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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

**A Finding Aid to the
Alvin Jay Reines Papers**

Manuscript Collection No. 786



Collection Summary

Title	Alvin Jay Reines Papers
Dates	1943-2003 (bulk: 1960-1985)
Collection Number	MS-786
Repository	The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator	Reines, Alvin Jay, 1926-2004
Extent	9.6 linear feet (24 Hollinger boxes)
Language of the Material	English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Alvin Jay Reines was born in Paterson, New Jersey in 1926 and received an Orthodox Jewish education. He graduated from the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School in Manhattan and the Talmudical Academy of New York. He then entered Yeshiva University, where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1947. After graduating from Yeshiva University, he went to New York University Law School and left before completing his degree. In a rare move for Orthodox-educated Jews of his generation, Reines went to Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion and earned his master's of Hebrew Letters and received ordination in 1952. In 1958, he earned a doctorate from Harvard where he studied under Harry Austryn Wolfson. In that same year, he joined the faculty of Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion as a professor of Jewish Philosophy. He taught there for over four decades before retiring in 2003.

His field of specialization was medieval philosophy, particularly the work of Moses Maimonides, and he struggled both to understand Maimonides as a halakhic and philosophical thinker and to deal with revelation as a source of absolute authority. Rejecting the notion of absolute authority led to his own original philosophical innovation. He developed the concept of polydoxy, meaning a religion of many opinions, in which the notion of absolute knowledge is abandoned and diversity and individual autonomy is not only respected but welcomed. This concept has had significant influence on liberal religious thought in the United States and elsewhere as well as within the Reform movement. He helped create the Institute for Creative Judaism and chaired its board, which was formed to develop religious, educational, and liturgical material for free Judaism. It has evolved into The Polydox Institute, which is "committed to serving all polydoxians, be they of Jewish, Christian or other origin, and whether or not they view themselves as belonging to any historic religious group, or as being presently affiliated with any organized religious body." His work has thus had influence far beyond the Jewish community. For religious communities that reject the existence of infallible knowledge, Reines argued that the only morally justifiable position was to affirm individual autonomy. Such communities should be prepared, Reines maintained, to accommodate diverse and even unconventional beliefs, rituals, and practices.

The Reform Movement's *Gates of Prayer* (1975) included an edited version of the polydox Sabbath worship service written by Reines. His seminal work is *Polydoxy: Explorations in a Philosophy of Liberal Religion*, (1987). Among his other works are *Elements in a Philosophy of Reform Judaism* (1968), *Maimonides and Abarbanel on Prophecy* (1970), and *Reform Judaism as Polydoxy* (1970—1973). His work on the Institute includes services for Hanukah and Rosh Hashanah as well as a Passover Haggadah.

Alvin Reines died in 2004.

--Adapted from Olitzsky, K. M., Sussman, L. J., and Stern, M. H. (eds.). (1993). *Reform Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Source-book*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Scope and Content

The Alvin Jay Reines Papers consist of correspondence, course materials, printed materials, and writings concerning his time as a professor at Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion and as a founding member of the Institute of Creative Judaism. This collection is particularly strong in its documentation of the evolution of Alvin Reines's unique interpretation of Judaism, from his time as a young student to his work with the Institute of Creative Judaism and the decades he dedicated as a professor of philosophy at HUC-JIR. There are also extensive lecture and reading materials for courses taught at the College-Institute.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in one (1) series: A. General.

Terms of Access

The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.

Preferred Citation Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Alvin Jay Reines Papers and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:
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Index Terms

Subjects Philosophy / Reform Judaism
Personal Names Reines, Alvin Jay, 1926-2004
Corporate Names Institute of Creative Judaism / Polydox Institute

Series A. General, 1943-2003

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