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Beyond the letter of the law

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, [2004]

INTRODUCTION

urn:nbn:de:kobv:517-vlib-10650

INTRODUCTION

This volume takes a serious look at some basic elements of Liberal *halakhah* along with a few other subjects. We do so a little more than a decade after the founding of the Solomon B. Freehof Institute of Progressive *Halakhah*. In the intervening years a host of authors, mainly, but not exclusively from North America, have provided insights into some of the issues which face us. We have looked at many areas and provided different perspectives through essays and selected responsa.

This volume is primarily concerned with providing different ways of approaching Reform *halakhah*. We are not seeking a consensus, but rather wish to demonstrate the various methods and paths which can be used. A few of the essays deal with entirely different topics and have only an indirect bearing on our primary theme.

In future volumes we will continue the pattern of looking at specific issues with two goals in mind: (1) We wish to give the Jewish community broad halakhic grounding for the decisions which need to be made. Philosophy, *aggadah*, sociology, and many other areas will have a voice in these decisions, but *halakhah* with its deep roots in the past, traditional and Reform, needs always to be consulted and to have a major, and often decisive voice. (2) We want to encourage a generation of individuals – Jewish scholars as well as interested members of the community to study the sources along with their modern interpretations and thus broaden the basis for sound decision making.

As Liberal Judaism is strongest in North America, the views presented are principally American, but not entirely. We welcome perspectives from other nations where Reform Judaism has continued to grow to present their views and concerns. Judaism has always been multi-faceted and we wish to encourage that. Pluralism has been a

hallmark of the *halakhah* as is visible from the talmudic period to our own day. This needs little encouragement as strong divergent opinions are expressed among all Jewish groups, be they Reform, Orthodox, or Conservative.

Occasional it is appropriate to take a broader and more general look at the modern, Liberal study of the *halakhah*. This volume fulfills that role and it is good to do so in honor of Moshe Zemer.

Walter Jacob
Erev Purim 5764