

I have Orthodox friends and have watched the movement my whole life. Back when I thought about Rabbinical School, I actually looked at both Reform and Orthodox. A Reform rabbi whom I knew pointed out that I was right, and there really are some very observant Reform Jews, but I would still be on the extreme fringe, though not alone.

As to the Orthodox, I watched them change drastically since I was young, even while an undergraduate in Manhattan. In the early 1970s, they still read Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Rabbi Solomon Freehof's responsa, answers to *halakic* questions. (The Reform Movement from its beginning in Germany and Hungary, and officially in the USA since 1906, has answered questions of practice, at times frowning on modern practices and urging people to maintain tradition, and most of its heads were great scholars.) By the mid 1970s, they were cutting out Rabbi Freehof's name and skipping the last paragraph, which, after a survey of the legal codes, I jokingly say begins—'but we in the Reform movement....' When I considered applying in 1979, they were no longer reading either Rabbi Freehof. or Rabbi Heschel.

I realized that the Modern Orthodox were fighting for their soul, and I did not want to be a part of it. They were losing the fight for many reasons, not the least of which was refusal to see it; low teacher pay, more of whom were rightist Orthodox; and a refusal to say no to the right. It came to a head after Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's funeral in 1993. He was simply know as "The Rav," "The Rabbi." Many in the right wing of Yeshiva University did not attend. More discord arose in 2002, when Richard M. Joel (former Hillel head), not a rabbi, became president. For peace, retired past president Rabbi Norman Lamm became chancellor and *Rosh Yeshiva* (*Talmud* academy head).

The whole Orthodox world has shifted right for different reasons, including, recreating a romanticized, idealized view of the dead Eastern European *shtetl*; battling modernity and disliking it entering Judaism through the Modern Orthodox; and a general societal rightward shift (I have spoken about how they do not always follow *halakah*, in what I call the Protestantization of the Orthodox). I stayed in the Conservative Movement with its general leftward shift, some of which I like and some of which I do not.

While I criticized the Reform Movement last month and applied it to the Conservative, the same is true on our other side. While for a while our laity has been less observant, especially outside of the Northeast Corridor (and Canada and Israel), and the same has been true of our rabbis shifting left, we also have our right, and some of the Orthodox issues apply, especially how we see *halakah*, law. *Halakah* is in danger of becoming an idol, with God forgotten in the process. Rabbi Gordon Tucker's article, "Can a People of the Book also be a People of God?" *Conservative Judaism*, 60:1-2, Fall/Winter 2007-2008 reminded me of this. He writes how what is important to religion is irrelevant to *halakah* (he never uses the word idol; I have used it for years). He also shows some Orthodox rabbis opposing this sentiment: Rabbi Yuval Cherlow of Petaḥ Tiqva in a 2002 article; Rabbi Haym Soloveitchik (The Rav's son) in a 1994 article in *Tradition* (a

Modern Orthodox journal), and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (later the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi under the British Mandate in Palestine) in an article in 1908.

Though not true today, the Conservative Movement was a centrist movement following the *via media*, the middle path. In reorganizing Conservative Judaism, Rabbi Solomon Schechter used it in a vein similar to the English Anglican Church tradition (he made major changes to the Anglican understanding, see Matthew LaGrone, "Schechter's Umbrella: England and the Church of England in the Life and Imagination of Solomon Schechter, *Conservative Judaism*, 60:1-2, Fall/Winter 2007-2008). We occupy the center of a continuum, but only as a convenient metaphor. Actually, depending on the issue, Conservative Judaism is more to the left, closer to Reform (*i.e.* using modern educational methods in Jewish study and understanding, and an openness to modernity in general), or more to the right, closer to the Orthodox (*i.e.* *halakah's* binding nature). Where any of us will end up is unclear. The Orthodox were supposed to disappear, and the Conservative melt into the Reform. So I make no predictions, but we should think about the issues and decide what kind of Jew each one of us is, not by movement, but by ideas. Summer is a good time to think about it, for as I wrote two issues ago, Judaism does not take a vacation, it goes on vacation with us.

--- Rabbi Michael Rascoe