



From Rabbi Weber:

What's the difference between "Reformed" and "Reform"? It's the difference between past and present – and future.

The Protestant Reformation happened in the 1500's, when Christians turned away from the Catholic Church to follow Martin Luther and John Calvin and founded "Reformed" churches. For them, "reform" happened once, five hundred years ago.

Reform Judaism, on the other hand, began in the early 1800's and has never stopped changing. Change happened yesterday, it happens today and without a doubt it will happen tomorrow. That's not always easy to accept, but that is what it means to be Reform Jews.

In the early days we were busy reforming traditional Judaism. We eliminated five-hour services in a language no one understood, including prayers to restore the sacrifice of animals as part of our worship. We stopped saying the same set of prayers *four times* in a single Shabbat morning service. We said that women's prayers were important to God, and that women were important to temple life – in fact, women could vote in Reform congregations 40 years before women won the right to vote in American elections! And we looked outside the Jewish community to create alliances with other religions and to help those in need, regardless of their religion.

If we had stopped there, maybe we would have been comfortable being called "Reformed Jews." But we never stopped reforming, and Rodeph Torah is a great example of that.

When our congregation started in 1980, we used *The Union Prayerbook (newly revised)* – which was "newly revised" in 1937! A few years later we bought *Gates of Prayer*, and chose the version that opened in the English direction. Fifteen years later we created our own prayerbook because we didn't want to refer to God as a male any longer and because we had chosen to eliminate responsive reading; everyone was invited to pray along whenever and however they chose. That "custom" prayerbook opened in the Hebrew direction. Now we use *Mishkan Tefillah*, which incorporates all our earlier changes – and many new ones.

Our High Holiday food drive began in 1988. Food baskets on the *bima* followed a few years later. Thanks to the late Debby Friedman, *mi sheberach* became part of our tradition in the 1990's, as did offering everyone the opportunity to stand and say the names of loved ones who died, before we recite *kaddish*. For many years our B'nai

Mitzvah "adopted" a persecuted 13-year old in the Soviet Union as their twin; we stopped doing that when the Russians actually heard our cry to "let our people go."

Blessings for new drivers. Birthday and anniversary blessings. Healing services. "Service in the Round." Friday evening services at 6:30, or at 8 p.m. "Very Young People's Shabbat." Unrolling the Torah on Simchat Torah. Rock Shabbat. Visual *Tefillah*. Reform Judaism in action!

Change can be disorienting, no question. But our openness to change leads to new traditions, and then they're not so disorienting anymore. Think about the things I listed above: honestly, how many of them are now so much a part of what we do that you would be really upset if we did away with them? Or try this: drop by my office sometime and ask to see a copy of *The Union Prayerbook (newly revised)*. Pick any page – or try page 34 if you want a recommendation – and try to pray it. Then pick up *Mishkan Tefillah* and do the same thing; I think you'll embrace change more than you ever thought you would.

This year we are doing what Reform Jews do – again. Rock Hashanah is new, as is the Yom Kippur afternoon program called "Sin Texting." Will they work? I don't know. Will we continue them next year, and the year after? I don't know that, either. The only way we know which changes work is to try them and see, so we will ask you for your thoughts and feelings when you try them. Tell us you like them or tell us you don't, and tell us why. But please don't be upset that we are "changing things," because that's what we do. It's right there in our name: not reformed, but Reform. In the present, and the future.



From Rabbi Stern:

What makes TRT different from other Jewish schools?

When I was in Hebrew School, you had two very clear choices: conform

to the schedule, content and student population, or find a tutor who would privately help you achieve your goal, most often just the *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony. I went three times a week to an orthodox, Sephardi school where I learned two things: I loved learning this stuff, and I couldn't use what I learned in class when I sat high up in the women's section on Shabbat morning.

That feeling of being on the outside looking in stayed with me until I got to college and realized that I could return to the Jewish classroom, alongside my male peers. I went straight to rabbinic school after graduating, and never looked back.

But the feeling of being on the outside never truly left me. So whenever I notice one of our students, or prospective members, hiding behind what they think is THE ONLY WAY to learn about Judaism - which means they will be excluded - I'm 13 all over again. Whether they are girls who are told formal Jewish education is unnecessary, or children who learn differently, or who struggle with challenges that have not been addressed by their "Hebrew School," we respond to them. We believe that Jewish Education must evolve in order to best serve *all* the members of our community.

What I love about TRT is that *here*, if we haven't done something before, we're willing to try it. Even if it means radically tailoring the schedule, or the focus of our curriculum, or the method of teaching, we want to accommodate our students with special needs.

We have become a nut-free school, as stringent as we can be to ensure the safety of those who are allergic, and we have additionally altered our holiday celebrations to include those children who cannot have milk or eggs or other allergens. We have doubled our aide program so that students who need one-on-one attention can get help to stay in the classroom with their peers. We have tailor-made entire curricula to accommodate kids on all points of the autism spectrum, so that every child whose parents have challenged us to find a way to include him/her will know that we will do whatever we can to be responsive to the needs of their sons and daughters. We have included use of new technology, such as iPads: if it enhances the learning experience, it is not only permitted in the classroom, it is encouraged.

When I was in school, we had no alternatives if we needed help to get a meaningful Jewish education. At TRT we will work with you to change that reality. We are a small school with restrictions of space and resources, but we do not accept negative assumptions that prevent people from feeling connected to the Jewish community.

In coming months, we will highlight some of our students and their efforts to study Judaism; read and be inspired. We know that we still have a great deal to learn about innovations that can expand our capabilities to provide the best Jewish learning for our students, many of whom have been left on the periphery of our student population.

We're excited: are you?



MAY HIGHLIGHTS



Friday, May 3rd

6:30 P.M. – Rock Shabbat – guest artists: **SABABA**
Onegs for all youth groups



Wednesday, May 8th



8:00 p.m. – Men's Club Card Night



Friday, May 10th



8:00 p.m. – Shabbat service with our adult choir, Kolot Yafim
B'nai Torah Ceremony, welcoming the Confirmation Class of 5774



Monday, May 13th



7:30 p.m. – Sisterhood Book Discussion Group
“The Secret Daughter” by Shilpi Somaya Gowda



Tuesday, May 14th



7:30 p.m. – Erev Shavuot/Confirmation/Yiskor Service



Friday, May 31st



8:00 p.m. – Adult Education Shabbat, honoring our students
and award winners

