family and friends to rejoice on the occasion, make it necessary for most temples to close their doors to general participation. It also makes difficult the scheduling of services for the children of the congregation who again are asked to observe the holiday and to absent themselves from their school sessions.

In an appreciable number of temples, the Confirmation Service is not conducted on Shvuous, but on a convenient week-end day close to Shvuous. For these congregations, Shvuous is a calendar point by which one determines a convenient date for the Confirmation Service.



Because of our concentration on the Confirmation Service as the principal observance of the holiday, we have given little thought to the holiday as a community observance. We must bear in mind as we consider the observance of this and other holidays that attendance at the synagogue does not constitute holiday observance. As important as prayer is, so is the holiday meal and the general spirit engendered by the requirements of the holiday. Observance of the Sabbath, as an example, calls for the Sabbath Service, the Sabbath meal, the Sabbath rest, Sabbath study, Sabbath dress and even Sabbath music. These together create a spirit which gives meaning to the observance of the day. I do not believe that we have communicated a program for observance whereby the spirit of the festival could take on meaning for the adherents of our religious way of life. The best we can say is that Shvuus has become "the season of our Confirmation."

### Conclusion

This discussion might be continued with an analysis of the economic and cultural factors in our society which have affected changes in our mode of living which bring into question the meaning, form and observances of the festivals. If, however, the reader is satisfied that the conditions emphasized in these pages are real and sufficiently significant as to advocate a serious consideration of the general problem, then it should become an objective of the Conference to make the necessary changes the situation demands.

Though we in Reform Judaism make much of the concept of change which, we maintain, is basic to our way of life, we hesitate to make changes even when they seem to be absolutely necessary. This is observable



especially with regard to the orthodox manner in which we pattern our special prayer services in accordance with the Union Prayer Book, the most radical departure from the traditional Sidur in recent centuries. Our approach to the festivals will have to be of a radical nature. However, against the background of the changes that Reform Judaism has brought about to the advantage of Judaism, not merely in the United States but the world over, these changes are merely the logical steps compelled by our interpretation of Jewish life, which, if taken, can only enrich our religious traditions.





August 12, 1955

Dr. Abraham J. Klausner, Editor  
CCAR Journal  
63 Hamilton Avenue  
Yonkers 5, New York

Dear Dr. Klausner:

Thank you for your letter to Rabbi Silver  
of August ninth. I regret that the Rabbi is  
out of the country at present. When he returns  
in September, I shall bring your letter to his  
attention.

Very truly yours,

(Mrs.) Ruth M. Sparrow  
Secretary to Rabbi Silver