



Inaugural Address of

DR. ARTHUR GREEN

as President of the

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Sunday, November 15, 1987, 2:00 P.M.

23 Heshvan 5748

The Procession of Generations: Jewish Past and Jewish Future

Dear Friends:

In telling you of my hopes and dreams for this College, this movement, and its future, I have to begin by telling the story of what it means to be a Jew today. We set out to build the future only by knowing and appreciating the present. And in order to tell you that, I have to begin with my own story. Where should a person begin the tale, after all, if not with himself? My name is Avraham Yitzhak, the son of Mordecai and Etel, the son and daughter in turn of Yosef and Manya, and Asher Mordecai and Basil. Basil was the daughter of Meir, a cabinetmaker in Lomza, and wife Hinkel. Asher Mordecai was an orphan whose father was killed by a peasant on a drunken rampage somewhere in Latvia over a hundred years ago. Manya's father, the Avraham Yitzhak whose name I bear, was a shtetl Jew from somewhere in Western Poland who migrated to the burgeoning industrial city of Lodz, where his children lost their Hasidic faith and joined the ranks of that new religion that was emerging on the left flank of the Jewish workers' movement. I am also the father of Hannah Leah and hopefully of untold generations to come. I also like to think of myself — and this in part to lighten the burden I place upon my only child — as a spiritual parent of the many to whom I have tried to teach Torah.

I introduce myself in this way in order to turn us immediately to the matter at hand: the issue of transmitting our Jewish legacy from one generation to the next. Most of our lives are lived in a generationally horizontal context. We associate with peers, or with those slightly older or younger than ourselves. We stand in relation to the world as it is, human society and the natural order as they exist in the historical and evolutionary moment in which we happen to encounter them. *But for us Jews in particular this horizontal*

context of life bears with it a vertical protext, if you will, a view that sees each of us not as an individual who lives among others in the present, but rather as a link between generations, an individual who is the product of countless ancestors and intended to be the progenitor of countless descendants. Testimony to this view of human existence abounds in our tradition. The commandment we claim was given to the first humans — “Be fruitful and multiply” — the commandment given to the first Hebrew, that of Abraham’s circumcision, symbolizing sacred restriction to the organ of generation, and the first commandment to Israel in Egypt — “remember this day and teach it to your children” — all point to the transmission of heritage as the central meaning of Israel’s existence. We are, after all, the children of faithful but stubborn old Abraham, who would rest easy with none of the blessings of personal fulfillment, prosperity, or longevity, as long as he had no child to inherit him. The links are close between that Abraham and Sarah, blessed with a single child only in old age, and the generation of Holocaust survivors who also so needed children to inherit them, and who had the great courage to bear children into the world still in the DP camps of Central Europe, wordlessly expressing their faith that the transmission from one generation to the next would still go forward.

The historical portions of the Bible were written in two schools: the prophetic and the priestly. The prophetic accounts of our ancient history — the Books of Samuel and Kings — are filled with accounts of various figures’ attempts to reshape the world as they encountered it: battles, conquests, the building of monuments, religious reforms. It is events that take place on the “horizontal” plane of each generation that shape history as we usually understand it. The priestly account that is recorded in Chronicles is largely a list of names — these are the generations that passed by, one to the next, the chain unbroken, while all that reshaping of history was taking place. This view of human life as an inexorable procession of

generations, unchanged by all that goes on other than birth, death, and birth again, is also a part of our heritage. Hence too the lists of Genesis: he begat and he died; he begat and he died.

We Jews have never been much impressed with promises of life eternal, even in those times when we believed more firmly in its existence. Eternity for us is that of survival into future generations, and is guaranteed only by the passing on of that legacy which in turn had been handed to us. Abraham’s questions: “What can You give me, for I am barren... and only my household servant will inherit me?” still echoes in our ears. Our lives are lived in search of those children, our students and their students, who will say *na’aseh ve-nishma*, “we will do, we will listen,” and thus guarantee our future.

Recovering the Tradition: In Search of Teachers

Of course as an American Jew born in the 1940's I was given an English name that was supposed to be the real name I would use in my lifetime. My parents, themselves American Jews who went by English names — and I have been blessed by having a third parent, a stepmother who has been a close and loving parent since my childhood — saw their Arthur Elliot as one who would live his life in the American cultural sphere, whose Jewish roots would be weaker than their own as children of immigrants, who would not understand the Yiddish of which they retained a smattering, and who certainly would have little relation to religious faith or observance, which they had quite resoundingly rejected. Here I see myself belonging to a generational pattern that was in fact mostly later than my own. I was part of a small vanguard of Jews who began already in adolescence, in the midst of the golden years of American Jewish assimilation, to reclaim our past, preparing for the larger and hopefully still growing cadre of such seekers who were to come after us. I was also part of the small group of young American Jews who were privileged to be taught by that great generation of rabbis and Jewish scholars who had come to America as a result of Nazi persecution, bringing with them a Judaism of spiritual and intellectual profundity that could not be matched by representatives of the American rabbinate as I encountered it. Such figures as my teachers Alexander Altmann and Abraham Joshua Heschel, *yehi zikhram baruch* and, distinguishing the living from the dead, Nahum Glatzer, David Weiss-Halivni, Zalman Schachter, and Max Gruenwald and Joachim Prinz, the rabbis who first impressed me as a child — these were all middle Europeans, cast on these Jewishly barren American shores by events not of their choosing, and hungry to find a few young people among the grandchildren of those earlier Jewish immigrants who still cared enough to study with them.

Here in America, before that generation of latter-day immigrants, there was only one Jewish thinker (I speak here of constructive thought, not of scholarship) of any real standing or seriousness, and that of course was Mordecai Kaplan. Already in the 1920's and 30's Kaplan was working away at an agenda for American Jewish life, one that could hardly be appreciated by Europeans who came from the context of an entirely different Jewish experience. Kaplan was the first to understand the voluntaristic nature of Jewish affiliation on this continent and the tremendous impact that would have on the shape of the Jewish future. Seeing that the future lay in intelligent and careful choice, he was the first to demand of future Jewish leaders and teachers that they examine the legacy they had received and ask what of it they in fact wanted to pass on to the future and what might best be set aside. He was well aware, both as a cultural Zionist and as an American educator, that our role in transmission is not merely custodial but creative, and that the heritage we pass on to the future must not only be preserved, but enriched, by our having lived as its bearers.

If we are celebrating a marriage today — and Jewish tradition has a way of likening almost any sort of celebration to its favorite, the wedding — it is a marriage of these two intellectual traditions. Kaplan's critical re-evaluation and selective retrieval from the tradition, ever mindful of choosing the "best" of Judaism from the standpoints of pedagogy and ethics, here is joined to the Judaism of that relentless search for inwardness, nurtured by those emigré disciples of Buber and Rosenzweig, but forged in the crucible of the terrible and exhilarating late 1960's, mirrored back into the present by a reflection off Rabbi Nahman's heart of the universe, hoping to send a ray of light into that great and seemingly endless shadow cast by the Holocaust. The Judaism that will emerge as the offspring of such a marriage, though it cannot yet be fully foretold, is that which I feel I must begin to unveil today.

If the truth be told, however, this event feels to me less like a wedding than it does like a Bar Mitzvah. I am, after all, standing here alone. I am making a speech, and this all has something to do with the study of Torah. There is too a certain coming of age in all this. Ira Eisenstein and I once before shared a platform from which we, two upstarts, spoke of the future of rabbinic education. That was at the *Judaism* symposium, just eighteen years ago. On that occasion I said the following:

In the seminaries, we must begin with the overcoming of roles. We can no longer talk about faculty and students. As long as the teacher sees himself in a faculty role and hides behind faculty cover, as long as a student is seen only as a student and not a religious human being growing with the faculty as they "grow" to be religious human beings, there can be no religious learning. The legacy of the seminaries is inevitably carried over into the congregations. If the legacy of the seminary years is one of spiritual dryness, the congregation will be spiritually dry; and that cannot be covered up with homiletic courses. If the legacy of the rabbinical college is the legacy of the pedestal, of authoritarianism, of respect for role rather than person, then that too will happen in our congregations, and that too will continue to alienate our most significant and important Jews. If the rabbi is to be the creator of a more meaningful community, he must emerge from a meaningful community. If the congregation is to become a religious community, a community of people growing together, the rabbinical college must be one.

About a dozen years later, at a conference on the history of leadership in Judaism at Indiana University, I presented a paper entitled "Typologies of Leadership in Early Hasidism." There I tried to describe the tension between the worlds of *rav* and *rebbe*, the normative halakhic universe and the spiritual charismatic value system of Hasidism. What happens, I asked, when the charismatic achieves such authority that the law itself is threatened. There I concluded:

Here we see Hasidism at its boldest and most audacious stage. The most essential halakhic area has now been transformed and removed from the hands of the *rav* to those of the *rebbe*. No wonder that the rabbinic establishment fought so hard to squelch such a movement! At the same time, however, we see here the conservative streak in Hasidism that was to determine its later character. For as tradition is given over into the hands of the *rebbe*, he himself takes on the mantle of spokesman for that tradition and becomes its greatest defender. The history of Hasidism bears witness to the fact that in this wedding of normative authority to the charismatic spokesman, it is chiefly the charismatic who is transformed as he feels the mantle of tradition, and the responsibility for its maintenance, bear down weightily upon him.

Here I had best make an end of quoting myself.

The Crisis of Vision

American Jewry has come a long way since the days of Kaplan. It has a security and self-confidence that was unknown in the pre-war generations. It has achieved tremendously in institutional growth, in financial stability, in educational development, and in the creation of an American tradition of Judaic scholarship. All of these are to be greatly applauded. Our community remains, however, beset by crisis. We lack a sense of direction, a unifying goal toward which we are working. How assimilated a community do we want to be? How fully integrated do we want our grandchildren to be in American society? Is there, after all, anything that we as Jews have to offer that might serve as a leavening or corrective in the rapid growth of a society dominated by mass media and electronic information? How distinctive will we have to remain in order to offer that? What is the place of Israel in our commitment to what is clearly an ongoing American Jewish life? Can we have – and do we want – a distinctive Jewish culture in America? What sort of religion, and how much of observance, do we seek for our grandchildren? We cannot build our future unless we know what that future to be. **The true crisis in Jewish life is a crisis of vision; we lack a vision of the future that would serve to animate the present and give meaning to our commitment to the Jewish past.**

We of this college, along with our partners in the other arms of the Reconstructionist movement, seek to articulate a vision for the future of the Jewish people. This college exists in order to create a Jewish leadership that is imbued with the inspiration and the vision to work with the entire Jewish community in the forging of a rich and creative Jewish future. The essential Torah of this *bet midrash* is the emerging vision of that future.

The Torah that will go forth from this institution will be born of a passionate love for the Jewish past, for sources, traditions, wonderful rabbinic turns of phrase. It will also bear within it, perhaps uniquely, a no less passionate love for the Jewish future. That future will be related to the past in complicated ways, surely not as simple continuation. As Jews living in the late twentieth century (or the mid 5700's, if you prefer), we are witness to a multifaceted break with our past. We are products of this break as we are products of the tradition itself, and our spiritual lives will always reflect both of these realities. Modernity and its scientific worldview have changed the way we experience the universe in which we live, the way we see humanity and its role, and hence the way in which we conceive God. The critical perspective on the history of religion has forever changed the way we see our traditions and the way we read our sources. The locus of Jewish life has shifted from the intensely Jewish and separatist but politically powerless setting in Eastern Europe to the new worlds of America and Israel: one in which a purely voluntary and spiritually impoverished community has to compete with the enormous resources of an accessible and highly attractive dominant civilization, and the other in which forces of old and new are tragically at loggerheads in the battle to determine the Jewish character of an emerging Israeli civilization. The holocaust of European Jewry, while its primary lesson surely has to do with the potential for evil within humanity, also serves to close the book on certain of our more naive religious expectations; phrases that were already hollow in the prewar years have now become downright blasphemous.

And yet, miracle of miracles, despite all this, Jews are coming home. Of the 105 graduates of this institution and its sixty present students, no more than a handful came from traditionally observant families. *Yiddishe kinder kumen tsurik tsu yiddishkeyt*, as I once heard a Brooklyn Hasidic rabbi say it. But the young Jews who decide, on their way back to the tradition, to study at this institution, are Jews who want to come home to the tradition while bringing with them the best that they have learned from the experience of living and studying in the American civilization. Here we do not check our twentieth century baggage at the door, nor do we so steep ourselves in textual and academic study that the burning questions that brought us here are forgotten. We also try not to so quickly professionalize rabbinic training as to turn aside from the deeply personal feelings, including conflicts, that each of us has as we re-embrace our tradition. *This is a bet midrash in which we indeed go, as Franz Rosenzweig once said it, from life to Torah. All the complexity of life in our times serves here as the fuel which we seek to turn into the light of Torah. Any denial of life, any retreat from confronting the reality of the times in which we live, means that much diminishing of our Torah. The life of our times will make for a reshaping of Torah, as it has in other generations, as it will yet happen after us. At the same time, we must remember and teach our students that the right to reconstruct the house of Judaism belongs only to those who choose to live in it. We must not allow ourselves to remain outsiders, streetcorner critics, to our tradition's home. Only when we have made our house truly our own, when we have come to love the old place for all its creaking stairs and over-crowded parlors, only then dare we take it upon ourselves to remodel rooms, modernize style, and retire excess furniture to the attic of historical memory.*

Reconstructionism: A Maximalist Judaism

Reconstructionist Judaism for the end of this century will have to be Jewishly maximalist in a number of important ways. We American Jews need to step forth from the category of religious denomination which we used as a protective sheath against the demand for ethnic assimilation in those years when only religious distinctions seemed likely to be saved from the American melting-pot's furnace. The new respectability of ethnic diversity in this society allows us to establish a Jewish civilization here as never before in this country. But now we must do it! This means a fostering of the creative spirit, of literature and the arts, but also of social forms, educational institutions, libraries and performance centers appropriate to the needs of our community. We need to build great institutions if we are to be a great community. Our over-reliance on acceptance in the general institutional world, including that of the university, will not, I fear, serve well the goals of Jewish continuity.

We will need to be maximalist in learning. This includes first and foremost a renewed commitment to Hebrew. Language is an essential hallmark of civilization. Jewish life in translation is Jewish life removed from its source. We will not create a serious Jewish culture in America, even in English, unless we have access to the sources of that culture in the original. Conquest of our so typically American language block is also vital to the continuity of contact between the Jewish culture being created in Israel and the life of this the greatest diaspora community. A new commitment to Hebrew must begin with our rabbinical colleges and other Jewish institutions of higher learning, flowing from there to a stronger commitment to day school education for children and the re-integration of Hebrew in some measure into Jewish camps, youth movement and afternoon schools. We of the Reconstructionist movement must lead the fight against Hebrew — and Jewish — illiteracy in America. I gladly commit

the resources of this college to that fight.

Learning for us embraces much more than language. The full range of Jewish sources — Biblical and rabbinic, halakhic and aggadic, mystical, philosophic, and poetic, ancient and modern — must be open books to us. The historical experience of the Jewish people, both in pre-modern and modern times, is also a source from which we have to learn. This is the first rabbinical college in Jewish history to be fully dedicated to the study of such a wide range of Jewish sources. In this matter as in some others, I venture to predict, we will be a model for all liberal rabbinic education in the future.

A Serious Religious Vision for Our Times

Judaism as it will proceed from this college will also be maximalist in its religious seriousness and intensity. This is an aspect of our program that is not always easily understood by those around us. Reconstructionism was never meant to be a compromise with Jewish secularism, nor can it survive today as a way of preserving folkways for Jews who have given up on the struggle for faith. Mordecai Kaplan's agenda insisted that we deal forthrightly with the questions of God, faith, prayer and that which he called "salvation", not avoid them. If I believe that his casting of these into an entirely this-worldly and naturalistic framework requires some re-thinking today, it is not because I am content with the unthinking or platitudinous piety that Kaplan set out to oppose. Kaplan's thinking about Judaism reflected the ideas of the greatest minds of his day — at least in America — on the questions of religion, education and culture. To be faithful to his spirit, our thinking on Judaism will of necessity have to differ from his, showing the influence of the greatest thinkers in our significantly different time. Within both philosophy and science in recent decades there has been a new openness to appreciation of mystery and of subjective inner experience as a source of truth. Advances in physics and astronomy have taken us to the far ends of that which the mind can conceive, requiring an expansion of mind into a new dimension of consciousness, an expansion confirmed by research into the chemistry of the brain and the psychology of inner experience. We have been infinitely awed by the trial of living in the nuclear shadow, and in the same decades, not coincidentally, we have been greatly enlightened by new contact with the religious reality that has its origins in South and East Asia. We live in the midst of what historian of science Thomas Kuhn calls a great "paradigm shift", one that leads us away from the modern West's exploitative and mechanistic views of nature toward a greater appreciation and even veneration of the

natural world of which we are a part, from a unidimensional social science toward an understanding of human life as infinitely complex and richly textured, from a positivistic and often somewhat simplistic attitude toward truth and falsehood toward a greater acceptance of subtlety, multivocality, and nuance in our thinking. All of this is capped by a new sense of humility that is abroad in the scientific community, an awareness that for all we increase knowledge about our universe, so too do we grow in appreciation of its mysterious and ever-elusive infinite self.

Such a change in the spirit of the age cannot but bring about in us Jews a new openness to the transcendent vision of Israel's prophets and mystics, a vision we seek to embrace in its most profound and mysterious sense, without necessarily lending assent to all the dogmatic conclusions that have been drawn from it. We are religious humanists, in that we continue to believe that humans alone are actors on the stage of history, and that in this sense the fate of the universe depends entirely upon us. There can be no abdication of human individual or collective responsibility for taking those steps that will allow for our survival; there is no interference from above to save us from our self-made destruction. But we are Jewish religious humanists: we believe firmly that every human being bears the image of God, that the divine voice, however understood, cries out within us to be heard and followed, and that the love of and care for fellow human and fellow creature are of ultimate value because they give expression to our love of God. Somewhere within the infinite depths of the human mind, we know the imprint of eternity waits to be discovered.

A New Commitment to Mitzvot

Such a serious religious life, if it is to be realized as Judaism, needs to find expression in an active commitment to a life of mitzvot. There can be no Judaism without a sense of religious imperative. Even we who do not understand Scripture and tradition to be the revealed will of God still need to find concrete means of turning the fulness of our hearts into a life-pattern to which we can make an honest commitment. We need such means of expression to share our joys, to sustain us in times of dryness, to build community, and to give to our children. As we live a life that makes room for traditional mitzvot, we open ourselves to discovering, sometimes to our own surprise, the presence of divinity that our ancestors always knew to lie within them. Some of these forms work well for us, while others seem to be in need of change. If we tend to be overly flexible in ritual matters, as I believe we have been, we will need to compensate, as I believe we do, by being *maḥamirim*, true sticklers, about the ways in which we treat our fellow humans. The commitments this movement has shown to honesty, forthright dealings, justice for all persons, and its disdain for gossip, backbiting, and corruption are all mitzvot of which we can feel proud.

But these alone do not suffice. We will also have to recommit ourselves to the search for a shared religious language, to a pattern of Jewish observance, that we as a movement will really come to own. As we begin work on our movement's second *siddur*, I suggest that we also begin an effort to encourage a higher degree of *shabbat* observance among Reconstructionists. *Shabbat*, which we call God's great gift to Israel, is certainly also one of the Jewish people's greatest gifts to human civilization, a gift needed all the more in our time as a respite from the relentless pace of contemporary living. At a seminar tomorrow with a group of our rabbis, I hope to propose the institution of a *brit ha-shabbat* fellowship within our congregations, made up of

people of all ages who commit themselves to renewing and intensifying the commitment to *shabbat* within their own lives and in their communities. I also hope to propose to the other arms of our movement that they join with us in appointing a commission to study the question of vegetarianism, and whether it might not be the proper *kashrut* for our age. Perhaps we Reconstructionists should be in the vanguard of those advocating a move toward vegetarianism within the Jewish community. Could it be that out of the holocaust and the terrible debate about whether Jews were or were not led "like sheep to the slaughter", there might well up in the Jewish conscience a revulsion to the mass slaughter of sheep themselves, a new norm of ethical behavior as a very Jewish response to a new experience, unparalleled in its awfulness, in our people's history? Here we might succeed in giving authentic new Jewish form to the moral passion by which many in our age have been so swayed. Another sort of example: the Reconstructionist movement has already committed itself to active participation in the movement to preserve and protect our environment. In this connection I propose that we choose to make Tu Bi-Shvat, an already existing but minor holiday, a major event on our sacred calendar and that of the Jewish people, using new liturgy to celebrate our appreciation of the divine within nature and educating Jews toward our responsibility for protecting the natural world we humans have come so close to destroying. If it is our generation's way to be lax in some areas of tradition, perhaps it should be our lot to expand and go beyond the demands of tradition in others.

Jewish Unity and the Role of Israel

We will also have to be maximalists, in creating a Judaism for the next century, in our commitment to and concern for the entire Jewish people, both in Israel and in the diaspora. Standing as we do at the dawn of a new era in Jewish history, one in which the nature of Jewish life is as yet indeterminate, it is natural that we also live in a moment of great controversy in the Jewish people. Such controversies have accompanied all ages of creativity and change; they are part of the birth-pangs of each new era in our civilization. Each competing group within the Jewish community has its own value-structure, each representing its own selective reading of what is important in the Jewish legacy. In such a time it is urgent that we define clearly the nature of our own reading of the tradition and press firmly our claim for its legitimacy. At the same time, we must be among those forces within Jewry that stand firmly for their own versions of the truth without needing to de-legitimize those of others. No single group within Jewry has a monopoly either on creativity or on rectitude. Only history will judge which of the many currents in late twentieth century Jewish life lead toward a creative Jewish future. Our firm commitment to our own understanding, like our commitment to Judaism itself, does not mean that we alone are chosen.

With regard to Israel, a bit more needs to be said. *It is a tragedy that Reconstructionism, in essence the most strongly Zionist of all American Jewish ideologies, has had so little impact on the new Jewish life emerging in Israel. All of Jewish life in North America is but half a body; we need the nourishment of knowledge, ultimate commitment, and experience of life in a full Jewish society that only Israel can offer us. I believe firmly that Israel needs us as well: we are developing here an approach to the Jewish past and the Jewish future that will help Israelis understand how one can embrace the Jewish past without being choked by it, build a*

future that is deeply and spiritually Jewish without being small-minded or confining. Israel urgently needs such an approach to Jewish living, one that is clearly maximalist in its commitment and just as clearly contemporary in its focus, its energy devoted to the creation of a new era in our history, not to the re-imposition of the past. It may yet be that the greatest impact our message has will be on an Israeli Jewry that so urgently feels this need for vision. I will see that this college does all it can to have our approach to Judaism reach Israel as well as America, and will actively encourage the other arms of our movement to do the same.

One of the more interesting figures in the rabbinate of the early twentieth century, Aaron Samuel Tamares, a pacifist and a critic of both the old halakhic community and of emerging Jewish nationalism, used to sign his articles *aḥad ha-rabbanim ha-margishim*, "one of the sensitive rabbis." We want to create here *rabbanim margishim*; rabbis who feel, rabbis who care. About this too we are maximalist, though here the tools of measurement most easily fail us. The rabbinate is above all a career of service. The qualities most needed for such a life are limitless reservoirs of generosity, commitment, patience, and caring. The rabbi in our day has little left of authority, and our approach to rabbinic training teaches that even the bit that remains should seldom be wielded. We rabbis are teachers, and the most important lessons we have to convey can only be taught by the examples of our own lives. We are builders of community, and a true community will happen only where we create a spirit of shared concern, of a commitment to one another that lends warmth and humanity to our dedication to Jewish life. We seek to make the community of students, faculty, and staff that comprise our college an embodiment of these values. Attention will be given to them both in the selection of faculty and students and in every step of the educational process along the way. We stand for a Jewishness that will make for a greater and deeper humanity, a renewed Jewish civilization that will help to make our world a more civilized place.

A Maximalist Judaism for a Post-Halakhic Age

The maximalist program I propose here is not something new or alien to our movement. Though I promised not to quote myself again, I may be permitted a brief paraphrase of Mordecai Kaplan's comments at the annual Reconstructionist dinner of 1968, where he commented on the founding of this college. His words were printed in the *Reconstructionist* of February 3, 1969. There Kaplan referred to four existing movements in contemporary Jewish Life: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Hasidic, to which Reconstructionism would then be a fifth. It may surprise some to learn, Kaplan went on to say, that of these other movements, Reconstructionism is closest to Hasidism. That is so, he explained, because the two movements stand firmly for a maximalist Judaism, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Further, said Kaplan, Hasidism, like Reconstructionism, understands that Judaism is a full-fledged civilization, one that requires a life commitment that goes far beyond what contemporary Americans usually understand as "religion."

As a student of Hasidism, I could add a few more ways in which I think this analogy works, including some aspects of theology, but I leave that for the classroom. There are also some ways in which the analogy is clearly a surprising and even somewhat jolting one. Hasidism, like Reconstructionism, sought a democratization of Jewish life, but did so by inviting all Jews (or all Jewish males) to participate in the charismatic persona of the rebbe. We believe in a fuller notion of democracy, one in which the charisma will lie in the center of the communal circle rather than in one leader personality, and one that includes women and families, not just men. Further, Hasidism's Jewish maximalism lay entirely within the bounds of *halakhah*, whereas we seek to create a maximalist intensive Judaism for what is essentially a post-halakhic age. This too requires a word of comment.

The Jewish people, with the exception of its Orthodox minority, has voted to opt out of rabbinic and halakhic authority. We Reconstructionists believe that this rebellion of Jewish modernity was essentially a healthy one, and do not seek to re-impose the old yoke of halakhic obligation. But we are not anarchists in principle. A new halakhah will emerge for the Jews of this new era, but we are not ready to proclaim it. If Hayyim Nahman Bialik was right, a new halakhah will only proceed from a new aggadah; halakhic practice is the crystallization into form of a nexus of ideas, beliefs, hopes and legends. It is these we must first seek out to re-create. We must stand for an enrichment of the Jewish imagination, in contrast to its terrible impoverishment in modern times. Our new era will need a new aggadah. Surely out of this century's Jewish experience the raw material already amply exists out of which such an aggadah will be created. That will combine with the surviving stronger elements of the old aggadah to create a new Judaism that will ultimately once again take halakhic form, though surely less rigid in form than it did when Jewry constituted a closed society. Meanwhile, in this time of transition, we dance between faithfulness and experiment, we live with the constant tension of the past's deep hold on us and the call of an undefined future. These are hard times in which to be a serious Jew, harder than many can imagine. Those who will join in supporting this vision of a maximalist Judaism appropriate to the emerging new age must know that they are still a small group swimming against the current. We are rejecting the easier paths of assimilation and indifference as we are rejecting the imposition of an earlier generation's Judaism on the future. Meanwhile, as we work to create for the future a Judaism that the world has not yet seen, it takes great faith to sustain us: faith in the greatness of our Jewish legacy, faith in the limitless potential of our future, faith in the divine presence that daily rewards our efforts. May we — I, this college, this movement, this generation of Jews — be worthy bearers of that faith as we strive to pass it on to generations yet to come.