LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

IN THE LIFE OF A RABBI

An Autobiography

by

Abraham J. Ehrlich

Illustrated

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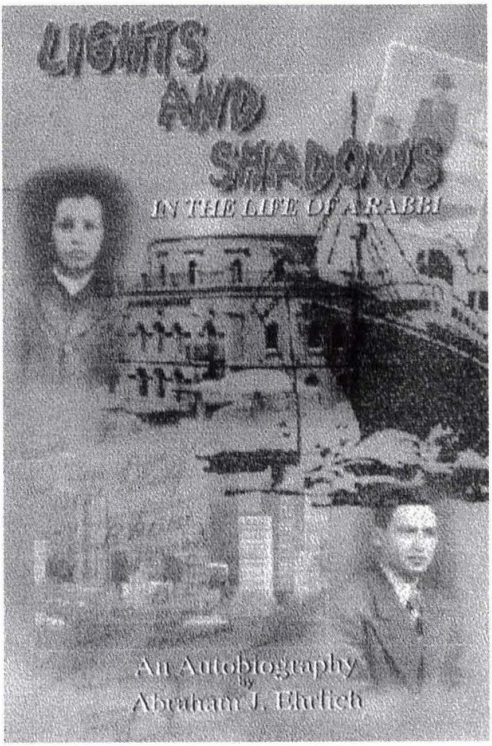
LIGHTS AND SHADOWS



THE COVER

Upper Center: The Dome of Nissan Bak Synagogue
Lower Center: American City Skyline
Upper Right: The Ship which took me from one to the other
Lower Left: The British Palesinian Travel Document
Upper Left: As Chassidic Youth, age 13
Upper Right: As Yeshiva Bachur in Hebron Slabodke, age 18
Lower Right: As Student in American University, age 25

LIFE OF A RABBI

רבי יוסף, ביומא דעצרתא אמר... אי לא האי יומא דקא גרים, כמה יוסף איכא בשוקא.

"On the Festival of Shavuot, Rabbi Yoseph said: 'If it were not for this day, on which I (received and) study the Torah, the street is full of people named Yoseph (and what difference would there be between me and them)'".

(T.B. P'sachim 68:b)

FROM THE AUTHOR

"Lights and Shadows" is the true story of my life from age four to age seventy five.

It is the story of a Jerusalem boy raised in a home filled with Torah, Kabbalah and Chassidism; of a young man who masters the Talmudic Tractates, but thirsts for Modern Literature, Philosophy and Theology, and dreams of a rabbinic career in America. By dint of sheer Will Power, the help of Divine Providence and Unique Circumstances his dreams turn into reality.

My teachers were the Melamdim of the Chassidic Cheder, the Deans of the Hebron-Slabodke Yeshiva, and the Professors of American Universities and Seminaries.

My disciples were the leaders of the Yishuv – State of Israel to be, the remnants of the Holocaust in the D.P. Camps of Cyprus, the Orthodox Galician Jews of Scranton, Pa., and the Conservative/Traditional congregants of suburban American congregations.

The full story is recorded in the pages of this book which I humbly dedicate to the memory of my beloved and saintly parents – Reb Nachum and Chaya Esther Ehrlich; to the wisdom and guidance of my teachers; and to the love and devotion of my wife and family.

I express my sincere appreciation to my friends and colleagues – Rabbis Mordecai Waxman, Donald Frieman and Harold S. Kushner who read the manuscript, made many valuable suggestions, and encouraged its publication. Also to my wife – Pearl, and her sister – Nellie Orenstein for proofreading the galleys several times over. Any mistakes still found in this printing will be corrected in the Second Edition, God willing.

Abraham J. Ehrlich

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A Machzor which my father, Reb Nachum z.l., brought from Poland, bearing his signature, from which he Davenned throughout the years.

→

מחזור

מכל השנה

ספרד

עם פירוש. כ״עט בבמות. ורב באיכות
והוספות רבות ויקרות. אשר תחזנה עיניכם.

(א) כל התפלה מתוקן בנוסח פי׳ ראדוויל הישן. ה׳רפס בהשגחת
הרב הק׳ מאפטא זצ״ל זיע״א: (ב) כל הפיוט מתוקן גם בנוסח
כתחזור רע״ד ל הי י ם שהדפיס החכם רו״ח ז״ל. וברוש כל פיוט
:צב שם מחברו ובאיזה אופן חברו, מלוקט מספרי דברי הימים
(ג) בו נמצא כל הלקו״ש החדש השייך ליום נוראים ושלש רגלים:
(ד) משניות עם פי׳ קצר ומכפיק טבעל תפארת ישראל זי״ע:
(ה) גם נמצוז בו תקון ליל שביעי של פסח

בדפוס והוצאת האחים לעווין־עפשטיין
רחוב נעגשא № 5

נחום שהרלוק

Chapter One

MY FAMILY ROOTS

In 1906, two Jewish families emigrated from Poland to Palestine which was then under Turkish rule as part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire.

Rabbi Moshe Chayim Cohen/Tzucker and his wife – Rivka, came from Warsaw, and they brought with them two daughters – Chaya Esther and Tzivya, and a son – Yechiel Baruch. From the city of Chelm (Chelmno) came Rabbi Moshe Ehrlich, his wife – Freidel, and their son – Nachum. An older son – Yoseph, had emigrated several years earlier to the United States.

The Cohen/Tzucker and the Ehrlich families settled in the Old City of Jerusalem, in a building known as "Reb Yisrael Schochet's Chotzer" (courtyard) near the famous Nissan Bak Synagogue, and in 1907 the elder daughter of the Cohen family – Chaya Esther, was engaged to Nachum Ehrlich. In keeping with Chassidic religious custom, after the engagement of the young people, one of the families moved away from Reb Yisrael Schochet's *Chotzer*, to keep the bride and groom from seeing one another until after their marriage.

Rabbi Moshe Chayim Cohen (the name Tzucker was dropped after their arrival in Palestine) and Rabbi Moshe Ehrlich were men of learning, without any training for either professional or manual labor. They were known as *Yeshiva Leit* – people who devoted themselves to the study of Torah. In reward for their devotion and piety, they were supported by Kolel Polin – an organization of Polish Jews that collected funds from Jews in Poland to sustain their countrymen who settled in the Holy Land – Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel. They also received a small stipend from the *Yeshiva* (a learning institution for adults) where they studied.

Their newly married children – Nachum and Chaya Esther established their home on the same basis. Like their parents, these young people were granted a minimal stipend from Kolel Polin – a few Turkish Pounds which were barely sufficient for the nominal necessities of life. In addition, they were assigned a one room apartment in the Varshiver Chotzer (Warsaw Courtyard) which was built by the Jews of Warsaw for their countrymen who lived in Eretz Yisrael – Land of Israel.

Under these difficult economic circumstances it was quite common among young married men to return to their countries of origin to earn a livelihood, or to seek their fortunes in Europe or in the United States, while leaving behind them their wives and children. In many instances, these wandering men were never heard from again, in which case their wives were declared *Agunot* – abandoned women who could not remarry until their fleeing husbands were located, and a *Get* – a rabbinic divorce was obtained from them to free their wives for remarriage.

The *Ketubah* – Marriage Contract of Nachum and Chaya Esther Ehrlich contained a clause in which the bridegroom promised his new bride never to leave the country (Palestine) without her written consent.

By the time the First World War broke out in 1914, Nachum and Chaya Esther Ehrlich were the proud parents of three daughters – Yentil, Rachel and Chanah. A son – Yoseph, born during the war years, died in infancy in 1917, as did the four elder Cohens and Ehrlichs. All of them passed away from starvation which was brought on by the strict embargo which the Western Allies imposed against the Turkish provinces in the Middle East.

An ancient Jewish custom stipulates that when a person partakes of a bread meal, a piece of bread should be left on the table until after the recitation of the *Birchat Hamazon* – the Grace After the Meal. In later years, the Ehrlich daughters who lived through the war years, described to their younger siblings

1922 Family Portrait

Father with Moshe Cahyim; Mother with Rivkah; the three girls L. to R.: Chanah, Yentil, Rachel

how they used to gather around the table where father ate, and how they waited until he finished the *Birchat Hamazon*, each of them hoping to grab the single crumb of bread which father had left on the table. So great was the hunger in Palestine in 1917-18; and it claimed its greatest toll among old people and infants.

Five more children were born to Reb Nachum (by now an established scholar deserving of the title "Rabbi") and Chaya Esther Ehrlich between 1918 and 1927: a son – Moshe Chayim, named after his two grandfathers; a daughter – Rivkah, named for the Cohen grandmother; myself – Avraham Yaakov, named for my father's paternal grandfather; my younger sister – Freidel, named for the Ehrlich grandmother; and the *Mizhinick* (youngest child in the family) who was named Baruch, for father's maternal grandfather.

This large family of ten souls maintained its meager livelihood from a small stipend which father received from Kolel Polin, and a grant from the Chayei Olam Yeshiva, since Rabbi Nachum attained the status of a recognized Talmudic scholar.

Chapter Two

EARLY CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

I was born in August 1923, and my early childhood memories go back to May 1927, when I was enrolled in Religious School. In Chassidic circles, a boy got his first haircut on *Lag b'Omer* – the 33rd day after the Second Day of the Passover Holiday – following the boy's third birthday. This semi-religious ceremony is called *Chalaka*, and it is often conducted at the grave of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochei, which is located in the village of Meron in the Upper Galilee. The ceremony may also be held in any Synagogue. On the morrow of the *Chalaka*, the young boy is enrolled in *Cheder* (children's religious school) for rigorous training in Prayer, Bible and Talmud until his maturity at the age of 16-18.

At the *Chalaka*, the spiritual and lay leaders of the congregation, along with members and friends of the family, are honored to cut off hair-locks of the young boy. The boy is then carried on his father's shoulders, with the assembly dancing around them, after which the child is taken to a barber to complete the haircut job.

My father lived in Jerusalem from his arrival in 1906 until his demise in 1959. During these fifty three years he left the city only once, when he took my younger brother to Meron. Baruch was gravely ill in infancy, and my father made a vow (*neder*) that if the child recovers, he would be *Chalake*d in Meron at the grave of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochei to whom tradition ascribed the authorship of the Zohar, the Kabbalistic commentary on the Torah.

My father was a follower of the B'yanner/Rizhiner Chassidic dynasty. As such, I must have gone through the *Chalaka* ceremony which I do not remember. But I vividly

recall being carried by my father through the narrow stairway which led from the Jewish quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem to the Chayei Olam Cheder which was located in the Moslem quarter. I was completely wrapped in my father's large *Talit* (prayer-shawl) to prevent me from seeing an unclean thing or a non-Jewish person on the day when my eyes would gaze for the first time on the words of Holy Writ.

After a long walk through the winding streets and alleys of the Old City, we arrived at Reb Mordchalle's classroom, Reb Mordchalle being the most popular first-grade teacher in Old Jerusalem. It was a very large room filled with young children, three to four years old, seated on low wooden benches which were lined up around the walls of the room. I was seated at a small table in the center of the room, with a large Hebrew Alphabet chart on top of the table. Reb Mordchalle stood on my right and my father on my left.

Reb Mordchalle pointed to the first letter on the right side of the chart, the Hebrew "A" (Hebrew is read from right to left), and chanted: *Mine kind, zog Aleph* (my child, say "Aleph"). I repeated: "Aleph", and a candy fell on the chart while my father said in Yiddish: *Der Mal'ach hot dir gegeben atzikerel zu lerenen davinen* (the angel gave you a candy to learn how to pray). The same was repeated with the *Bais* (the second Hebrew letter "B") and the *Vais* (the third Hebrew letter "V"). Then Reb Mordchalle brought over a *Chumash Vayikra* (the Book of Leviticus), the third book of the Bible. He put a few drops of honey on the word *Vayikra* (and God called), and he instructed me to lick off the honey from the text, while my father explained to me in the words of the Psalmist that "the Torah is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb" *(Ps. 19:10).*

On that day I embarked on my life-long study of the Torah!

Two months later, in July 1927, in the middle of another reading lesson in the *Siddur* (prayerbook), chunks of plaster began falling from the ceiling and walls of the classroom, the

result of a serious earthquake which caused considerable damage in major cities throughout Palestine. Reb Mordchalle instructed us to immediately leave the building, but upon reaching the exit, we discovered that the exit stairs had collapsed from the quake. Each child had a rope tied around the waist, and was lowered to street level. I remember walking through the rubble-strewn streets. When I reached home, I found that all balconies and staircases had collapsed. My parents could not come down from the third floor where they lived, and I could not go up until wooden ladders and planks were installed where the stairs had been before the quake. After this frightening experience we all went to the Synagogue to recite the *Birchat Hagomel* to express our gratitude to the Almighty that our immediate family remained intact and well.

Another childhood memory indelibly engraved in my mind is connected with the tragic events of Black Friday in 1929, when murderous Arab bands attacked Jewish communities throughout Palestine, killing men, women and children and ransacking Jewish homes and business places. The Jewish neighborhoods of Old Jerusalem, Hebron, Jaffa and Zefat suffered the most casualties when frenzied mobs, who were incited by their Imams at their weekly Friday services in the Mosques, tortured, maimed and killed hundreds of Jewish people. All this was done at high noon, and the British authorities did not raise a finger to protect the Jewish inhabitants of the country.

Our Chayei Olam Cheder was located in the Arab section of the Old City, just a few hundred feet from the Mosque of Omar, from which Arab mobs were pouring into the Jewish streets. It was about twelve noon, when we were engrossed in the weekly chapter of the Torah, completely unaware of the tragic events involving our homes and families, when Jewish and British policemen came into our classroom, and herded us into the school courtyard. A police spokesman informed us of the unfolding events in the Jewish quarter, and told us that we

would be taken home under police protection. Surrounded by a chain of policemen, we made our way from the Moslem to the Jewish streets which were covered with debris from ransacked stores. Here and there, we also came across Jewish corpses with slashed throats and mutilated bodies. These were among the unforgettable sights of a six year old child from the events of the Black Friday in 1929.

When order was restored and the situation appeared to be under control, we returned to our *Cheder* classroom in the Moslem quarters, but our relationship with the Arabs was never again as it was before the riots. We lost our trust in them and we lost our sense of security. Arab youngsters now lurked behind walls and pelted us with stones as we passed by, or assaulted us bodily. Whenever possible, we walked to *Cheder* in pairs or groups. When several Jewish stores were reopened in Moslem streets, we darted from one Jewishly owned store-front to another until we reached the safe haven of the *Cheder.*

On a more personal level, I remember my love for learning even during those early childhood years, and the rapid progress I made in my studies, often skipping over school grades.

At the age of six, I had mastered the *Siddur* prayerbook, and could recite by heart the weekday and Sabbath services. I recall standing on the *Bimah* (platform from where the Torah is read) in the great Nissan Bak Synagogue, facing my father and praying aloud by heart each chapter, while he followed me from his *Siddur.* During the following two years, I learned the entire *Chumash* (Five Books of Moses). At the tender age of eight, I began to study selected chapters from the *Mishnah* (rabbinic interpretation of the Bible), and a year later my teachers introduced me to the study of the *Talmud* (rabbinic interpretation of the Mishnah) and its commentaries.

It is a trait which I either acquired or inherited from my father. The singular most impressive memory I have of my father is his love of learning, which for him meant *lernen Toireh*

– learning the Torah. Every image I have of my father is either with a *Sefer* (religious book) in his hand, or sitting at a table with a *Sefer* in front of him, be it a *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Law), a *Mishnayot* or *Gemara* (Talmudic books), the *Zohar* or the *Eitz Chayim* (mystic books) or a plain *Siddur* (prayerbook), since he was at home with all of them. The man was literally engaged in learning Torah every waking minute of the day or night. Even when he was eating, he would talk of Torah with those sitting with him at the table, or deeply absorbed in thought of Torah when he ate by himself.

Another characteristic of my father was that of a *Tzadick Tamim* – Wholly Righteous person. We know the definition of a *Tzadick* – a righteous man who lives by the commandments of the Torah, but what is the meaning of a *Tzadick Tamim*? I came to understand the meaning of that concept by watching my father in the kitchen in the early hours of Friday mornings.

Father got up every weekday morning at 2:00 A.M. to recite the special *Chatzot* (midnight) prayers which consist of mournful dirges over the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and over the sorrowful fate of the Jewish people in exile. At times, I think that I can still hear my father crying and sobbing as he recited these prayers in the stillness of the night. Afterwards, he would change to the study of the *Zohar* (a Kabbalist interpretation of the Torah) until the break of dawn when he began to prepare himself for the *Schacharit* morning service. But on Friday morning, instead of studying the *Zohar*, father went into the kitchen to make the *Gefilte Fish* for Shabbat in keeping with the rabbinic dictum that each person should participate in preparing the home for the Sabbath. The Talmud records that certain Rabbis chopped wood, others made the candles. Reb Nachum Ehrlich made the *Gefilte Fish*.

On several occasions, I went to the kitchen and saw my father grinding and chopping the fish and onions and old *Challe* (Sabbath loaves) with the same devotion and joy as when he learned Torah, be it the *Zohar* or other sacred texts.

As a young lad, I wondered how that was possible, but as I grew up I understood that this is the true characteristic of the *Tzadick Tamim*, because the significance of performing a Mitzvah is that the person is doing what God expects of him, which at one time may be *lernen Toireh* which is a biblical command, and at other times it may be chopping fish for Shabbat which is only a rabbinic custom. To the *Tzadick Tamim* both are of equal importance because both are in the context of the Will of God.

"*Tamim*" is in truth a Divine Attribute. Moses said: "The Rock, Whose work is *Tamim* (perfect)". *(Deut 32:4)*. King David said: "God, His Way is *Tamim* (perfect)" *(Psalms 18:31)*. When applied in human terms, Reb Nachum was the *Tzadick Tamim*.

Chapter Three

ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

As I was growing up, I became increasingly conscious of the precarious economic situation in my home and of the dire poverty in which we lived. I have no recollection of my oldest sister's presence at home because she was married at age sixteen, soon after I was born. However, I do have vivid memories of my second sister's presence at home together with her husband, Reb Avraham Mordechei Yuzevits. In those years it was common practice among Jerusalemite families to offer a newly married son-in-law two or three years of *Kest* during which the newly married couple had their daily meals with the bride's parents. The purpose was to enable the newly married *Yeshiva Bachur* (young man) to continue his religious studies for those two or three years without having to worry about providing for himself and his young bride. In practical terms it meant that instead of marrying-out a daughter, my parents took in another son.

This new son-in-law was often treated much better than the household children. For example, Reb Avraham Mordechei occasionally received a whole fried egg for breakfast, a luxury which was never offered to me. On such occasions, I used to crawl under the table to sit at Reb Avraham Mordechei's feet, and pull at his *Kaftan* (a silken multi-colored striped upper garment worn by Chassidic men). He usually took the hint, and put a piece of bread with a piece of egg in my mouth. Thus began my love affair with this brother-in-law, all the way back then, long before I came to appreciate the more subtle qualities of his most unusual personality.

All this means that when I was growing up, eight or nine of us lived in the extremely cramped quarters of a small one-room apartment, a single room, approximately 15×15 feet. Facing the

entrance door stood a clothes closet about six feet high, five feet wide and two feet deep. Two beds stood on the sides of the closet, both piled up with bedding neatly arranged. At night, much of the bedding was spread out on the floor alongside the beds, with the boys sleeping at the foot of father's bed and the girls at the foot of mother's bed. When a child was ill with high fever, he/she would sleep several nights in a bed with father or mother. In the center of the room stood an oblong table with 8-10 chairs. On the right of the entrance door was a small bookcase, and next to it was a wall closet where the special Passover dishes were kept.

Facing this single room, but separated from it by a pathway, was a 4X4 feet kitchen in which mother spent a goodly part of each day to prepare food for her large family. On each floor of the *Varshiver Chotzer* were two open-pit toilets which were shared by four families with many, many children.

The single 6X5 feet clothes closet contained all the clothing for 8-9 people, clearly indicating how few items each of us had. To be precise, I had four white shirts (Chassidic boys never wore colored shirts), four knee-length pants – usually black or charcoal grey, four knee-high black stockings, one upper garment (*challat*) for weekdays and another one for Shabbat, and one pair of shoes. I assume that the other members of the family had similar outfits. One Sunday of each month was clothes-washing day when mother had the help of a woman to wash the clothing we wore during the previous four weeks.

There were no bathing facilities at home. Each Friday I went to the *Mikvah* (a public ritual bath) to wash and bathe in preparation for the Sabbath. Upon returning home, mother gave me a clean set of clothing – shirt, pants and stockings which I wore for seven days and slept-in for seven nights throughout the week, until next Friday. There was no underwear for daytime use, nor pajamas for the night.

Once each year, usually before the Passover holiday in the Spring, I got a pair of new shoes. By the time Winter came around, the shoes had been resoled more than once and the upper leather parts were patched up in several places. As a result, we walked around in the Winter months with cold feet in wet stockings. I never understood why the single pair of shoes per year were not bought in the Fall, before Rosh Hashanah, which would have provided us with dry stockings and warm feet during the Winter months.

As for nourishment, breakfast consisted of a piece of pastry which mother baked on Friday together with the Sabbath Loaves (*Challot*), and a cup of coffee. Each morning, the milkman brought us one cup of milk for the family, from which each child received one or two spoons-full for the coffee, and the balance went to father or mother for their breakfast. Lunch varied from time to time. There were years when the *Cheder* provided the students a bowl of soup and two pieces of bread for lunch. Otherwise, mother gave me two slices of bread with a spoon-full of corn oil or olive oil (*shirres*) spread on them, and a tomato or a cucumber, and on rare occasions a piece of herring. At times, instead of the oil and tomato, mother gave me three Mill (one penny) to buy a small melon or an orange to make the bread more palatable. In later years, when one of my classmates reached Bar Mitzvah age, the teacher would collect money from the children for the "class gift" to the Bar Mitzvah boy. Each student contributed a *pyaster* (10 pennies) or two, with which the teacher bought a set of religious books like *Midrashim* (Torah Commentaries) or *Machzorim* (Holiday Prayerbooks). I did not have any change to contribute, and could not ask mother for anything. Instead, for several days I ate the two slices of bread dry, or with a glass of water, and saved up the lunch pennies as my contribution towards the Bar Mitzvah gift. For dinner, after a full day of study in *Cheder*, I had a bowl of bean soup, or split-pea soup, or potato soup with a piece of bread. Neither meat nor fish ever entered our home during the entire week.

Most of the time I sympathized with mother and did not ask anything other than what she offered, but occasionally the child in me craved for something different. When I asked for it, mother would allow me a piece of onion and one spoon of oil. I then mashed the potato or the beans from the soup with the chopped onions, and fried it into a pancake which I ate with the bread, and then finished up dinner with the clear soup. At the time, I considered it as a real treat, but when I think of this episode today, my eyes overflow with tears by the recollection of the pathetic economic conditions in which we lived.

The only decent meals we had at home came on the Sabbath, in keeping with the rabbinic tradition of eating *Shalosh Se'udot* three meals on the Sabbath – Friday night dinner, Shabbat lunch, and on Shabbat late afternoon. For the sake of *Oneg Shabbat* (Sabbath Delight), these meals contained fish, meat and wine, each family according to its means. An exception was made with the Sabbath afternoon meal when a lesser menu was acceptable.

In our home, mother bought a pound (450 g.) of fish to prepare the traditional *Gefilte Fish* which was usually made by father in the early hours of Friday morning before he went to Synagogue for the daily morning service. Since each of us had to partake of three patties of fish at the three meals, the *Gefilte Fish* contained more onions and old *Challe* stuffing than fish, on a ratio of five to one.

Mother also bought one pound of meat, and the butcher threw in a few marrow bones. Half of the meat went into the making of meat patties (*Koftelles*) on the same ratio of onions and *Challe* as the *Gefilte Fish*, which we ate for lunch on Friday (after it was cooked with fried onions and potatoes – a *Rossalle*), and for the third meal on the Sabbath. The other half pound went into the making of the Friday night soup, and then portioned out

– one ounce each, to 8-9 people. The marrow bones were used for the traditional *Cholent* at the Sabbath noon meal.[1]

Father did not always have the four-five *Shilling* (about one Dollar) needed for these Sabbath provisions. With great agony and sadness I still recall those Thursday evenings when mother said to my father: "*Dee*" (You, in Yiddish. My parents never addressed each other by name). "*Dee*, do you have the few Shilling for Shabbos?", and very often, after a lengthy silent pause, father responded: "*Ich hob nisht* – I do not have it". And then, the accumulated frustration and pain of the entire week came to the fore as mother broke down weeping and sobbing: "*Vei is mir* – woe unto me, the children will go hungry even on Shabbos". Father was openly pained by her crying, and deeply embarrassed by his inability to provide the bare minimum necessities for his family. He was also ashamed to ask friends for a handout or even a loan, but when he could no longer listen to mother's sobbing, he ran out of the house, and later returned, placed several Shilling on the table and said: "*doo hostte oif Shabbos* – here you have for Sabbath".

I watched and listened to similar heartbreaking scenes before many Holidays when mother asked for a few *Shilling* to buy a new dress or a new pair of shoes for a child. With 6-7 children at home, even such basic needs could not always be met. Instead, we often had to settle for hand-me-downs from families who were a little better off then we. Children behaving like children, and often as cruel as they can be, I was embarrassed when classmates taunted me, saying: "You wear my shirt, or my pants, or my hat".

The worst times at home were the weeks and months preceding the scheduled wedding of a son or daughter, when

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1. *Cholent* is a stew, traditionally prepared on Friday and placed in the oven before the Sabbath begins, to cook overnight, and be eaten at Saturday lunch. The basic ingredients of *Cholent* are slimming cuts of meat and pulses which are not spoiled by long slow cooking. (Ency. Judaica 5/489).

considerable funds were required even for a modest trousseau. As far as our neighbours and friends were concerned, we were considered a respectable family. To outsiders, we always appeared clean and happy, and they had no idea that very often we were also very hungry. As a respectable family, my parents were expected to outfit a child about to be married, with at least a minimum amount of clothing and household items, and to share in the wedding expenses. Mother wanted to maintain an aura of respectability before the *Mechutanim* (in-laws), for without such an appearance it would become difficult to even find a proper *Shiduch* (match) for a maturing child. I am sure that father also aspired for the same, but he just did not have it. As he often said to mother: "What am I supposed to do? *Hakken shteiner, oder ganvenan* – chop stones or steal?" The result was often a sad and heartbreaking confrontation between them, as they fought over each piece of clothing to be provided for a child to be married. Mother would cry that it was "*abushe und charpeh* – shame and disgrace" to send out a child "*nakked und borvess* – without clothes and shoes", and father defending himself and saying again and again "*ich hob nisht* – I do not have it". What was supposed to be a happy time, filled with joyful anticipation of marrying off a child, turned into months of strife and sadness for all of us at home, especially for the child in question, and for our loving parents. As young as I was at that time, I vowed in my heart that it would never happen to me, and that I would not get married until I could provide for myself.

In spite of the depressing poverty and the cramped living conditions, our home was immaculately clean. People who came in, used to say "*bei eich kenmen essen fun di balates* – in your home one can eat from the floor". Since we never had outside help for this chore, the work at first fell on mother, and as the girls grew up they took over. I remember my sisters, only 10-12 years old, going down on their hands and knees to scrub and wash and dry the stone floors. When the youngest and last of the daughters got married, the *einiklach* – the grand-daughters

came up to do the job. It is a trait which my entire family adopted, down to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren unto the third and fourth generations. When my mother in-law visited Israel in 1959, and came back to us to report on her visit with my family, the first comment she made was: "*Dee vest nisht gloiben vee rein dorten iz* – you won't believe how spotless their homes are, the floors and the linen".

Around 1932, a very painful event took place which cast a lengthy Shadow upon me and resulted in doubts as to the sincerity and trustworthiness of my father's close Chassidic friends and colleagues. A wealthy Sefardic Jew from the famous Sasoon family of Cairo arrived in Jerusalem with the aim of establishing a *Yeshiva* of Kabbalistic scholars who would dedicate themselves exclusively to the study of *Kabbalah* – mysticism, and to daily worship in the Kabbalistic tradition. In return, he offered them a generous monthly stipend, and promised them that after his demise the project would be maintained by his children.

Father was chosen to become a fellow of this Kabbalistic circle. To protect himself against unforeseen developments, father obtained the consent of the *Gabba'im* (overseers) of the Chayei Olam Yeshiva to join this Circle, and their promise that he would be able to return to his long standing status at the *Yeshiva*, should he want to do so. My father then moved over to the Sha'ar Hashmayim Yeshiva for the study of *Kabbalah*, and participated in the *Kabbalah* services at Beth El Synagogue where the daily morning service lasted four hours.

Mr. Sasoon was generous towards these selected scholars even as he had promised them, and for a year or two we had a real taste of the goodly life. We ate regularly even on weekdays, and could expect a new garment and a pair of new shoes more than once a year. But, as the saying goes, "all good things come to an end", and so did this noble experiment. When Mr. Sasoon passed away, his children refused to continue with their father's enterprise.

Father decided to return to the Chayei Olam Yeshiva, but found the doors shut tight to him. He had not asked, and did not receive a written confirmation for his right of return. He considered his colleagues to be as honest as he himself was, and could not conceive that they were capable of denying what they had promised him orally. He was deeply shocked by the brazen attitude of his Chassidic colleagues who were his fellow worshippers at the famous Nissan Bak Synagogue. Only the heavy pressure from several Jerusalem Rabbis brought about his eventual re-admittance to the Chayei Olam Yeshiva, but at a considerable lower stipend than he was getting before, and the economic situation at home became worse than ever. This incident was all the more shameful when one considers father's status among these Chassidic functionaries.

Father was the *Ba'al Koreh*, Reader of the Torah to the Congregation of the Nissan Bak Synagogue on all Sabbaths and Holidays. He was a Master Reader, and seldom made a mistake in pronounciation or in *Trop* (musical notes) by which the Torah is chanted. He was also the *Ba'al Makre*, to read out the sounds of the *Shofar* (Ram's Horn) to be blown on Rosh Hashana (New Year's Day), like *Teki'a*, *Shevarim*, etc. Kabbalists (mystics) assigned certain *Kavanot* (Devotions) to each of these sounds. Father, as a leading Kabbalist, was therefore honored to read out the sounds so that he may intone these devotions on behalf of the entire Congregation.

Chapter Four

COMPENSATION OF LOVE AND RESPECT

There was, nonetheless, a very bright side to our home and family life which found expression in our mutual love for one another and in the total respect with which parents and children related to each other: Our parents did not vent their own frustrations against us, and we never blamed our parents for the pain and embarrassment we suffered. We knew and we felt that our parents loved us with heart and soul, that they wanted the best for us, but could not give us what they did not have. Mother never raised her voice to us, and father seldom used physical punishment against us. He did not have to. A mere unfavorable look at us by father sufficed to make us realize that we had overstepped the red line and that we had done something wrong.

We had the utmost sympathy for mother, knowing that she hurt as much as we did, and even more so. We respected father for his righteousness, his great learning and his standing in the community. We dared not disobey either one of them, or to raise a voice against them – not because we feared them, it was just unthinkable. There was never a confrontation or contrariness between us. I should perhaps say "almost never" because I do recall an incident which I related to my children and my students a thousand times to illustrate the extent of *Kibbud Av v'Aim* – the honoring of father and mother which was expected of us.

I was about six years old, and my sister just two years older. One Friday afternoon, father said to her: "Please go to the store and fetch a few candles for Shabbat". "I don't want to", she responded. Father asked another one of the children to run the errand. This would be considered a common occurrence in most families, but not in our family. For weeks, this young girl could not look father in his face. Not that we were always angels; not at all. It would have been quite acceptable for her to have said

"I don't feel like going", or "Why don't you ask someone else?", and nothing would have been made of it. But to say to father "I don't want to", was totally unacceptable, almost unpardonable, and the eight or nine year old girl felt ashamed of thus having responded to father's request.

On Fridays, after a full day of cooking, house cleaning and polishing, mother and the children dressed up in their freshly washed Sabbath fineries, and father put on his colorful silken *Kaftan* and his fur *Shtreimel.* After mother lit the Sabbath candles, the boys proudly walked with father to *Schule* (Synagogue) for the Sabbath evening service. Father already enjoyed the status of a recognized scholar in Talmud and *Kabbalah*, and walking alongside him to *Schule* bestowed an aura of honor upon us. When we returned from Schule, our home was filled with the special aroma of the Sabbath dishes, and brightly lit with the Sabbath candles which stood on a window sill, and with the gas lamp hanging from the ceiling. We were warmly welcomed by mother and the girls with their sing-song greetings *Good Shabbos, Good Shabbos*, repeated numerous times. Then father and the boys chanted "*Shalom Aleichem* – Peace unto you, angles of peace", who, according to legend, accompanied us to our Sabbath home, and we sang *Eishet Chayil* to serenade mother as "The Woman of Valor", an honor she truly deserved, having prepared for the Sabbath with so much devotion and love.

After the recitation of the *Kiddush* (santification of the Sabbath over a cup of wine), first by father and then by each of the boys, we sat down to a four-course Sabbath meal of Gefilte Fish, Soup, a sliver of Meat each, and a repast of cooked fruit. There was only one plate for each person – a soup plate, because you cannot eat soup from a flat plate; and there was only one spoon for each person – a soup spoon, for the same reason. The plates and spoons, therefore, had to be washed and dried after each course. While mother and the girls tended to this chore, father and the boys chanted the *Zemirot* – Sabbath Hymns which

are chanted during the Sabbath meals, And did we sing! Father had a strong melodious voice, and so did the boys. We were also loud, loud enough to be heard by the entire neighborhood. The girls were not allowed to participate in the singing, because "a woman's voice is unchaste", said the ancient Rabbis; but, when they were seated at the table, I could observe the movements of their lips as they kept up with the words and the melody.

What a difference this Sabbath atmosphere was from the ordinary weekday evenings. The spirituality of a Sabbath evening in my parents' home had to be seen and experienced to be appreciated. God knows that I tried very hard, but I never succeeded in duplicating it in my home with my own children.

Another highlight of spirituality in our home was the Family Seder on Passover night, together with my married sisters and their respective families, but that did not come about until years later, after we moved to larger living quarters.

Chapter Five

"SWALLOWING" BOOKS OF TALMUD

The painful economic situation at home did not adversely affect my progress in school. My father made sure of that. At the age of ten and a half, I entered the highest class of the Chayei Olam Cheder. My teacher was Reb Cheikel Miletzky, Jerusalem's most prominent teacher of Talmud to children and, under his prodding, my Talmudic studies went into high gear. Reb Cheikel was a task master, and demanded the utmost effort from each student, but he was a master craftsman of his profession, a great and beloved teacher, and students eagerly strove to meet his expectations of them. Reb Cheikel was a graduate of the Slobodker Yeshiva of Lithuania, a *Litvack* (non-Chassidic person), and Chayei Olam was a Chassidic institution, but Reb Cheikel so impressed the Jerusalem community with his skill and devotion that Chayei Olam welcomed him on its staff and assigned to him the highest class of the *Cheder.*

Reb Cheikel set for us an almost unattainable goal for young children – the completion and mastery of an entire Talmudic tractate each semester, but the children took on the challenge in all earnestness. During the first semester in his class, we put in ten to twelve hours a day in learning and memorizing the eighty two *blatt* (164 pages) of *Kedushin* – a Talmudic volume which deals with Laws of Marriage. I personally fell in love with this great teacher, and intuitively felt that he would lead me to where I wanted to go, which meant to be the best I could intellectually be. Father sensed my feelings, and he too was determined to push me as hard as he could. I gladly followed.

Father used to get up every morning at 2-3 o'clock to recite the special Midnight Prayers (*Chatzot*) and to study the *Zohar,*

the Kabbalistic commentary on the Torah. At 4:00 AM, father would bend over me where I was sleeping on the floor and whisper: "*Avroom*, it is time to get up". At first, mother resisted this unusual demand of a father from his eleven year old child, and she shouted: "*Rotzei'ach* – Murderer, let the child sleep!" But father persisted, responding: "Avroom does not want to waste the night in sleeping"' and he was right. I readily responded to father's prompting, and six days a week, with the exception of the Sabbath, I got up at 4:00 AM to plunge into a rigorous schedule of Talmudic learning until 9:00 PM, with short interruptions for the religious services and meals.

The rewards for this effort were not long in coming. At the end of the first semester, when I was only eleven years old, I knew *Kedushin* by heart, all 164 pages with the commentaries of *Rashi* and *Tossafot*, the eleventh-twelfth century commentaries on the Talmud. The high point of the semester was the final test, skillfully administered by Reb Cheikel, to test our mastery and comprehension of the material. Although I was the youngest in class, I achieved the highest mark, and was awarded a set of five *Machzorim*, Holiday Prayerbooks. The Chayei Olam administration marked the occasion with a festive dinner to which several leading rabbis were invited, and I was given the honor of delivering the *Hadran*, a rabbinic discourse on the subject of the Talmudic volume we just completed. The scene must have been comical, with an eleven year old child, less than four feet tall, dressed in a *Shtreimel*, standing on a wooden box in front of a speaker's stand (*Stender*), and for half an hour deliver a Talmudic discourse to a distinguished audience of Rabbis and *Yeshiva Leit* (Talmudic scholars). But, to me, the experience was exhilarating, a truly generous reward to an eleven year old youngster for the effort of one semester.

Three other students kept pace with this program, while the other fifteen children also did their best, and together we petitioned the school adminstration to let us stay with Reb Cheikel for a few additonal semesters, to which Reb Cheikel had

given us his consent and blessing. Apparently, he was as much in love with us as we were with him. Our unprecendented request was granted by the administration. The semesters turned into years, and during the following three years, we mastered five additional Talmudic tractates in the following order: *Gittin* – Laws of Divorce; *Nedarim* – Laws of Oaths and Vows; *Bava Batra* – Laws of Property; *Ketubot* – Marriage Contracts; and *Sanhedrin* – Court Procedures. The conclusion of each volume was celebrated with the now famous festive dinners which became the talk of the town.

Competition between the four students was intense, with one of us winning top honors, and the others in 2nd, 3rd or 4th place, respectively. The winner always had the honor of delivering the *Hadran* at the festive dinner, and the usual award of a set of religious books. When I reached the age of thirteen, I had memorized 600 *Blatt Gemarah*, or 1200 pages of Talmud by heart.

All editions of the Talmud are printed with the same page sequence, and a person with a photographic memory can visualize the format of each page no matter which edition he studies. God blessed me with this capacity, and it gave rise to a fun game among my friends, who used to push a pin through a Talmudic book which I had memorized, and I was expected to give the exact word which was pierced by the pin of any given page of the book.

Rabbis who examined us would not do anything like this, God forbid. Instead, they would quote a Talmudic passage of 5-6 words, and we were expected to tell them the name of the Tractate and the page number from which the quote was taken. I found, in these achievements, great spiritual satisfaction, and saw in it the way of breaking out from the cycle of poverty in which I grew up; namely, through learning and scholarship. As the sages said: "Look well after the children of the poor; from them will come forth the knowledge of the Torah" *(Nedarim, 81a)*.

Chapter Six

CELEBRATING MY BAR MITZAH

At the beginning of 1936, before I reached Bar Mitzvah age, the Palestinian Arabs raised a banner of revolt against the British authorities, and embarked on a campaign of terror against the Jewish residents. At the helm of the Arab Commission stood the infamous Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al Husseini, who later became allied with Hitler of Nazi Germany in plotting the annihilation of European and Palestinian Jewry.

The Arabs presented four major demands of the Mandatory government:

1. An end to Jewish immigration into Palestine.

2. The prohibition of land acquisition by Jewish people.

3. The renunciation of the 1917 Balfour Declaration in which Great Britain promised to establish a Jewish National Home in Palestine, and

4. The establishment of an independent State in Palestine under an Arab government.

In this revolt, the Arabs declared a general strike in commerce and industry to cripple the country, and gangs of Arab irregulars attacked Jewish Kibbutzim (commonly owned settlements) and Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa and Zefat. Jewish vehicular traffic was attacked on the highways, destroying the vehicles and killing the occupants. This revolt lasted over three years, until the beginning of World War II in September 1939, and brought the country to a virtual standstill.

Since the British Foreign Office was not keen on fulfilling its promise to the Jewish people, the mandatory powers of Palestine exerted little effort to control the Arab murderers, or

to protect the Jewish population. Under these circumstances, we could not continue to live in the *Varshiver Chotzer* (Warsaw Courtyard) of Old Jerusalem in which my parents resided for over three decades, and we went to live with my second sister in the Beth Israel neighborhood of new Jerusalem. Rachel and her husband, and their three children lived in a one-room apartment, very similar to the room we had in the Old City, to which we now moved in with two more adults and four grown children. All together, we were four adults and seven children in a one-room apartment.

The Chayei Olam Cheder was also evacuated from the Moslem quarters of the Old City. In anticipation of such an eventuality, Chayei Olam had embarked on the construction of a new building in the Geulah section of new Jerusalem, but it was not yet ready to house the classes which were evacuated from the Old City. Our devoted teacher, Reb Cheikel, took his twenty students to his small apartment in the Nathan Straus Housing, near the Mea She'arim section of New Jerusalem, to make sure that we did not miss even one day of studying Torah.

In August 1936, my Bar Mitzvah was celebrated in my sister's home. I remember the scene as though it happened yesterday. Every piece of furniture and bedding was removed from the room which was then filled with tables and wooden benches we borrowed from a nearby Synagogue. Packed into that room for the Bar Mitzvah festive meal were members of my family, which now amounted to a sizeable clan of three married sisters and their families; my father's

Avroom at age 13-14

friends from the B'yaner Chassidim among whom he worshipped, and from the Chayei Olam Yeshiva where he learned; my 15-20 classmates, and a number of Rabbis whom Reb Cheikel invited to show off one of his high achieving students. There were also an equal number of women for the celebration, but they were seated in the outside courtyard because men and women could not be seated together at any public gathering.

Following the recitation of the *Minchah*/Afternoon service silence fell over the large assemblage in and outside of the room. I stood up at the head table, all four feet of me, dressed in Chassidic Garb, including the furry *Sh'treimel* which was bought for me to wear every Sabbath and Holy Day, and my blonde *Pai'ot*/Earlocks hanging down to my shoulders. For almost an hour, Reb Cheikel's Rabbis and some of my father's friends fired off questions on the 1200 pages of Talmud I was reputed to know. From their approving nods and facial expressions I surmised that I fielded them well. Even my demanding father seemed to be pleased. I would have liked a more physical expression from him, like a hug or a kiss, but that was not done in my family. I don't recall ever being embraced by my parents, neither by my father nor mother, with only one exception which took place many years after my Bar Mitzvah.

After this intensive drilling, everyone washed hands (*Netilat Yadayim*) and sat down for the meal, but I dare say that there was more Torah-talk around those tables than food on the tables. Before *Bentchen*/Grace After Meals, I was called upon to deliver the Bar Mitzvah *D'rashah*/Discourse on the significance of the occasion. Then Reb Cheikel presented me with my classmates' Bar Mitzvah gift, a set of *Midrash Rabba*, a collection of rabbinic commentaries on the Torah which I frequently use to this day. As far as I recall, it was the only gift I received on that day.

I cannot let go of this celebration without alluding to one episode. The most important ritual observance associated with

Bar Mitzvah is the wearing of *Tefillin*/Phylacteries at the morning service on weekdays. My brother-in-law in whose home the celebration was held, produced hand-made *Tefillin* which were sought-after by the most reputable Rabbis of Jerusalem, and my third brother-in-law, Reb Chayim Asher Lederman, was a *Sofer*/Scribe who wrote the *Parshiyot* – Parchments which are placed in the *Tefillin*. If they had not been as poor as they were, between them they probably would have presented me with a set of Tefillin as their Bar Mitzvah gift. But they could not afford the gesture, and my father could not afford the six dollars for new *Tefillin*. Instead, father acquired an old pair which was produced in Poland, and my brother-in-law polished them up to look like new.

Many years later, when their economic situation improved, these brothers-in-law presented my father with a new pair of *Tefillin* to replace the Polish *Tefillin* which he brought with him from Poland in 1906. When father passed away in 1959, these *Tefillin* were the only item of any material value he left behind. My sisters and brothers unanimously agreed that I should inherit father's *Tefillin*, and I have been wearing them daily ever since. When I received the *Tefillin*, I recalled the Yiddish expression: "*Az men vart genug lang, devartmen zich*" – When you wait long enough for something you may in the end get it.

I related these memories to my son Mordechei in 1962 when he began to train for his Bar Mitzvah, and I told him that his *Tefillin* would be made in Israel by his two uncles. And then it all fell into place for him when he met them in person three years later during the family visit in Israel in 1965.

Twenty three years later, when I watched Mordechei's son, Sh'muel David, don a pair of *Tefillin* which were put together by his two great uncles, and as I contemplated upon the three generations praying together in the Jerusalem *Tefillin*, I expressed my gratitude to the Almighty for having fulfilled His Promise unto us:

"*Va'ani zot B'riti*" – And as for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord: My spirit that is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouths of your children and your children's children, henceforth and forever" (Daily Prayerbook).

In 1938, two years into the Arab revolt, the British Mandatory government began to see that they themselves were hurting from the revolt as much as the Jewish residents. They also looked askance at the Mufti's collaboration with the Germans and Italians. But, as the winds of WWII began to blow, they considered it more practical to give in to the Arab demands. In a White Paper issued by the Foreign Office in London, the British government severely curtailed Jewish immigration into Palestine, and prohibited Jewish land acquisitions in the country.

Although not explicitly stated, these prohibitions for all practical purposes annulled the 1917 Balfour Declaration at a most inauspicious time. Three years later, when European Jewry faced the Nazi Final Solution, and with no place to run to, they found that their ancient Promised Land was also closed to them, and this time by the British people.

At the same time, the Mandatory authorities did take several concrete steps to curb Arab unrest which claimed the lives of over six hundred Jews and some British fatalities. The Arab revolt continued to a lesser degree until the outbreak of WWII in September 1939. A somewhat renewed sense of security encouraged Jewish families to return to the Old City of Jerusalem, following the issue of the White Paper in 1938, especially those people who could not afford to relocate permanently in New Jerusalem. My family was among the latter.

Chapter Seven

FAMILY SEDER IN A NEW HOME

It was still too dangerous to return to our former apartment in the *Varshiver Chotzer* – the Warsaw Courtyard – because of its close proximity to the Moslem section. Instead, we moved to *Batei Machsse*/Shelter Homes which were built by German Jews for the benefit of their countrymen who settled in *Eretz Yisrael*, and was therefore called "*Der Deutcher Platz* – the German Place". We were assigned a much larger and more comfortable apartment than we had before. The people who had occupied it before us had apparently decided not to return to the Old City. It was a great relief for us to have our family privacy again, and I am sure that my sister and her family felt likewise.

In comparison to what we had in the *Varshiver Chotzer*, we now had a real apartment, almost a palace. It consisted of a good size covered foyer, almost as large as our previous apartment. On the right side of the foyer was an open porch on which we used to build a *Succah* (Booth) for the *Succot* Festival. On the left side was a very large room of which one third was separated by a panelled partition, and served as my parent's bedroom – giving them for the first time a sense of privacy which they lacked throughout all the years of their marriage. The remainder of the room was still large enough to accommodate a family gathering. For the first time in our lives, we also had a private toilet. Of great significance to mother was the decent-size kitchen she now had, a real kitchen, with cabinets and a large working surface. In addition, the kitchen had a clay oven for Shabbat, and a screened window with recessed storage space in which cooked food could be kept overnight without spoiling, seeing that we never had a refrigerator or an ice-box.

The Chayei Olam Cheder never returned to the Old City, and I faced a daily problem of commuting from my newly found

home in the Old City to my new classroom of the Chayei Olam Cheder in the Geulah section of New Jerusalem. The distance was about two kilometers, not too much for a young boy in good weather, but in the Winter it was cold and wet to walk that distance. In addition, it was not safe to walk through the Moslem quarters around the Jaffa Gate, where Jews were frequently molested. There was the number "2" bus, a small vehicle especialy built for the narrow winding road of the Armenean Quarters through which it had to traverse. This bus was also frequently attacked by Arabs with machine guns and hand grenades, but it was definitely safer than walking. My problem with the bus was the bus-fare, the three Mill (a penny) which was not readily available. I hesitated to ask mother for it, for two reasons: First, because she might not have it, and would feel hurt and embarrassed. Secondly, she may need the three Mill to purchase a loaf of bread. Therefore, I walked the two kilometers most of the time, in spite of the danger and the rain and the cold.

Until now, I never told the following episode to anyone, not even to my wife and children. I do it now with great hesitation, only to illustrate the dilemma of a 14-15 year old boy living in conditions of extreme poverty. I do not recall the exact circumstances, but one morning I did not feel like walking to *Cheder*. Father was already at services, and mother was still in bed, probably asleep. I walked into the kitchen where mother kept her small coins wrapped in a handkerchief. I took out three Mill from the kerchief and made my way to the number "2" bus, near the Zion Gate. When I reached the bus, I was overcome with deep remorse for what I did. I realized that mother knew every Mill she had in the kerchief, that she would realize that someone removed three Mill, and she would be hurt at the thought that her Avroom was capable of such an impropriety. I ran back to our home, and was relieved to find mother still in bed. I returned the coins to the kerchief, and walked to *Cheder*.

Moving into larger quarters on the *Deutcher Platz* brought another memorable experience into our family life. My married

sisters and their respective family members used to visit us twice a year, usually during the *Chol Hamo'ed* (Intermediate) days of the Passover and *Succot* Festivals, but I do not remember their ever coming to us for a meal, nor do I recall a family *Seder* while we lived in the *Varshiver Chotzer.* I guess that the cramped quarters in our small one-room apartment rendered such gatherings impossible. But now, with the larger space in the *Batei Machsse* apartment, a family *Seder* could be considered, and the memory of the first one is indelibly engraved in my mind.

The proper observance of *Pessach* involved many strictures. Each Chassidic clan and each family had its particular and peculiar customs and requirements. Some people did not eat *g'brogt* (Matzah or Matza-meal which came in touch with water), fearing that a grain of flour which is not completely baked may turn *Chametz* (leavened) when soaked in water. Some people would not use any processed food, like cheese, on Pessach, except for Matzah, because they did not trust the supervision of the manufacturer. In our home, the Pessach menu consisted of Matzah and olive oil, (father knew and trusted the producers); fresh vegetables which we personally picked from the ground in the nearby Silvan Arab village, to make sure they were not washed with non-Pessachdic water; unwashed eggs (for the same reason); milk bought before Pessach for the entire Holiday week (for fear that the goats may be fed leavened grain during Pessach), and milked directly in our own pan, and other such strictures.

To this day, Chassidic people eat only hand-made Matzah and not machine-made, because they are afraid that a crumb of dough may get stuck in any part of the machine and turn into leaven after eighteen minutes. The saying among strictly observant people was that "*Pessach misht-men zich nisht* – On Pessach, people do not eat in each other's homes". When such people made courtesy calls on family or friends during Pessach, the only *Kibbud* (refreshments) put on the table was wine and

unshelled nuts, and occasionally hard-boiled eggs, also in their shell. My three brothers-in-law were in this category of observance and strictures. That they consented to share a *Seder* with us and eat in our home, was an expression of faith and trust in my mother's righteousness.

By this time, my three sisters already had about fifteen children among them, and, together with us at home, about thirty people would be seated around the *Seder* table. The task of preparing the *Seder* fell entirely on mother, with whatever assistance she could get from father (making the *Gefilte Fish* as he did for every Shabbat) and from us – the children still at home. Mother entered the kitchen immediately after *B'dikat Chametz* (the Search for Leaven) on the evening before the Holiday, and literally worked there for almost twenty-four hours, perhaps catching a few hours of rest during the night. By the time the Holiday arrived, mother was falling off her feet. I remember her saying that the only time she enjoyed a *Seder* was when it fell on a Saturday night. Since all preparations had to be completed on Friday (one may not work on the Sabbath even to prepare for a religious observance), she was then able to rest on Shabbat before the *Seder* began at night.

Two of my sisters, Yentil and Chanah, lived in the Old City, just around the corner from us, but Rachel lived in New Jerusalem, necessitating transportation to reach us. I still remember the tensions and father's nervousness as the Holiday Candle-lighting time was approaching, and Rachel with her family were nowhere in sight. Finally, just as we heard the sounds of the trumpets announcing the candle-lighting hour, Rachel and family walked in. Everybody was now present – eight adults, ten grown teenagers and about fifteen youngsters. The four women lit the Holiday candles, each of them lighting a candle for each person in her respective household, and two additional candles in honor of the Holiday. The menfolk with their respective sons then went to *Schule* (Synagogue) for the evening service, each of them to his own Chassidic *Schule*,

while the women and the girls remained at home. My oldest brother-in-law was a B'reslever Chassid, the second one was a Chassid of Reb Arralle, and the third was a Karliner.

We all left for *Schule* at the same time, but on our return we usually had to wait for one or another of the brothers-in-law as the length of the services differed among the various Chassidic sects. When all of them had finally arrived, seat assignments began to take place, and I leave it to the reader to visualize the bedlam as each child insisted on having his/her way of sitting here or there, on this or that chair, next to his/her father or mother, or perhaps next to grandfather. The worst was yet to come when mother brought out a tray of thirty-five wine glasses, no two alike, and the children began shouting (in Yiddish, of course) "*Ich vill the groisse, Ich will the Kleine, Ich vill mit de fissalle, und Ich vill un de fissalle* (I want the large glass, and I want the small cup; I want the glass with a stand, and I want one without a stand), and like all children, each one wanting what the other had already selected.

My Four Brothers-in-Law (L. to R.):
Reb Shiya Baron, Reb Yaakov Barzesky, Reb Avraham Mordechei Yuzevitz, and Reb Chayim Asher Lederman

My fourth brother in law, Reb Shiyah Baron, was a direct descendant of the Sanzer Chassidic Dynasty. Their customs were often distinct and different from those of other members of our family. Reb Shiyah, therefore, preferred to have his own Seder in his own Sanzer Way.

By 9:00 o'clock, when everyone was properly seated with his/her cup, and at his/her place and chair, we began to chant *Kiddush* (sanctification of the Holiday over a cup of wine), first by father, then by each of the brothers-in-law, followed by each of the boys – each in his turn according to age and each in his own melody according to his Chassidic tradition (women and girls were not permitted to chant aloud). Then came the recitation of *Mah Nishtanah* (the Four Questions) chanted 8-9 times by the boys present, beginning with my eighteen-year old brother down to my four-year old nephew. The whole assembly recited the first half of the *Haggadah* (Passover Story) together, in the universal sing-song chant, but when it came to the songs of the *Haggadah*, the members of each household were allowed to chant each hymn in their own Chassidic tradition; in other words, each hymn was chanted four times over. When we completed the first half of the *Haggadah*, and mother began to serve the festive meal, the young children were fast asleep, stretched out on straw mats on the floor. The older children struggled to stay awake, each of them hoping to "steal" the *Afikommen* (the half Matzah set aside for the conclusion of the meal), and the small gift that he/she might exact for its return (for without the *Afikommen* the *Seder* could not be completed).

After eating the *Afikommen*, we refilled the glasses of wine for the third time and recited *Birchat Hamazon* (Grace after Meals). Then father filled the *Koss shel Eliyahu* (Cup of Elijah) with wine, and mother was honored to open the door for Elijah, the Prophet of Redemption, who, according to legend, visits every Jewish home on Pessach night. When we all stood up to welcome the prophet, father led us in the fervent prayer of "*Sh'foch Chamoscho El Hagoyim* – Pour out Your Wrath Upon the Nations who knew Thee Not."

Only people who experienced generations of persecution and years of personal fear can appreciate the Plea and Cry which went into the recitation of such a prayer on the Holy and Festive night of Passover. In *Eretz Yisrael*, this Holiday often coincided with the Moslem festival of *Nabi Mussa*, when Arabs make their pilgrimage to a place near Jericho which they believe to be the grave of Moses. On this occasion, thousands of Arabs poured through the streets of Old Jerusalem, waving their spears and chanting: *"Din Muhammed bisayef* – The Sword is the Law of Muhammed", followed by the threatening chant of "*Itbach el Yahud* – Slaughter the Jews." Before we sat down for the *Seder*, we made sure that the gate of our courtyard was properly closed and barricaded before we relaxed in the relative safety of our barricaded homes.

When we concluded the Seder with the song "*Leshanah Haba'ah Biyerushalayim* – Next year in Jerusalem", it was well passed midnight, when even some of the older children and most of the women were already asleep, but father and my brothers-in-law continued with the recitation of *Shir Hashirim* – Song of Songs, the biblical Book which is read in the Synagogue during the Passover Festival.

Were we tired? Of course we were! Were we exhausted? Of course we were! But these beautiful and inspiring memories will never be forgotten.

Chapter Eight

PERSONAL LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

A few incidental memories associated with Pessach are worth recording if only to illustrate the priorities of truly religious observant people.

1. The family *Seder* was held annually for about five years, from 1938 to 1943, and no more. Father loved it, and so did mother, although she carried the brunt of the burden. The children, also looked forward to it. Why then was it dismantled? Because, as understanding as father was of all family problems as they affected his own household, when it came to what he considered to be a matter of principle he would not compromise. *Uma'asse shehaya kach hayah* – and this is what happened.

His oldest son-in-law, Reb Yaakov Barzesky had a mother who celebrated the *Pessach Seder* with her daughter's family. When she could no longer go there, Reb Yaakov justifiably felt that his mother should have the *Seder* with him and his family. He then asked my father's permission to invite his mother to our family *Seder*, but father felt that he could not sit at the *Seder* with a woman who is not of his immediate family circle, and thus rejected Reb Yaakov's request. Reb Yaakov then felt that his obligation of honoring his mother – *Kibbud Aim*, took precedent over his obligation to his father-in-law, and the Barzesky family withdrew from the family *Seder*.

The subject was too sensitive to be discussed, and we did not. I never asked father what really lay behind it, because I did not want to aggravate him, especially when I was going through my own transformation. Suddenly, just before *Pessach* we (the three children who were still home) heard that none of the sisters were coming, and we would be alone with father and mother.

My brother, Moshe Chaim z.l. shared an apartment with his in-laws, and naturally always had the *Seder* with them. Now, there was a rumor that he might come to us to ease the pain of the separation, but nothing came of it.

It was a sad *Seder*. I personally missed Yentil, my oldest sister – knowing that she felt badly that her husband dismantled the Close Society of the Family *Seder*. When we finished the first half of the *Seder*, and mother began to serve the meal, I sneaked out of the house and walked over to Yentil's home just across the courtyard of the *Deutcher Platz*. I found that they were also sad, and they appreciated my dropping in.

2. As is the case today, hand-made Matzot were always 3-4 times the cost of the machine-made ones. Since Matzah was the main staple of food during *Pessach*, and each person consumed a *Rotel* (3 kilo) package of Matzot during the 7-8 days of the Holiday, the total cost of the Matzot for a large family was almost astronomical. But, no matter how difficult the economic situation was as home, father insisted on using hand-made Matzot only.

I remember when father asked me to stand in line in front of the *Kolel Polin* office for the distribution of Matzot to needy families before *Pessach*. I was personally ashamed to do it, but I nonetheless did what father said, and brought home several packs of machine-made Matzot. It was a welcome gift for the family, but father put it away to be used *after* Pessach, while using the hand-made Matzot on Pessach.

My favorite meal on Pessach was and still is a *Matzah-Brei* which is made from crumbled Matzot dipped in eggs and fried pancake style in oil. The hand-made Matzot, which are very hard, first had to be softened in water before adding the eggs. In the pre WWII years in Palestine, we could buy one hundred eggs for one dollar (20 *pyaster*), but mother would beat up one egg and divide it between two children, giving each child one-half egg for his/her *Matzah-Brei*.

As a child or youth, I resented that practice, both because I knew how cheap a whole egg was in comparision to the fortune father had spent for the hand-made Matzot, and because I knew that the machine-made Matzot, which I had brought home and which were considered perfectly Kosher in most religious homes, were out of reach to us because they were stored away out of eye-sight. However, as I matured, I began to understand that the scale of priorities upon which people make their decisions, is a very personal matter. Some people will spend $60. for a theater ticket, but will not spend that money on the purchase of a new pair of slacks to wear to the theater. Similarly, some religious people would rather eat hand-made Matzot soaked in water than machine-made Matzot soaked in eggs.That was my parent's scale of priorities, which I eventually learned to understand and to accept.

3. I came across a similar phenomenon many years later in connection with the *Succot* Festival. One of the ritual *Mitzvot* (commandments) of this Festival is the partaking of the Four Species (*Arba Minnim*) of vegetations, each of which has definite specifications in terms of size, shape and color, etc.

One year, I sent to one of my brothers-in-law a monetary gift in honor of the approaching *Succot* Festival. A few days later, when I went to visit him and my sister, I saw on the table a single twig of myrtle (*Haddas* – one of the Four Species) standing in a cup of water. My brother-in-law pointed to it with great pride and pleasure, and said that he had found a perfect specimen which met all the ritual specifications of an *Haddas*. When he told me how much he had paid for it, amounting to a considerable part of the gift I had sent him, I was at first taken aback. I thought that the money could have been better used by putting another chicken on the holiday table. But, on further thought, I said to myself: "You gave him a gift to add a little pleasure to his holiday. Apparently, as far as he was concerned, a perfect *Haddas* will give him greater pleasure than a piece of roasted chicken", and just because I gave him a few Pounds for

the holiday, I had no right to determine his priorities. True, at the time I could not help but wonder whether the money should not have been used to put a pair of new shoes on a child's feet, and whether or not his children resented his decisions as I had resented some of father's decisions when I was a child? Hopefully, I said to myself, they, too, will grow up to understand their father even as I eventually matured to understand mine.

4. Half a century after its occurrence, I still recall an incident associated with Pessach which at the time cast a giant Shadow over my faith in people, even of religious people. One year, a few days before Pessach, father brought home for me a reconditioned hat which he obtained from the parents of one of my classmates. I could not complain to my father on this matter because he himself was wearing a *Kaftan*, a *Sh'treimel* and a *Dz'ubba* (brown silken garment worn over the Kaftan on Sabbaths and Holidays) which were either bequeathed to him by friends or given to him by widows of friends. For many years, father proudly wore a *Gartel* (a broad waist-band), and carried the Staff (*Sh'tekin*) which were bequeathed to him by Reb Joseph Chaim Zonenfeld, the Agudat Yisrael Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. I refused to wear this reconditioned hat only because I knew that its previous owner would taunt me for wearing his old hat. Having been left without a presentable hat for *Yom Tov*, I did not go to *Schule* (Synagogue) on the first day of Pessach.

Reb Y. was the respected *Gabai* (overseer) of the famous Nissan Bak synagogue where father and I *davened* (prayed). He was also the Gabai of the Chayei Olam Cheder and Yeshiva where father and I studied. He respected my father for his great learning, and he was very fond of me. When I absented myself from *Schule* on *Yom Tov*, Reb Y. asked my father on my whereabouts, and my father told him the truth. Reb Y. then told my father that he would like to see me. After *Yom Tov*, I went up to Reb Y.'s office. He told me that I was missed in *Schule* on Pessach, and then handed me four *Shilling* (one dollar) to buy

myself a new hat. On the following Shabbos, I proudly appeared in *Schule* in my new black, silken, wide-brimmed hat, with none aware of how I came to obtain it. So far so good, but there was an ugly catch to it.

My father's monthly stipend from the Chayei Olam Yeshiva was one and a half English Pounds (six dollars) per month to sustain eight people on bread and a bowl of bean soup. Some time later, I found out that my great benefactor, having pretended to present me with a gift, and without a single word either to my father or to me of what he really had in mind, proceeded to deduct from my father's stipend a whole *Shilling* each month for four consecutive months – this coming from a great Chassid, a friend of the family, and a *Gabai* of two great religious institutions in Old Jerusalem. What a price to pay for a single *Kappelutch* (silken hat)! What a sad ending for a Holiday which had begun with so inspiring a *Seder*!

Chapter Nine

A RATIONALE FOR RELIGIOUS CHANGE

In the closed and close-knit society in which I was growing up, children almost invariably followed in their parents' footsteps, both in their outward appearance and in their religious behavior. From the day a girl reached the age of twelve and a boy the age of thirteen, they were considered mature adults in all religious requirements. After his Bar Mitzvah at age thirteen, a Chassidic boy wore a silken *Kaftan* and a fur *Shtreimel* on Shabbat just like his father. Girls did not cover their hair until marriage, but in every other way they dressed like their mothers – in long and loosely fitted dresses, and in black shoes and black stockings, never in color. This was the accepted norm, and was seldom if ever questioned or violated.

In most homes, any change from the norm was not tolerated, and a serious break with tradition was often severely dealt with. Our *Ashkenazi* (European) neighbors sat *Shiva* (Seven Days of Mourning) when their daughter married a *Sefardi* (Oriental) Jewish man.

I was considered a good boy and an obedient youth. I studied diligently, I attended religious services regularly, and I was always respectful of my parents and elders. What could possibly cause such a young boy, who was never exposed to non-religious people or to modern literature, to veer off the accepted norm and mode of behavior? I have searched for the answer ever since, and was never able to answer the question to my own satisfaction. But I distinctly remember that at the age of 15-16, I became uncomfortable in my outward Chassidic appearance, and became consciously aware of being different from most children around me.

Sefardic (of Oriental origin) young boys, even the most religious among them, were dressed in modern garb. *Ashkenazi* (of European origin) youth who were of *Litvish* (non Chassidic) families did not wear a *Kaftan* and *Shtreimel* on Shabbat, although their fathers did wear them. And I began to wonder why I had to be so conspicuously different from most young people around me. By that time, I also had sufficient knowledge of the Talmud to realize that our Sages were not always of one mind in their requirements of ritual observance. Among the rabbinic teachers of old were those who followed the more stringent path (*Machmirim*), and there were those who were more lenient (*Mekillim*) in the application of the law, and I wondered why we, in our family, always had to adhere to the requirements of the most stringent amongst the Sages?

However, awareness of being different did not always lead to change, and the mere questioning of ritual practices did not necessarily lead to their abandonment. The seeds of change were already there, but I was still years away from any break with the past. Open rejection of my parents' way was at that time unthinkable for I would not hurt them in a realm of such great importance to them.

In 1938, the *Gaba'im* (Overseers) of the Chayei Olam Cheder decided that enough was enough, and they would not allow my class to stay on with Reb Cheikel, our favorite teacher for over four years. They were not yet ready to let us leave for another *Cheder* or *Yeshiva*, for we had brought much fame and credit to the institution. Instead, they adopted Reb Cheikel's suggestion to engage the service of the Charkover Rov (Rabbi) whom we had met as one of the Examiners (*Farherers*) at the end-of-the-semester celebrations. His style of teaching was like that of Reb Cheikel, even on a higher *Yeshiva* (adult) level, and we were very happy with this accommodation. But some Chassidic scholars of the Chayei Olam Yeshiva felt slighted for having been by-passed for the position by a *Litvack* (non Chassidic) Rabbi, and an outsider. At the end of the semester,

the Charkover Rov was laid off, and two Chassidic scholars, Reb Sh'lomoh Schreiber and Reb Gershom Lapidus, were engaged to teach our class.

As young as we were (I was 15-16 years old and my classmates a year or two older), we saw the difference between the *Litvishe* and *Chassidic* teachers, and a goodly number of us were unhappy with the change. At the beginning of 1939, it became apparent that we had reached an impasse which would lead many of us to leave the Chayei Olam Cheder where we had studied since childhood. I, personally, took a brazen step that was destined to change the course of my life and set me on a collision course with my father (with mother too, but women usually kept themselves in the background).

Chapter Ten

FATHER'S REACTION

Chayei Olam Cheder and Yeshiva was the foremost institution of learning for the Jerusalem Chassidic community. Of equal status for the *Litvish* (non Chassidic) Jews of Jerusalem was the Eitz Chayim Cheder and Yeshiva. Except for some slight nuances, the children and adults of these two institutions followed the same standards of religious observance and personal life-style. Entirely different from these institutions and, therefore, a total outsider of the Jerusalem religious community, was the Hebron/Slobodker Yeshiva. The level of scholastic achievement among the students of the latter may have been considerably higher than of the former, but the life style of the Hebron/Slobodker students and, in some instances their leniency in ritual religious observances, were unacceptable to Jerusalemites, whether they were of *Chassidic* or *Litvish* persuasion.

In 1925, Rabbi Moshe Mordche Epstein brought to Palestine a group of selected students from the world famous Slobodker Yeshiva in Lithuania, and established a *Yeshiva* in the city of Hebron, the burial place of the Jewish Patriarchs, and only second in holiness to Jerusalem. Rabbi Epstein went to Hebron, and not to Jerusalem, because he knew that his students, although in most instances religiously strictly observant, would not be welcomed in Jerusalem.

Their dress was ultra modern European, uncommon among Jerusalemite *Ashkenazi* students. They were clean shaven, without beards or earlocks (*Pai'ot*), and many of them were with overgrown plaits (forelocks) on top of their heads, the latter being particularly abhorrent to religious Jews of Jerusalem. *Yeshiva* students of Jerusalem used to be married at the tender age of 18-20, but in Slobodka it was not uncommon to see

bachelor students 25-35 years of age. For these and other reasons, Rabbi Epstein took his students to Hebron, away from Jerusalem, to avoid conflict with the zealots of the city.

Arab pogroms against the Jewish communities of Palestine on Black Friday in 1929, were most severe against the Jews of Hebron, and worse yet among the Hebron Yeshiva students. Twenty-five young men were slaughtered or tortured to death on that Friday afternoon. During the following week, the British authorities evacuated all Jews from Hebron, and thereafter prevented Jews from residing in the city, a city in which they had lived since the days of the Biblical Patriarchs. The Hebron/Slobodker Yeshiva was then moved to the Ge'ulah neighborhood of New Jerusalem, but retained its name as the Hebron Yeshiva. Although the *Yeshiva* was now physically situated in Jerusalem, it was not part of it. For the next ten years, until the outbreak of WWII, the Hebron Yeshiva continued to draw its students from its parent institution in Slobodka, and from other great Yeshivot of Latvia and Lithuania who wanted to emigrate to Palestine. The Jewish Agency usually granted the *Yeshiva* a number of Immigration Certificates from the annual Quota which the Agency received from the British Mandatory authorities.

I did not know, and I had not heard of any Jerusalem young men studying in the Hebron Yeshiva when, in early 1939, I went to visit Reb Aaron Cohen, a Dean of the *Yeshiva*. I was politely invited in, and was asked to be seated. I gave him my name and age, and told him that I had a fair knowledge of six Talmudic Tractates (about 800 Blatt, 1600 pages), and wanted to be examined by him. I made sure to mention that I was a student of Reb Cheikel, a graduate of Slobodka in Lithuania. Reb Aaron was known as an *Illuy* (a Genius), and did not need a text book for the job – he knew the whole Talmud by heart.

We spent an hour or two together. He seemed duly impressed, even surprised, to see such knowledge from a young Chayei Olam student, and he asked me what he could do for me.

I told him that I wanted to be admitted as a student in his *Yeshiva*. If Reb Aaron was at first impressed and surprised, now he became completely amazed and shocked. He looked at me again, a typical Jerusalem Chassidic youngster, dressed in Chassidic garb, with a pair of long *Pai'ot* (ear-locks) reaching down to his shoulders, brazenly seeking admission to the Hebron/Slobodka Yeshiva. Unheard of! For a moment, I thought that he would burst out in laughter, and then I wondered how he was going to wiggle out of the dilemma, but he was a true genius, and he soon composed himself. I don't know whether he had heard of my father, but, looking at me, he understood what my father was like, and he said to me: "If you bring me a *Tzetalle* (note) from your father that he agrees with you, we will gladly admit you to our *Yeshiva*."

I could not argue with this perfectly logical answer. That evening, I went home with mixed feelings of hope and despair, happy that I had passed the formal exam, and afraid of my father's reaction. After dinner, I told my father that I would like to study in the Hebron Yeshiva. "So, you want to study in Hebroner Yeshiva", my father confidently responded; "but you must know that they will never accept you!" "I saw Reb Aaron Cohen today," I said again, "and he is willing to admit me to the *Yeshiva* if I bring him a *Tzetalle* from you." "And you honestly expect me to give you a *Tzetalle* to study in the Hebroner Yeshiva", this time father responded resolutely; "but I want you to know that I would rather say *Kaddish* for you (see you dead) than send you to the Hebroner Yeshiva."

Never before had I seen father display such anger, and never before had I heard from him such threatening words. I felt that this was the end of my short-lived dream. I lay down to sleep in my regular place on the floor, but I could not fall asleep, and cried most of the night. The Hebron Yeshiva was my ticket to scholarship, perhaps also to a rabbinic career, but I could not get the ticket without a *Tzetalle* from father, and he had made it absolutely and definitely clear that I was not going to get it from him.

I cried over my fate. I am sure that father heard me for most of the night, but he made no move to comfort me or to calm me. He was perhaps in a worse dilemma than I. He appreciated my drive for further study and respected me for it. On the one hand, he was sure of what he wanted me to be, and on the other hand, he intuitively knew where the Hebroner Yeshiva would take me vis-a-vis his life style. And so he said nothing more during the night.

The following morning, before I left for *Cheder*, father asked me what I was going to do. I explained to him (what he himself already knew) that Chayei Olam had nothing more to offer me, that I very much wanted to continue learning as I had heretofore done, and that the only place where I could progress, beyond which I reached at that stage, was in the Hebron Yeshiva, and I concluded: "But if you refuse to give me the required *Tzetalle* of consent, I will probably go to work."

Father asked what exactly I had in mind. I told him that for some time now I had been tutoring a classmate of mine from the Freedman family. The Freedmans had recently immigrated from Antwerp, Belguim, and had established a diamond cutting and polishing factory in Jerusalem. I further told him that Mr. Freedman had found that the 16-18 year old *Cheder* students did well in that profession, and that Mr. Freedman had once offered me a job as a trainee, but I turned him down becuase I would rather study. "The economic situation at home is terrible", I said to father, "and if I am just going to waste my time, why not accept Mr. Freedman's offer and help you out at home?"

Father contemplated a few moments, and then he said to me: "Avrom, you leave the house to me, and you will continue to study." Then he sat down and wrote the *Tzetalle*, the note of consent to Reb Aaron, permitting me to enter the Hebron Yeshiva.

Years later, when I looked back to that morning, I concluded that I had seen my father at his greatest hour. He must

have known that after granting me that note I would never be the Chassidic young man he wanted me to be, but he saw that I was determined to leave his world through the Hebron Yeshiva or the working market, and he decided that Torah-study in Hebron was preferable to the working-street without Torah. By giving me the note, he also told me that his statement of the previous night that he would rather see his son dead than let him change direction, was not what true Judaism stood for. Faced with the real choice, he wrote the note and prayed for the best. When he handed me the *Tzetalle*, he said: "I can see that a Chassid you will not be, with this note you will at least remain a *Talmid Chacham* (a Talmudic scholar)."

I heard the same sentiment many years later when the Chassidic Husyatiner Rebbe, a cousin of the B'yaner Rebbe, came to Jerusalem in 1946. Out of curiosity, I went to see him. Because of my father's status in the B'yaner circles, I was ushered in for a private audience with the Rebbe, an unusual honor for a twenty-three old young man, dressed in modern European garb. Someone must have informed him of my background, although his Chassidim insisted that it was his Power of Prophecy (*Ru'ach HaKodesh*). The Rebbe stood up as I entered, took my outstretched hand in both of his, and said: "You are Reb Nachum's son. I have been told that you are a *Talmid Chacham*. May it be the Will of God that you also be a God Fearing Person (*Ba'al Yir'at Shamayim*)." We talked for a few moments, and I did not detect any feeling of rejection from him because of my modern non-Chassidic demeanor.

Even as I was preparing to leave the Chaye Olam Cheder for the Hebron Yeshiva, I also left Nissan Bak Schule for the Churva Synagogue. I was leaving *Chaye Olam* for intellectual pursuits, and I left *Nissan Bak* for aesthetic reasons.

As a child I *davened* with my father in the Chassidic Nissan Bak *Schule*. The prayer hall was large, but, by 1940, the worshippers were few in number due to the steadily decreasing Jewish population in the Old City, and the people frequently

walked about to and fro within the *Schule* during the services. Talking among the worshippers was also quite common, although everyone knew that they were not supposed to.

As I was growing up, I became intolerant of these irreverent practices in a place of Divine Worship, and when I reached the age of 15-16, I felt that I could go out on my own. I began to *daven* in the *Litvish* (non-Chassidic) Churva *Schule* where the services were more quiet and more dignified.

And it came to pass, when the Torah Reader moved away, that I volunteered to take his place – at first on a temporary basis and then, after I proved myself competent in this demanding but honorable work, as the permanent *Baal-Koreh* of this prestigious Synagogue. At age 16, I read the Torah even on the major Holidays and Festivals, when the Chief Rabbi came to the Old City – *Aliyah LeRegel* – to *daven* in the Churva, and the *Schule* was filled to capacity with hundreds of worshippers.

As my father's son, I tried to keep up with his reputation as the Master Torah Reader of Yerushalayim. Every *Shabbat* I had him listen to my last rehearsal before going off to *Schule*, to get his nod that I was ready. For all this, I was rewarded twice. The first time, when an Elder of the congregation pinched my cheek, and said: "Young man, you are coming close to your father". The second time came twenty five years later. On my visit to Israel in 1968, I attended a Sabbath morning service at the *Kotel* – Western Wall. When we came to the reading of the Torah, none of the 50-60 worshippers stepped forward to do the honor. And then an elderly gentleman pointed to me and said: "I believe that twenty five years ago this young man was the *Baal-Korre* in the Churva. Would you honor us today?" I told them that the law requires of us to rehearse the chapter at least twice – *Sh'nayim Mikra* – before reading it *b'tzibur* – in public; but since there was no one else, I consented to read the Torah with great pleasure, and to the satisfaction of the worshippers.

I was well integrated with the *Baalei Battim* of the *Churva*, and felt at home in their midst, but on the three days of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* I always went back to Nissan Bak or to *Batei Orenstein* to *daven* with Reb Moshe Chazzan. I have attended the services of highly trained professional Cantors and of inspiring *Ba'alei Tefillah* (non-professional Cantors), and none of them ever came close to the moving spiritual experience I had when I *davened* with Reb Moshe Chazzan on the High Holy Days.

Reb Moshe Chazzan officiated at the Nissan Bak Synagogue over several decades, and most of his congregants were with him throughout all these years. They were familiar with every nuance of his *Nusach* (score) and melodies, and they hummed and chanted with him. Sitting in this congregation with several hundred participating worshippers was like listening to a choir of several hundred voices.

The exception was the Introductory Prayer of the *Mussaf* (additional) Service, which Reb Moshe Chazzan chanted all by himself. A hush fell over the congregation when he approached the pulpit and intoned in a whisper "*Hineni He'onni Mema'as* – Here I am, a humble worshipper, poor in good deeds". In a crescendo tone he continued "*Bossi La'amod Ulehis'chanen Lefonecho* – I have come to stand before you, to pray for your people Israel, who have appointed me to beseech you on their behalf". And then, like a lion, he roared out the three sacred attributes of God "*Sha-dei, Oyom Venoro* – Almighty, Awsome and Revered God". The windows rattled all the way up to the one hundred foot ceiling of this great Synagogue, and the quiet sobbing of the congregants could be heard as in a whisper.

And there were also the lighter moments of the service. In his latter years, Reb Moshe Chazzan could no longer stand on his feet for the three hour long *Mussaf* service. At certain places, a chair was placed behind him, and he carefully sat down without moving or lifting his feet from the floor. In this sitting position, Reb Moshe Chazzan led the assembly in chanting:

"*Veye'esoyu Kol Le'ovdecho* – And all the inhabitants of the world shall come to worship you... *Veyitnu Lecho Kesser Melucho* – And they will place the Crown of Royalty upon You".

Fifty years have passed since my last service with Reb Moshe Chazzan in 1946, and on each of these years my family and I chanted *Veye'esoyu* at the table during the *Rosh Hashanah* meals. Since my retirement from the rabbinate, I have often gone to *daven* with the B'yaner Chassidim on the High Holy Days, hoping to find a *Ba'al Tefillah* in the image of Reb Moshe Chazzan. They all tried to imitate him, but to no avail; there just was not anyone like him, not even close! What a pity! But, I thank God for the gift of memory. I left *Chaye Olam* and *Nissan Bak*, but both institutions have remained an integral part of my life. When I think of learning and Talmud, I remember Reb Cheikel; and each year – with the approach of the High Holy Days, and when I come to the *Zemirot* – table hymns on *Shabbatot* and Festivals, I recall Reb Moshe Chazzan, and I thank God for the intellectual and emotional impact these two institutions and these two *Rabbanim* made on my life.

The Nissan Bak Synagogue

Chapter Eleven

GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION

In August 1939, I entered the Hebron Yeshiva, and I stuck out like a sore thumb. I was young in comparison to most students who were 25-30 years old; I was very short when compared to the six footers of European origin; I looked pale in complexion and, above all, I was in my Chassidic garb and long *Pai'ot* (earlocks) in contrast to the ultra modern European appearance of the other students. But, to me, the *Yeshiva* was first and foremost a House of Learning which offered me unlimited opportunity for intellectual growth and, on that score, I did not feel out of place, nor did anyone try to make me feel that I did not belong. On the contrary! I was warmly welcomed by all concerned, perhaps as a curiosity, and was made to feel at home. I specifically recall the warm overtures of Yitzchak Kulitz, the present chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, and of Pinchas Scher, for many years Rabbi of Kfar Sava, and many many other students in the *Yeshiva.*

Except for the three weekly lectures, each given by one of the three deans of the *Yeshiva*, which all students were required to attend, the students were on their own. Everyone had to learn the assigned Tractate on which the weekly lectures were based; but, in addition to that, we could learn whatever we wanted as long as we sat and studied and did not waste our time. And the Hebron Yeshiva students were very diligent in their studies from early morning until late in the evening. Since we had only half-day of study on Fridays (*Erev Shabbat*), many of us stayed up the entire night (a *Mishmar*) on Thursdays. A few weeks ago, when I was introduced to a woman from a prominent Jerusalemite family, she told me that she still remembers listening to my studies on Thursday nights when she was a young child in her father's home which was close to the *Yeshiva.*

The Talmud speaks of two kinds of students. On the one hand, there was the *Sinai* student who mastered the texts of the Torah and the Talmud as they were handed down at Sinai, and was content with the traditional simple meaning (*P'shat*) of the text. On the other hand, there was the *Oker Harim*, the sharp-witted student who "uprooted mountains" to reconcile apparently contradictory and difficult texts, constantly struggling for clarity and logical harmony by way of *Pilpul* – the didactic and hair-splitting of the text.

Most Lithuanian Yeshivot encouraged their students to follow the latter approach in their studies. An anecdote which made its rounds in the *Yeshiva* told of a young man who was studying in a book in which several pages were torn out, but, as he jumped from page 75 to 79, he connected the unrelated subjects on these pages without ever noticing that four pages were missing from the text. I must admit that I never mastered that craft. To be sure, even the *Sinai* student had to understand the underlying reasoning of the Talmudic text, so that he could apply its logic and precedent to situations not explicitly dealt with in the ancient texts (*mevin davar mitoch davar*). But, lacking the power of *pilpul*, I concentrated on mastering and memorizing one Talmudic Tractate after another. People said that I "swallowed" the *Gemmores* (Tractates) of the Talmud. Apparently, after I filled my stomach with Talmudic books, I began to crave for something else. I literally hungered for another, an additional kind of knowledge. I wanted a general education in history and philosophy, in literature and theology. The *Yeshiva* world did not approve of such pursuits, and considered them as a waste of time, as *Sefarim Chitzonim* – outside the scope of the Talmudic scholar, but I did not see it that way, and this set me apart from other students of the *Yeshiva*.

In modern Israel, bright *Yeshiva* students aspire to fill rabbinic posts in one of the hundreds of communities throughout the country, or to become a *Dayan* (Judge) in a religious court

which deals in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance. These Rabbis and *Dayanim* are well paid by the Israeli government, on the same scale as secular judges, but such opportunities did not exist in pre-State years. Mandatory Palestine was small and poor, and there were only a handful of Rabbis and *Dayanim* in the major cities, and they were pitifully sustained by the local Jewish authorities.

The most any of my colleagues could hope to achieve was a level of prominence in Talmudic learning which might lead to a career as a Dean of a *Yeshiva* on the highest level, or as an instructor of Talmud in a *Cheder* on the lower level. Failure to achieve either of these, confined even the prominent scholars of the *Yeshiva* to a life-time of study in a *Kolel* (Assembly) with a stipend not much higher than that offered to my father in his time. Learning institutions as exist in Israel in these days, when *Yeshiva* students can afford to live in comfortable apartments, and are supported by the government and National Insurance (*Bituach Leumi*), did not exist in pre-State days.

I wanted nothing to do with either of these alternatives. I aspired to a secular education and to a professional life. I wanted to be a modern Rabbi; not a Rov, but a Rabbi! Did I dare think of a university degree when I did not have a high school education? What did I know of philosophy and theology? How did I chance on such notions? I really don't know. I cannot even fathom the answers to these questions. But I did know where to find what I was looking for. I knew that I could find some answers in the B'nai B'rith Library on Straus Street, just a few blocks from the *Yeshiva* building, but worlds apart from its thinking and aspirations. In the dark of the night, when I thought that no one would see me, I would sneak into the library, and sneak out with a few books tucked under my Chassidic *Challat* (a light upper Chassidic garb which I was still wearing).

Where was I going to read these books? Certainly not in my parents' home, and certainly not in the *Yeshiva*. But, if not there, where? Let me preface the answer to this riddle with a tenet of

faith in which I strongly believe. "*Anee Ma'amin B'emunah Sh'laimah*" – I believe with perfect faith in Divine Providence – that God is interested in each individual human being as though he were the only human being on earth. I know that this personal faith in Divine Providence is not fashionable in our days, not even among many of my rabbinic colleagues, but I believe in it nonetheless, because I have seen it, I have felt it, and I have experienced it throughout the years. Many of my colleagues, who have heard parts of my unfolding story, said to me: This is a true demonstration of *Hashgacha P'ratit* – Divine Providence. If anyone needs rabbinic proof of this concept, I can quote the Talmudic saying: "A man is duty bound to say '*Bishvilee Nivra Ha'olam*' – the world was created for my sake" *(Sanhedrin 37a).*

Where did I read the library books? For the first two years in the Hebron Yeshiva I walked each day from my home in the Old City to Geulah, a 30-40 minute walk, in the hot summer and in the cold and rainy winter days. The *Yeshiva* did have dormitory facilities, but room assignments were restricted to out-of-town students. Gradually, I began to realize that I was missing out a great deal by not being part of *Yeshiva* life at night, and I started to come home later and later at night. My parents were concerned about my safety, as I had to walk through the Moslem neighborhood near the Jaffa Gate, and my father decided to ask a favor from another person, something which was not in his nature to do.

My father had a distant cousin, Mrs. Ziyon, who lived just around the corner from the *Yeshiva*. I remember her calling on us in the Old City one time, but she did not maintain frequent contact with us, nor did we with her. However, for the sake of my safety, my father called on her to see whether she would accept me as a tenant in her apartment. Surprisingly, she was most receptive to the idea, partially for her own interests.

Mrs. Ziyon, a widow for many years, had come to Palestine from Chelem, Poland, in the 1930s, with two married daughters and their respective husbands, and they settled in Rishon

Liziyon, near Tel Aviv. Around 1940, she married an elderly American gentleman who lived in Jerusalem. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Ziyon was struck with senility, and he was generally in ill health. This prevented Mrs. Ziyon from visiting her children and grandchildren in Rishon. Having a young live-in student/cousin would give her the freedom she needed. And so it came about that I now lived in a room near the *Yeshiva.* I was able to be part of *Yeshiva* life in the evenings, and I could also read the books which were unacceptable to my parents and to the *Yeshiva.*

I began with Josephus' "Wars of the Jews" and soon graduated to the voluminous Graetz' "History of the Jews", and the five volumes of Prof. Meir Waxman's "History of Jewish Literature". In between, I read a little of Shalom Aleichem and Achad Haam, "Anna Karenina" by Tolstoy, "Crime and Punishment" by Dostoevski, and others. An entire new world of knowledge, experiences and emotions were now open to me. The fact that it was all done clandestinely only added to the excitement. As the wisest of all men put it "Stolen waters are sweet" *(Proverbs 9:17)*, with one unexpected revelation. I was soon to discover that my secret was not as unknown as I assumed it to be. I discovered that to certain religious people, reporting to parents about the deeds of their erring wayward children, was considered a meritorious act, even a *Mitzvah.* And so it happened that a certain man who saw me either entering or leaving the library reported his great discovery to my father. Father asked for an explanation of what I was doing in the library. Taking advantage of a rabbinic comment that one is permitted to tell an untruth for the sake of peace, I somehow managed to wiggle my way out.

Concurrent with this inner transformation, I initiated a gradual change in my outward appearance which, for the sake of sparing my parents the heart-ache it was bound to cause, took me two years to accomplish. The process began with changing my *Challat* (Chassidic upper garment) and my knee-length pants

to a modern tailored suit. I considered this change to be the least offensive to my parents because my older brother had already done part of this a few months earlier.

I remember the commotion at home when Moshe Chayim z.l. came in wearing a pair of full length modern tailored trousers. Father pointed to the embarrassment he would face in *Schule*, and he was right. For no sooner did the three of us walk into the Nissan Bak Synagogue that Friday evening, when Reb Y.R., one of the *Gaba'im* of the *Schule* and of the Chayei Olam Yeshiva, looked my brother over from top to bottom, spat on the floor in the front of us, and shouted "*Bushe und Charpeh* (shame and disgrace), Reb Nachum's son is *gevorin Adeitch*" (became a German). Calling a Chassidic young man "*Adeitch*" was the utmost insult, just what my father expected to hear. Neither father nor my brother or I responded to this public onslaught, but I never forgot this incident, and therefore proceeded with my transformation in a most cautious way. I, nonetheless, felt that the way had been paved for me as far as wearing a modern suit was concerned.

This incident came full circle when I returned to Israel in 1975. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah of that year, I attended services in the B'yanner Chassidic *Schule* of New Jerusalem, which took the place of the Nissan Bak Synagogue which was destroyed by the Arabs in 1948. Reb Y.R.'s sons were then the *machers* (big shots) of the *Schule*. After the services, one of them recognized me and came over to introduce himself as the *Gabai*. He asked me what I thought of the congregation. In reply, I related to him his father's assault on my family thirty years earlier, and then concluded by saying that "I am happy to see that all of your father's sons and grandsons are now dressed like *Deitchen* (Germans)". He took the hint, and left without further comment. Was this reaction ethically correct on my part? Probably not, for he was after all an innocent bystander in this ancient episode.

The second step on the agenda of my transformation was the elimination of the ten-inch long *Pai'ot* (earlocks). This was the most difficult task even as it was the most drastic, because the wearing of *Pai'ot* had a biblical base, and was much more fundamental than Chassidic garb which was mere custom. The same was true about shaving off the beard, as the Torah states: "You shall not round the corners of your head, neither shalt thou mark the corners of thy beard" *(Lev. 19:27)*. But, while I could manage the latter by not allowing my beard to grow to begin with, a disappearing act on long *Pai'ot* is not so simple, for the shocking effect of such an act on truly sincere Chassidic folk could be traumatic indeed, and this I tried to avoid, at least to minimize, at all costs.

The process took almost two years, and the method was at first "curl and cut" and then "tie and cut". The first step is to form the ten-inch long straight *Pai'ot* into eight-inch long curled *Pai'ot*. A few weeks later, when people get used to seeing you in shorter earlocks, you cut off two inches and leave them at the same length, but once again straight. You repeat the process once or twice more until you are left with straight *Pai'ot* only 2-3 inches in length, and you are no longer able to curl them. Now you just twist them into a small ball, very close to your cheek, and tie them up with a piece of cotton, the color of your hair. When you feel that people had become accustomed to seeing you without ear

Avroom, in 1943, age 20, during his "Transformation"

curls, you snap off the tied-up balls of hair, and you now look like most young men around you. Did I fool my parents with these make-believe tricks? Probably not! They were too smart for that. They also saw it coming, and watched every move of mine. They saw that I was sensitive to their feelings, and they did not say anything. It also eased my conscience, and made it possible for me to do what I wanted to do.

Chapter Twelve

A STRICT BUT UNDERSTANDING FATHER

I was keenly aware and sensitive to the pain and anguish I was bringing upon my parents. I respected them, I loved them, and their pain hurt me as well, but I could not continue in the way I was raised, and I did not know how I could change without colliding with their feelings. The one comforting thought in this somewhat painful development was my belief, my feeling that father foresaw all this on the night he said that "he would rather say Kaddish for me than let me go to Hebron Yeshiva", and that he had made peace with it on the following morning when he gave me the *Tzetalle* (note) of consent. At the same time, I also tried to cause my parents the least public embarrassment, and even that only on points of peripheral religious importance, never on principles, like the Sabbath or *Tefillin*.

Two critical moments in this unfolding story are worth mentioning if only to demonstrate my father's great wisdom and tolerance. When I began sprouting a beard, I made sure to shave on Fridays, before going home for Shabbat, hoping that father would not know that I was shaving, and perhaps think that I was not yet growing a beard. Then came the nine days before *Tish'ah b'Av* (the Fast Day on the 9th of Av), when shaving is prohibited. I could not bring myself to shave. I went home with some trepidation, fearing a possible confrontation with my parents, but when we sat down at the Shabbat table, father said to me: Avrom, I was aware for some time that you were shaving your beard; thank you for not doing it during the Nine Days.

The second incident occurred when I decided to stop wearing the *Sh'treimel* (fur hat) on Shabbat. Knowing that my father would be embarrassed when he enters his Chassidic *Schule* with me wearing a modern felt hat (remember the

incident with my older brother), I informed my parents that I would remain in the *Yeshiva* for Shabbat, and instead come home for my weekly visit on a regular weekday. For the following two weeks I did stay at the *Yeshiva* for Shabbat, but on the third Friday my older brother came to me with a message that father wanted me home for Shabbat even without wearing the *Sh'treimel.*

One would not wear a *Sh'treimel* and a plait (forelock) of hair at the same time, because they just don't go together. The *Sh'treimel* is a symbol of Chassidism and piety, while the plait is a "no no", as it constitutes a *chatzitzah* – an intervening object between the phylacteries and the body of the head on which the phylacteries are placed for the daily morning service . When I removed the *Sh'treimel*, I began to grow a plait. But since my hair was not overly long, father did not say anything. Of greater concern was the combing of the hair on the Sabbath, lest the comb tears strands of hair from its roots, which constitutes a violation of the Sabbath. My father brought this to my attention, but I assured him that I use a loose tooth comb which does not dislodge any hair. Father then remarked to me that a man is not permitted to use a mirror which is considered a *K'lee Isha*, a woman's utensil, which should not be used by a man *(Deut. 22:5).*

Father was single mindedly strict in his personal observance of all laws and customs in Jewish life, and he tried to inculcate the same spirit in his children, being at times almost adamant about it. I remember entering the *Succah* (Booth) on the Shabbat of *Hol Hamo'ed* (Intermediate Days) of the Succot Festival, to say *Good Shabbos* to my father. As I was talking with him, I noticed some dust on my jacket, and instinctively, without any forethought, I brushed it off with my hand (definitely a "No No" on *Shabbat*). My father jumped up as though bitten by a snake, and shouted out "*Shabbos, Shabbos*"! His reaction to a violation of Jewish ritual was as spontaneous and natural as my natural reaction to dust on my jacket, which was to brush it off. I

definitely did not fault him for his outburst against a minor infraction of the law. I also knew that after a moment of further consideration he could be as reasonable and understanding as we might expect of most liberal people.

My oldest brother-in-law once discovered that one of his sons had committed a cardinal transgression by a deliberate desecration of the Sabbath. In Jewish Law, such an offence of *Chillul* (desecration) *Shabbat* placed the offender out of bounds of the Jewish community, and he may not even be counted to a *Minyan* (the quorum of ten required for public worship). In a fit of anger, my brother-in-law abused him physically, and expelled him from his home. When my father heard about this, he chastised his son-in-law for having raised his hand against a mature young man, which is also prohibited in Jewish Law, lest the young man be brought to the point of striking back. Then my father prevailed on his son-in-law to seek out his erring son, to apologize to him for having struck him, and to implore his returning home. "You can banish a child from home" my father said, "only for apostacy or intermarriage with a non-Jew, to save other siblings from following in his/her footsteps; otherwise, you keep the child home and try to teach him the best you can".

My brother-in-law, learned his lesson well. Many many years later, I witnessed a scene in his home which was reminiscent of my father's attitude. I was visiting my oldest sister on a Saturday night in Jerusalem, when many of her own children and grandchildren were present, all of them Chassidic and strict observers of the Sabbath. About five minutes after the conclusion of the Sabbath, in walked that erring son who lived in Ramat Gan, about 50-60 miles from Jerusalem. Everyone in the room was cognizant of the fact that the young man must have driven his car on the Sabbath to Jerusalem. My wife and I looked at each other with apprehension, fearful of an explosion about to take place right there and then. How astonished we were to behold the genuine happiness and the cheers with which this desecrator of the Sabbath was welcomed home by his

siblings. And what did his father do? Well, his father poured a cup of wine, lit the *Havdalah* Candle, and said to his son: "Moshe, come here and say the *Havdalah*" (a blessing recited at the conclusion of the Sabbath). Moshe did as he was told, and when he finished, he was embraced by his father and mother as though he had just walked in from around the corner.

This is true Judaism. You do the best you can to transmit to your children the heritage you received from your parents, and, if you fail, you must try to salvage as much as you can, unless the child deliberately and willingly leaves the fold. That was my father at his best, as on the day he gave me his consent to enter the Hebron Yeshiva, and on the day he insisted on my coming home for Shabbat even without wearing the *Shtreimel.*

My dual ambitions for a university education and for a rabbinic career crystalized in a determination to find my way to the United States. I could continue reading books out of sight from my parents and the *Yeshiva*, but I could not follow through with a formal educational program clandestinely. I could perhaps have undertaken a High School matriculation program in Mrs. Ziyon's home through correspondence courses, but I did not have the money for it. And even if I had managed to go that far, what then? University was definitely beyond my reach in Jerusalem because I would not even contemplate embarrassing and hurting my parents that much, even if my life depended on it (which it did). The solution was to be found in the United States.

America was also the answer to my desire for a rabbinic career. In the 1940s there were no more than 10-15 professional Rabbis in all of Palestine, and all of them were of mature or old age status. I did not want to be a Rov of the East European/Palestinian style, and I was not willing to wait to old age for a rabbinic position. Once again, the solution would have to be found in America.

I kept these thoughts to myself, deep down in my heart and in my dreams, because there was no sense in discussing them with my parents. First of all it was just a dream, and at that time an impractical and unattainable one. So, why talk nonsense, unachieveable nonsense? Secondly, I knew that my parents would not approve of their son travelling to the *Treiffe* (non-Kosher) and irreligious America. Jerusalemite *Chassidim* used to say that even the *Sh'teiner* (stones) of America were *Treiff*. True, I realized that if my dream ever took on a state of reality, my parents would have to know about it, but the chance of ever crossing that bridge was a long distance away, and I saw no reason to aggravate them that far in advance.

But, the time to reveal my dreams came much sooner than I anticipated. Soon after the marriage of my older sister around 1941, when I was 19 years old, the *Shadchanim* (matchmakers) began to frequent our home with matching proposals for me. When my parents thought that a suitable candidate, suitable to *their* expectations, had been found, I was asked to meet the *Shadchan* and the proposed candidate.

There and then, the time for sharing my dreams and aspirations with my parents had arrived, and without much fanfare I told them that I would *not* get married until I completed my learning, and *not* until I secured a position to afford a respectable livelihood. When I spoke of *learning*, I thought of the university, but to my parents *learning* meant Torah study, and to that they had no objection. But when I mentioned a *respectable livelihood*, that was like waving a red flag. "What do you mean by a respectable livelihood", father asked. I explained to him that I wanted to be a Rabbi. "With all due respect for your knowledge, what chance do you have of becoming a Rabbi here, and at your age?" father asked again, and this time in a somewhat sarcastic voice. I answered; "When I feel that I have gone in my learning as far as I can possibly go here, I intend to go to America, and *there* I will become a Rabbi, and *then* I will get married."

The battle line was now drawn. Father embarked upon a lengthy exposition, pointing out all the difficulties and obstacles I would face getting to America, and then concluded triumphantly: "And if you do get to the *Goldenne Medinah* (golden country), do you think that American streets are paved with gold"? "Father," I said to him, "I want you to know that I have repeated these same words to myself a thousand times, but my mind is made up that I will not get married until I get to the States, and if I fail to find what I want there, I shall come back and admit that you were right to begin with."

In truth, there were several girls in our neighborhood whom I had eyed before. One girl in particular, a good-looking daughter of a well-to-do Chassidic colleague of my father, was very much on my mind, and her father had on many occasions expressed his affection towards me in person, but I was determined not to be distracted from my goals, and not to fall into a trap with a premature marriage.

My parents saw that my mind was made up, and they made peace with it. Thereafter, they would tell the *Shadchanim* to talk directly to me, and the latter soon realized that they would not collect a *Shadchanim* fee from me. Instead, they directed their efforts towards my younger sister. A few months later, father came back to me, saying that "Freidel is of marriageable age, but you, with your *Narishe* (foolish) ideas are standing in her way", quoting the biblical words (spoken by Laban): "It is not so done in our place, to give the younger (in marriage to Jacob) before the older" *(Gen. 29:26)*. I assured my father that I would solve that problem for him.

I immediately sat down and wrote a note in which I yielded my rights as the elder at home, and of being next-in-line for marriage, and thereby granted Freidel the privilege of getting married before me. And she did get married shortly thereafter, before me.

I have a special warm spot in my heart for this sister for the contribution she made to our home at a very crucial time, before she married. The Second World War was at the height of its fury. Since Palestine served as a staging arena for the British Commonwealth Forces, the country enjoyed full employment and a higher than usual standard of living, but not for Torah scholars like my father. The *Kolel Polin* and the Chayei Olam Yeshiva, upon whom the *Yeshiva* scholars depended for their substance, had lost their main sources of income which came from the East European Jewish communites. The economic situation at home was at its worst during the war years. I personally did not feel it that hard because I was eating all meals in the Hebron Yeshiva restaurant which managed to stay open, but my parents, and my younger sister and brother bore the brunt of the worsening situation, as did most other *Yeshiva* men.

Then a German/Jewish religious industrialist came to the rescue of many religious families by establishing a shoe-polish factory for the exclusive employment of religious girls from families who would not allow their daughters to work in mixed plants, where either men or non-religious women were employed, fearing that their daughters would come under the influence of their co-workers. Freidel volunteered to join this working force. At first, father resisted, telling her, even as he told me several years earlier "to leave the house to him", but when the house became cold and hungry he had no choice.

Freidel went off to work, the first time a girl was permitted to leave the confines of our protective environment. I recall her coming home on Friday afternoon with her week's pay in her hand. She would not embarrass father by handing her earnings to him personally. Instead, she put it under the cover of the dresser which was already set for *Shabbat*, and father picked it up from there without a word passing between them. For about a year, until Freidel was married, there was food at home. Around the Feast of *Chanukah* that year, Freidel brought home a kerosene heater which her employer had presented to each of

the girls as a *Chanukah* gift and, for the first time in our family life, we had real heating at home. Father would light the heater when he got up early in the morning for his studies, and placed a *Tcheinik* (kettle) of water on top. When we got up, we were able to wash our hands (*Neiggel Vasser*) with warm water. That was luxurious living for a change.

Mother once whispered to me, saying with tears running down her face: "A girl earns a few pounds from hard work during the entire week, but instead of putting it aside for a wedding trousseau, which she will soon need, we have to spend it on food, *Vos vet zein mit hir* – what will become of her?" To comfort her, I said: "At least you don't have to worry about me", although inwardly I knew that it was not much comfort to her that I had decided to sit it out.

Chapter Thirteen

RABBINIC ORDINATION – SEMICHAH

With marriage plans for me indefinitely postponed, and with my thoughts of University and America only distant dreams, I embarked on doing what I could at that time. In my extra curricular time at the *Yeshiva*, I began to study for rabbinic ordination (*Semichah*) by studying the Talmudic Tractate of *Chullin* and the second volume of the *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dai'ah*, both of which were required for Ordination. One day I was invited to the home of Reb Aaron Cohen, the Dean who four years earlier had admitted me to the *Yeshiva*. Reb Aaron wanted to know why I had chosen to study these two volumes, and I told him that I was interested in a rabbinic career, to which the Dean responded: "Reb Avrohom, we want you to know that our goal is to educate *Talmidei Chachamim* (scholars), not *Rabbonim* (Rabbis)". In view of this declaration, I had no choice but to share with him my secret thoughts that I was preparing myself for a rabbinic career in the United States. Reb Aaron was not sympathetic, and once again declared: "Reb Avrohom, we do not approve of this", and then my interview was over. I enjoyed a good reputation in the *Yeshiva* as a diligent student, and no overt threats were made to deter me from the way I had chosen to go, but the administration decided to apply genteel pressure by withholding the periodic stipends which were given to students twice a year to purchase a new suit of clothes or a pair of new shoes.

To me, these retributions were not genteel at all. I could not expect any assistance from my parents, and the prospects of substitute income on my own looked grim until "Personal Divine Providence" once again manifested itself. When I walked down the steps of the *Yeshiva* one day, I saw an elderly gentleman standing at the bottom of the staircase. He was

immaculately dressed, with a white beard flowing down to his chest. I stopped to ask him whether I could be of any help, and he told me that he was looking for a young man to teach his grandson *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism). Seeing my inquisitive look, he went on to explain, somewhat embarrassingly, that his daughter was married to a non-religious man, that his grandchildren were attending non-religious schools, and were growing up without any religious training. He was, therefore, looking for a *Yeshiva* student to prepare his eleven year old grandson for his Bar Mitzvah, and at the same time imbue him with some *Yiddishkeit.* "Could I perhaps be the young man you are looking for"? I asked. "I don't see why not", he answered, and he invited me to come with him.

We took the #15 bus from Geulah, and got off at Sh'lom Ziyon Hamalkah street, and walked up one flight to his daughter's home. Except in the movies (which I occasionally visited), I had never before seen such an exquisite home as the one I walked into that morning. I had no idea that such homes actually existed in Jerusalem. A few moments later, I came face to face with a charming and beautifully dressed woman. She repeated the story I had heard an hour earlier from her father, and she suggested that I talk with her son, Sh'muel, for half an hour.

Sh'muel and I sat down at the dining room table, while mother and grandfather walked out of the room. Since it was the month of *Kislev* (December), I talked with Sh'muel about the forthcoming *Chanukah* Festival, explaining its history and its ceremonial observances. It occurred to me that the adults might be standing behind the door, and I spoke loudly enough for them to hear. No sooner did I stop, when they both walked in. Mother was beaming from ear to ear, and said to me "You are just the young man I was hoping to find." Then she asked whether I would be willing to come to the house three times a week, and how much I would expect to be paid. I immediately accepted the job offer, but I did not have the vaguest idea of how much

to ask. The lady suggested eighteen *Pyaster* per lesson. I quickly figured out that (3×18=54) fifty four *Pyaster* equalled the average laborer's weekly salary, and I gladly accepted her offer.

Her husband was Chief Engineer of the Jerusalem Municipality and the owner of an Industrial Machine store. He was a tall and impressive looking person. The K's also had two daughters – the older was a nurse and the younger was a student at the Hebrew University. Besides the wages which I received, I actually looked forward to my visits with this modern and well educated family, the very embodiment of what I dreamt I might one day have. My monthly income far exceeded the periodic stipends I used to get from the *Yeshiva*, and I soon became one of the best dressed men in town and in the *Yeshiva*. After Sh'muel's Bar Mitzvah, I was asked to continue meeting with him twice a week, and was now considered a *Ben Bayit* (part of the family). This newly won feeling of independence strengthened my belief in Divine Providence, and my confidence that many more good things were yet to come.

1944 was a good and eventful year in my life. I continued with my learning towards rabbinic ordination in the course of which I acquired two new *Chavruta* (learning companions) who played important roles in my progress. One was Reb Nissan Zacks in the study of *Talmud Yerushalmi* (Jerusalem Talmud). Reb Nissan was the grandson of Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap, the Dean of the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva, and a fellow Kabbalist of my father. Reb Nissan had a sharp mind and excelled in the art of *Pilpul*. My association with him gave me a lift in a field of Talmudic studies in which I fell short. The second *Chavruta* was Reb Feivel Frank in the study of *Yoreh Dai'ah*. Reb Feivel was the son of Rabbi Zvi Pessach Frank, Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem and senior member of its *Bet Din* (rabbinic court). I became a *Ben Bayit* (frequent visitor) in the Frank household, and two years later Reb Feivel's older sister played a major role in obtaining for me a Student Visa to the United States.

In early 1945, Divine Providence once again revealed itself in the form of two C.I.D. (Central Intelligence) agents who arrested me on suspicion of being a member of the I.Z.L. – *Irgun Zva'i Leumi* (National Military Organization). As the Second World War was drawing to its conclusion, and the facts of the Nazi atrocities in the European Death Camps became known, the I.Z.L. raised the banner of revolt against the British Mandatory Regime in Palestine which kept the gates of the country closed to Jewish people throughout the war, and even now refused to allow the few remnants of the Death Camps to enter the country. I.Z.L. attacked British installations throughout Palestine and demanded a) the departure of the British authorities from Palestine for its failure to carry out the provision of the 1917 Balfour Declaration which promised the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, and b) the establishment of a Jewish State in its place. The British authorities retaliated with mass arrests and the exile of hundreds of young men to Africa on suspicion of I.Z.L. affiliation.

Although I was ceremoniously inducted as a member of the underground, I was not active and was never called upon to participate in any I.Z.L. action. But my younger brother was very involved, and all of us at home were aware of it. There were occasions when we were awakened by police action in our neighborhood in Old Jerusalem, only to realize that Baruch had sneaked out of the house in the middle of the night, and was probably among those being chased by the police. My guess was that the police were tipped off of an "Ehrlich" in the I.Z.L. ranks, and arrested me because I was already in modern garb while Baruch still looked like a typical Chassidic *Yeshiva* boy.

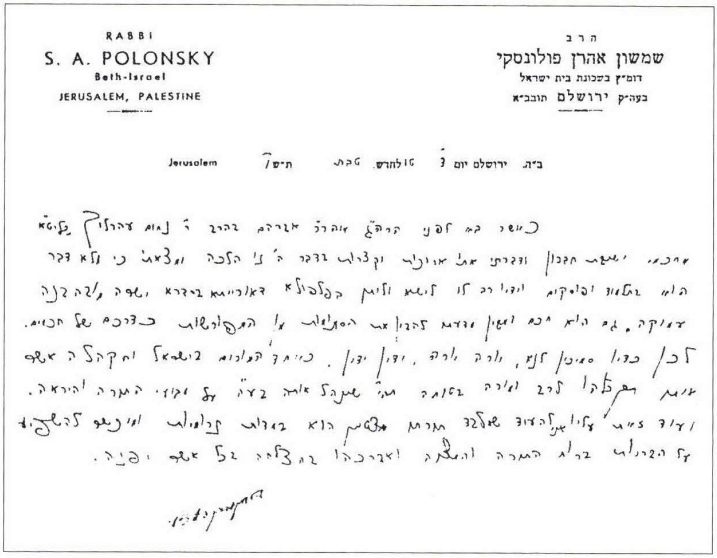
The C.I.D. agents took me to the Kishle, the police station near the Armenian quarters of Old Jerusalem, where I was kept and interrogated for three days. Then I was transferred to the main Jerusalem prison on the Russian Compound (*Migrash Harrusim*) where I remained for three weeks. Upon release from prison, I was placed under House Arrest, confining me to my

home from sunset to sunrise, either with Mrs. Ziyon during weekdays or in my parents' home on weekends. I also had to sign in at the closest police station twice each day, in the morning and in the evening. Violation of the House Arrest orders would return me to imprisonment.

Home confinement freed me from attendance at the *Yeshiva* during the long winter evenings, and enabled me to embark upon new learning ventures through correspondence courses in English and Math towards High School matriculation. In one year, I successfully completed two courses in each subject with the Berlitz School of Correspondence.

During the daytime hours, I continued with my learning towards rabbinic ordination with ever greater zeal. Towards the end of 1945 and the beginning of 1946, I made the rounds among the leading Rabbis and members of the Rabbinic Courts (*Dayanim*) to be examined for *Semichah* – Rabbinic Ordination, and the results were most gratifying. I was ordained by the Jerusalem Bet Din with the signatures of Rabbis Eliyahu Rom, Yoseph Gershon Horwitz, and Yizchak Vachtfogel. Of special significance were the Personal Ordination granted to me by the Tepliker Rov, Rabbi Simshon Aharon Polanski of the Beth Israel community, and Rabbi Sh'lomo Dovid Kahana, former Head of the Warsaw Beth Din and now Rabbi of Old Jerusalem. The significance of these two *Semichot* was the fact that these Rabbis seldom granted *Semichah* to young aspiring students. Later that year I received *Semichah* from the Chief Rabbis of Palestine, Rabbi Isaac Herzog (Ashekenazi) and Rabbi Ben Ziyon Uziel (Sefardi), and from the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, Rabbi Zvi Pessach Frank.

The Tepliker Rov was reputed to have granted *Semichah* only to five young people. I went to him anyway, just to take a chance, perhaps I would be the sixth. He sat with me for several hours during which he asked questions pertaining to the first volume of *Yoreh Dai'ah* and on various *sugyot* (subjects) of the Talmud. The Rabbi was no longer able to write, and I was



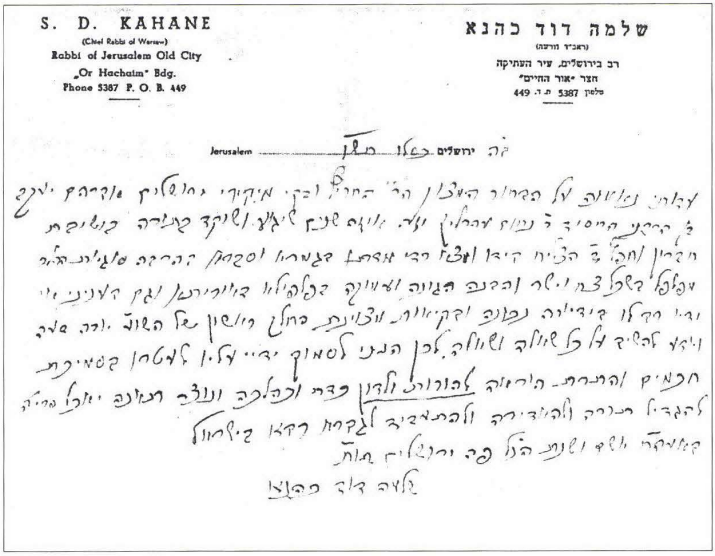
RABBI
S. A. POLONSKY
Beth-Israel
JERUSALEM, PALESTINE

הרב
שמשון אהרן פולונסקי
דומ"ץ בשכונת בית ישראל
בעה"ק ירושלם תובב"א

pleasantly surprised when he called in his nephew and dictated to him a *Semicha* document which he then signed, personally.

Reb Sh'lomo Dovid Kahana knew me well since I regularly *davened* (prayed) in the *Churva Schule* where he served as the Rabbi of the Old City. He asked me to come back time and again for the examination for three consecutive sessions of several hours each. After a few questions, he said to me: "I can see that you know the material by heart, but you won't always remember it that way. Therefore, from now on, instead of giving me the answers, you will open the *Gemara* or the *Shulchan Aruch* and show me the source on which your answer is based". When he was completely satisfied, he wrote the *Semichah* in his own hand-writing.

When I sat before Rabbi Frank, I said to him: *K'vod Harav*, your Honor, I heard it said that you are a *meikil* – lenient in your decisions on ritual matters. I would like to understand what that means. The Rabbi started out with an anecdote about a rancher


S. D. KAHANE
(Chief Rabbi of Warsaw)
Rabbi of Jerusalem Old City
„Or Hachaim" Bdg.
Phone 5387 P. O. B. 449

שלמה דוד כהנא
(ורשה)
רב בירושלים, עיר העתיקה
חצר „אור החיים"
טלפון 5387 ת.ד. 449

Jerusalem ירושלים

(*yeshuvnik*) who used to come to his Rabbi with questions on what is *Kosher* and what is *treif* (not Kosher) regarding certain items on the ranch. When the rancher did not appear for some time, the Rabbi wondered whether there were no questions on the ranch, and the rancher explained that he heard the Rabbi quote from the Torah: "you shall not eat flesh that is torn (*treifa*) by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs" *(Ex. 22:30)*. "Therefore", explained the rancher, "when I have a question on any item, I put it before the dog; if he does not eat it, I know that it is Kosher, and if he eats it, I know that it is *treif*". A few days later, when the rancher came in with a question, and the Rabbi asked him why he did not consult his dog, the rancher replied: "*Der hunt is amachmir* – the dog is stringent (as he always eats)".

The Rabbi concluded: We live among people for whom a Rabbi's decision on *Kashrut* may determine whether or not the family will have something to eat on *Shabbat*. Therefore, unless

the Rabbi is *absolutely sure* that the item in question is *treif*, he should be a *meikel*, and go towards leniency if at all possible, as the *Shulchan Aruch* favors this approach.

Chapter Fourteen

TEACHING TALMUD TO VIP PRISON INMATES

Another round of arrest and confinement took place in 1946 when the I.Z.L. blew up the British Intelligence Headquarters in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. On the Friday following the explosion, the police rounded up all suspects who had been arrested during the previous two years. They also came looking for me at my parents' home. When they did not find me, they left a note, requesting that I report to the Kishle prison that same day. I knew that if I did not respond to this summons on Friday, they would come for me on *Shabbat*. So, when I came home that afternoon, I took a pair of pajamas, a toothbrush and a *Gemara* (Talmudic Tractate) *Sanhedrin*, and went to the Kishle where I was detained overnight.

The following day has been dubbed in the annals of the Palestinian Jewish community (*Yishuv*) as the "*Black Sabbath*" when the British police arrested thousands of young men throughout the country and all leaders of the Jewish Agency who were in the country and, on the sacred day of *Shabbat*, transported them to the Latrun Detention Camp, an army barrack converted for the imprisonment of suspected underground terrorists. Among those arrested were Moshe Sharet, head of the diplomatic core of the Jewish Agency; David Remez, head of the Histadrut Labor Union; and Rabbi Judah Leib Maimon, head of the Mizrachi Religious Party, and many others. Even the elderly Rabbi Maimon was forcefully pushed into a lorry on the sacred Sabbath, and driven from Jerusalem to Latrun, and so was I and many other young men, many of whom were religiously observant people.

The experience of riding on the Sabbath, and the scene at the Latrun army barracks overwhelmed me. Dozens of long tin-bunks lined the huge fields, each bunk housing 20-30 men. The fields were completely bare of trees, and the bunks were burning hot during the day and quite cold at night, and without bathing or sanitary facilities. About six hundred young men roamed about in the camp the entire day without any occupation. Since most of them were picked up from work, or plucked out of bed in the middle of the night, they did not have any reading material. This was a perfect setup for teaching Torah to a captured (literally) audience.

On Tuesday, I put up a notice on the door of the barrack which was designated as the "Synagogue", which read: "A class in *Sanhedrin*, 9:00-11:00 A.M.", *Sanhedrin* being the name of the Talmudic Tractate I took with me the previous Friday. About sixty young men came to class on the first day, and listened to my reading from the only text available, and to my explanation on justice in ancient Israel. The number of those in attendance doubled on Thursday, and on Friday morning, as we were gathering for class, a young man burst into the Synagogue, shouting: "*Haim Ba'im* – They are coming".

When this young man shouted "*Haim* – They" he referred to the Heads of the Jewish Agency and other leading figures of the Palestinian Yishuv (Jewish Community) who were housed in a separate compound behind barbed wire on top of the hill, which we called the VIP prison. Most of these VIPs were irreligious people, some of them hardened leftists with anti-religious sentiments. The scene of these people coming down the hill and walking towards the Synagogue to attend a study session in Talmud presented by a *Yeshiva Bachur* (young man) could only mean one of two things or both: One, that they, too, were as bored as the six hundred regular detainees; and, two, their curiosity of coming face to face with the young terrorists to whose activities they were politically opposed. To those who

had come from traditional homes, it was perhaps an opportunity for a nostalgic return to their former years.

An exception to this lot, was Captain Dr. von Weizel. He had acquired the rank of "Captain" when he served as head of a military brigade in the German army during the First World War. He was a physician and the owner of a private medical clinic in the town of Gederah. He was arrested on the Black Sabbath as a member of the Revisionist Executive, a rightist organization which was the parent body of the I.Z.L. He was kept in Latrun long after the Jewish Agency leaders were released, and not before he went on an extended hunger strike. Although of an assimilationist home in Germany, Dr. von Weizel had a positive attitude towards tradition, and in the course of a few weeks of Talmudic studies he became an ardent admirer of the teacher. In his book "Ninety Two Days of Detention and Fasting", page 107, Dr. von Weizel wrote the following about our Talmudic class:

> "For the past several days, Remez, Halperin and I attend the daily class in Talmud. Our teacher – Abraham Ehrlich – a young man from Old Jerusalem, only 21 years old (I was almost 23) and already an Ordained Rabbi, speaks excellent Hebrew and also German and English. He had two job proposals to South Africa... but was arrested because he appeared suspicious..."
>
> "The underlying cause of this suspicion, people in the know (*Mevinim*) explain that a religious young man, the son of an Orthodox family of Old Jerusalem, who cares about the cleanliness of his finger-nails, who is dressed in a clean shirt and a decent suit, and even speaks English – must be a terrorist, and at least deserves to be sent to Latrun if not exiled to Africa..."
>
> "In the meantime, we are delighted to have found such an understanding and dedicated teacher. He excels in his learning. Remez is deeply impressed by him, and seems to

have been caught up with childhood nostalgia. Remez admitted to me that he never thought of finding among the Latrun detainees a person of knowledge and character like Rabbi Ehrlich. The study hours of 9:00-11:00 A.M. bring him great pleasure; but not only to him. Halperin and I share the same feelings."

Dr. von Weizel was caught up in this study over and above what might have been expected from a person who probably lacked any religious education, and never before even saw a Talmudic text. After a few weeks, he asked me to meet with him privately for in-depth discussions on the material we studied that morning in class. Mr. David Remez offered to follow up my class in Talmud with his own class in Scriptures in which he had considerable knowledge. I did not believe that students would be willing to sit for three full hours. Therefore, I cut my class to one and a half hours, which was followed with a one hour class in Scriptures by Mr. Remez.

My eventual release from Latrun came through the intervention of Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna, Dean of the Hebron Yeshiva, and Mr. K., Chief Engineer of the Jerusalem Municipality, who personally vouched for my innocence of any terrorist activities, and guaranteed my good behavior. In a further entry in his book, page 154, Dr. von Weizel wrote:

"One other detainee was released today – Rabbi Abraham Ehrlich, our teacher of Talmud. We were in the middle of a class session, when a young man came rushing, shouting excitedly – 'Ehrlich, Ehrlich'. The young Rabbi hesitated to get up because it is sinful to interrupt a lesson in Talmud. The young man entered the Synagogue, once again shouting: 'Ehrlich, Ehrlich, Frage (you are free)'. Ehrlich did not know what to do; in fact, he wanted to sit down and continue his teaching, but Remez and I did not let him. We congratulated him on his freedom and pushed him out of the Synagogue. Afterwards, we returned to our seats and discussed whether *Frage* (freedom) which comes

during a Talmudic session may be considered as a reward for the Mitzvah of studying Torah? In fact all of us regret Ehrlich's leaving – there is no one in camp to take his place."

I proceeded from the Synagogue to the office of the camp commander who confirmed my release, and asked me to sign an obligation for continued House Arrest. He then handed me a bus ticket which would take me to Jerusalem via public transportation. I arrived in Jerusalem in mid-afternoon. I knew that father would be in his *Yeshiva*, but mother would be home. She had not been well for some time before my arrest, and I surmised that the six-week detention of her son made things worse. I felt that my sudden return home might be too much excitement for her. I, therefore, asked an acquaintance I met in the street to inform her of my release, and that I would be home shortly. On the following day I returned to the *Yeshiva*, somewhat in the aura of a hero since the press had written extensively about the daily attendance of the Jewish Agency leaders in a Talmudic class under the tutelage of a Hebron Yeshiva student. I went into Rabbi Sarna's office to thank him for his personal intervention on my behalf. I must admit that the good Rabbi did not think that having a *Yeshiva* student on the rolls of suspected terrorists added honor to the *Yeshiva's* reputation in spite of his Talmudic resourcefulness.

Chapter Fifteen

RABBI OF DP CAMPS IN CYPRUS

If the good Rabbi Sarna did not appreciate the episode of my confinement in Latrun, to me it was *God-sent* because it brought me in touch with people of whom I had only heard or read about before, people who were to have a decisive impact on my life in the very near future. In other words, my encounter with the people I met in Latrun was to me another manifestation of Divine Providence. Several weeks after my release, a special courier came to the *Yeshiva* with an invitation from Mr. Yizchak Ben Zvi, then Chairman of the *Vaad Haleumi* (Jewish National Committee) and later the second President of the State of Israel, to come to his office in the Jewish Agency Headquarters. I did not have the slightest idea what he wanted, and neither did the courier, but I went forthwith. When I came into the office, Mr. Ben Zvi stood up, and welcomed me as *K'vod Harav* (your honor). He asked me to be seated, and immediately came to the point, saying: "We heard about you from Mr. David Remez who thinks very highly of you. We need a young Rabbi for the Displaced Persons Camps on the Island of Cyprus, and Mr. Remez recommended you for the position. Will you accept?" Without any knowledge of what might be involved, I automatically responded: "Of course I will", and Mr. Ben Zvi then proceeded to explain the nature of the mission.

When the European segment of the Second World War came to an end in May 1945, what was still left of Christian conscience was shocked by the discovery of the fate which had befallen European Jewry at the hands of the German people in the gas chambers and crematoria of the Nazi Death Camps. The governments of the Western Allies, including Great Britain and the United States, and their respective leaders – Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt had known since 1942

of the systematic annihilation of European Jewry, but decided to do nothing about it, and they let the German Devil perform his Satanic work. When the curtain was raised from the liberated Death Camps for the whole world to see the mountains of tortured and gassed corpses, Christian conscience temporarily awakened, and demanded a humane solution for the several hundred thousand Jews left on the continent – some survivors of the Death Camps, some Jews who hid in bunkers, some Jewish children who were kept in monasteries, and smaller numbers who were hidden by Righteous Gentiles.

No European country wanted this "Refuse of Humanity" to settle in its territory. Several thousand refugees who returned to their homes in Poland which, prior to the war, was the home of three million Jews, most of whom perished in the Death Camps, were attacked by Polish Catholics in the infamous Kielce Pogrom. The eyes of the world then turned to Palestine as the natural place for the settlement of these refugees, the Death Camp survivors who were on the move throughout the European continent. But the British government, still in charge of Palestine, was determined to enforce the provisions of the White Paper they had issued in 1939, which abrogated the 1917 Balfour Declaration, and prohibited the entry of Jews into Palestine. President Harry Truman of the United States appealed to Britain for a one-time humane gesture to permit the entry of 100,000 refugees into Palestine, but the stone heart of Great Britain could not be moved, and Truman's appeal was rejected.

The *Yishuv* (Jewish Community) of Palestine, which numbered over one half million residents, initiated a system of illegal immigration into Palestine. Wandering refugees of the European Continent were directed to port cities of France, Italy and Greece where they boarded rickety boats for the Mediterranean crossing to Palestine. Upon reaching the make-shift disembarkation points in the darkness of night, they were dispersed to *Kibbutzim* (communal settlements) throughout the country. The British government mobilized its mighty

Mediterranean fleet to intercept these boats on the high seas where they forcefully transferred the men, women and children to British vessels, and transported them to make-shift tent-camps on the Island of Cyprus which was under British control.

Mr. Ben Zvi then told me that there were 5000 refugees in Cyprus, and that their number was growing week by week. He further explained that a goodly number of representatives of the Yishuv, disguised as refugees, had entered the camps to care for the administrative matters in the camps, and that my mission would be to organize and care for their religious life. I told Mr Ben Zvi: "If Mr. Remez and you believe that I can do the job, I accept". We shook hands, and Mr. Ben Zvi said: "Rabbi, since you are not married, you probably do not have a *Tallit* (Prayershawl), but as a Rabbi you will need one; so let us go to *Mea Shearim* to buy it for you."

In Polish-Chassidic Circles, the men begin to wear a full-size *Tallit* at the morning service only after they are married. Until then, they wear only a *Tallit Katan*, a small *Tallit*, each person according to his size, and it is worn under the upper garment throughout the day.

I remember that long walk from the Jewish Agency headquarters on King George Street to Mea Shearim, the *Yeshiva Bachur* (young man) walking side by side with the chairman of the *Vaad Haleumi* (Jewish National Committee) to purchase a *Tallit*. Mr Ben Zvi was not a young man, but he did not take a bus or a cab, preferring instead to walk "for the sake of the *Mitzvah* (Good Deed)", as he put it. We parted after the purchase of the *Tallit*, and he promised to contact me "as soon as we get your travelling papers".

I later learned that the British police were not happy with the candidacy of a suspected terrorist as Rabbi of the D.P. Camps in Cyprus, but later relented to the pressure of the Jewish Agency, figuring perhaps that I would be less likely to do any damage on peaceful Cyprus than in turbulent Palestine. At the

same time, they refused to grant me a Palestinian Passport, and instead issued a temporary travel document. A few days later, I received a message from Mr. Ben Zvi that a *Mohel* (Circumciser) was needed in Cyprus to circumcise a great number of uncircumcised children who were born in the camps of Europe and Cyprus, and that the Agency had arranged with the chief *Mohel* of Jerusalem, Rabbi Yitzchak Zvi Halperin, to train me in the art of *Milah* (circumcision).

Several days before my departure for Cyprus, an article appeared in the *Hamashkif* daily newspaper under the heading:

"The Rabbi who Goes From
One Barbed-wire Fence to Another"

הרב ההולך מגדר תיל לגדר תיל

הרב אברהם אהרליך, שיטוס ביום ג' לקפריסין כדי לטפל בענינים הדתיים של מחנה המעפילים — אין זו לו הפעם הרא־שונה להימצא בין גדרות תיל.

הוא יליד העיר העתיקה בירושלים, תלמיד ישיבת חברון, אדם ידוע וחביב על היישוב היהודי בירושלים. היה נתון במעצר על שלא רק למד את כתבי הקודש אלא אף הדר לעמקם. לפני כשנה שוחרר ומעצרו הוחלף לו במאסר בית. לאחר ההת־פוצצות במלון „המלך דוד" נאסף ביחד עם יתר הנתונים לפיקוח המשטרה, ונשלח ללאטרון. שם עסק בהוראת כתבי הקודש לשאר העצורים, ויו"ר הועד הלאומי דוד רמז היה אחת מאלה שלמדו תורה מפיו.

עכשיו יורה לגולים בקפריסין את פירוש הפסוק: „את הארץ הזו נתתי לך לירשה"...

"For Rabbi Abraham Ehrlich, who will fly on Tuesday to Cyprus to care for the religious affairs in the Refugee Camps, it will not be the first time to find himself within barbed-wire fences."

"He was born in Old Jerusalem, is a student of the Hebron Yeshiva, and a well known and beloved personality in the Jerusalem community. He was imprisoned in the Kishle because he not only studied the Holy Writ, but also tried to penetrate their implication."

"A year ago, he was released and placed under House Arrest. Following the King David explosion, he was sent to Latrun where he taught the Talmud to his fellow detainees, and Mr. David Remez, chairman of the Vaad Haleumi, was among his disciples."

"Now the Rabbi will teach the Exiles of Cyprus the meaning of the Scriptural verse: "This (Promised) land have I given to you as an inheritance."

I flew to Cyprus in a British Military Transport with a stop-over in Cairo, and was picked up at the Larnaca Airport by an army sergeant who took me to a hotel in Famagusta. He informed me that he would be at my service during my stay on the Island.

For some reason, known only to them, the British authorities preferred that I stay in a hotel rather than in the camps proper. The following morning, the same driver took me to the Camps where I met with a committee representing the various camps around Famagusta. The people complained about the housing conditions in the camps. They said that except for the absence of Gas Chambers, the physical conditions in the camps on Cyprus were worse than those in the Nazi Death Camps in Europe. I later related their sentiments to the Camp Commander. In typical British coolness he said to me: "Rabbi, we are not interested in making their living conditions here too comfortable; on the contrary, the worse they feel here, and the sooner they relate these feelings to the European staging areas, the less of them will venture out for Palestine, and the better it will be for all of us here".

I had personally experienced British hospitality in three Palestinian prisons, and I was sure that the Captain meant every word he said. I knew that the life of these unfortunates would not be easy. I could only pray and hope that some satisfactory solution would be found to alleviate their suffering.

At a subsequent meeting with the Camps' representatives, we decided to establish an educational program within the camps by utilizing the manpower and talents which were available from among the permanent Jewish residents on the Island. Sanitary conditions did not allow us to perform circumcisions in the camps proper. The camp commander gave

us permission to take groups of children for circumcision in the Necosia hospital where they were left overnight, and to be brought back to their parents on the following day, when we took another group to the hospital. At the same meeting, we also established procedures for the registration and performance of weddings.

The most difficult days in the camps were when we expected the arrival of new contingents of refugees who were intercepted by the British navy. Very often, the refugees resisted their transfer from the refugee ships to the British vessels. The refugees were beaten into submission, and we had to treat those badly beaten and wounded people when they finally arrived in Cyprus.

One day, I was informed by the Camp Commander that another ship of refugees was about to arrive in Famagusta. He told me that he expected stiff resistance to their disembarkation, but he was determined to get them off the ship for transfer to the camps, and he appealed for my presence at the dock "to avoid casualties". I had no choice but to comply with his request, mainly to avoid casualties, if possible. The refugees at first refused to disembark. Through a loud speaker, I addressed those who were standing on the decks facing the port. I introduced myself as a Rabbi from Palestine, and as a representative of the Jewish people there. I expressed my hope that their stay in Cyprus would be brief, and I appealed to them to stay alive to eventually reach their desired destination. They disembarked peacefully, to the gratification of the Camp Commander and to my personal satisfaction, feeling that I probably saved some of my unfortunate brethren from additional suffering and physical harm.

I was standing at the bottom of the gang-plank. As the refugees were filing by, a man pulled me aside, saying: "I want to talk with you." He was of slight build, probably 30-35 years old, but he looked like an old man with sunken eyes. With his right hand he held on to a stick which was placed over his

shoulder, with a small wrapped up bundle, *a Torballe* hanging from the other side of the stick. The following brief conversation took place between us in Yiddish:

He: Are you a Rov (Rabbi) from Palestine?

I: I am, and I bring you regards and good wishes from there.

He: Did you ever hear of Slutzk? (a Lithuanian city).

I: Of course I did, and I know of the great Slutzker Yeshiva. We even had several Slutzker students in our *Yeshiva* in Jerusalem.

He: Rebbe, I want you to know that all Jews of Slutzk are dead, and that I am the only survivor.

And with these shocking words ringing in my ears, he turned around and joined the line of refugees marching towards the lorries that would take them to the camps. I subsequently learned that he was not the only survivor of that great center of Jewish life and learning, that about ten or fifteen Jews had managed to escape from the Slutzk Ghetto before its destruction. I have seen that young/old man a thousand times in my dreams over the last fifty years, and I have related the story of that encounter to each congregation I served, usually on Yom Kippur day before *Yizkor* – Memorial Service, and to all people who were willing to listen.

For a while all seemed to be going well in the camps. I settled into a routine which served the religious needs of the confined detainees, and it gave me the personal satisfaction of a job well done under very difficult circumstances. I did have a problem of Kosher food. Lunch I shared with the camp people who maintained a Kosher kitchen for those who wanted it, but breakfast and dinner I had to fend for myself in the non-Kosher eateries of Famagusta. Fortunately, I located a restaurant owned by a Cypriot Moslem who understood my dietary requirements, and fed me well with fruits and vegetables, with milk and

Kosher canned fish. Occasionally, I spent an afternoon on the beautiful Famagusta beach, near the hotel where the Egyptian King Farouk spent his summer vacation. I also officiated at several weddings in the presence of hundreds of camp people. And then, quite unexpectedly, my work and my very presence in the camps became problematic, almost impossible, due to the misery of the refugees on one hand, and the sheer cruelty of the British authorities on the other hand, as well as to my own youthfulness and naivete.

There were a great number of pregnant women in the camps who requested of the camp authorities to provide them with fresh fruits and vegetables, but their request was denied, as might have been expected. Then, someone came up with a brilliant idea. Since the Rabbi was coming to the camp each day, and on some days even several times a day, why not have him fill up his large station wagon with fresh fruits and vegetables, and the women would divide the produce among themselves. Logically, I should have checked out this idea with the Camp Commander. However, I knew that he would not grant the request and, once he said "no", I could no longer do it. And how could I say "no" to these unfortunate people. So, against my better judgement, I said "yes". Said and done! Each day a committee of the women handed me a sum of money, and on the following morning, when the military driver picked me up at the hotel, we first stopped at the open market, filled up the wagon with fresh produce, and off to the camp we drove. The women met us at the gate, and removed the produce from the car for distribution among the participants.

Soon thereafter, the boom was lowered when I was summoned to the office of the Camp Commander, who said: "Rabbi, I am aware of what you have been up to during the last few days. I once told you that we are not interested in making the life of these people any easier than it is. You have been taking advantage of your free access to the camps which we have granted you for your honor as Rabbi; but, unless you

promise me on your honor that you will refrain from bringing any foodstuffs into the camps, I will order to have your car searched upon your entrance, and all items will be confiscated."

I had no choice but to comply with his orders, and so informed the committee, but they did not believe me, and instead assumed that I did not want the extra work. When I arrived the following morning with an empty car, several women greeted me with shouts (in Yiddish) "*Do Geit Der ongefresinner* – Here comes the well-fed one". No amount of pleading helped me in convincing these unfortunate people that my hands were tied. The Jewish camp leaders and elders could see what was happening, but they, too, were powerless against the emotional outburst of these suffering women. I was perhaps too sensitive about their reaction, but I felt that my position had been compromised, and that my influence upon the inhabitants of the camps would no longer be as effective at it had been before this incident. Right or wrong, I began thinking of returning to Jerusalem.

Chapter Sixteen

DIVINE PROVIDENCE TAKES ME TO AMERICA

Shortly thereafter, I got word from Jerusalem that my efforts to obtain a student visa to the United States got a boost from an unexpected source. To the rescue came the married sister of my Hebron Yeshiva *Chavruta* (Study Companion), Reb Feivel Frank, son of the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, Rabbi Zvi Pessach Frank. Reb Feivel's sister, Mrs. Gevaryahu Lando, of Chicago was on an extended visit with her parents in Jerusalem, and I had been a frequent visitor to that home. I once confided to Mrs. Lando my yearning for a university education in the U.S.A. Her husband was a *Rosh Yeshiva* (Dean) of the *Bet Midrash LeTorah* of Chicago, and I asked her whether she could get me a student visa through him.

At the time, I thought that my appeal had fallen on deaf ears. She did not say "yes" and she did not say "no", but her reluctance did not surprise me. After all, why should anyone want to help a young man to leave *Eretz Yisrael*? She herself had left years earlier to join her husband, and always yearned to return, as witnessed by her frequent visits and extended stays in Jerusalem. So, why should she play a role in encouraging a young man to leave for the *Galut* (Diaspora)? Her change of mind must have been the result of my plight in the Latrun Detention Camp, and that alone moved her to intercede with her husband to get me out of Palestine. Word reached me in Cyprus that several legal papers had arrived from the American Embassy in Jerusalem.

In view of this sudden turn of events, coupled with my precarious situation in the Camps, I forwarded an application to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem for my return home. Luckily, a

suitable substitute Rabbi was soon found, and I was flown back to Jerusalem. I reported to Mr. Ben Zvi on the physical and religious conditions in Cyprus. Mr. Ben Zvi expressed his gratitude for my services, and asked in which way the Agency could possibly compensate me for my work. I told him that I expected a student visa from Chicago, and I would appreciate his efforts in obtaining for me a scholarship to the University of Chicago. Mr. Ben Zvi promised to help. And he did!

First, he helped in procuring a British/Palestinian Passport. With a police file over my head – containing whatever they had on me as a suspect of terrorist activities – the prospect of getting a Passport and an Exit Visa were poor indeed, and the American Embassy insisted on my having both documents before they would even consider the granting of a student visa. Mr. Ben Zvi

Required Document for Travel Abroad

and the Jewish Agency came to my aid by guaranteeing the British authorities that I would indeed leave the country if they granted me the papers requested by the American Embassy. Soon thereafter, I received the Palestinian Passport which I still have, with an Exit Visa stamped in it. A few days later, I was invited to the US Embassy to process the papers for the student visa.

News travelled fast, and all friends and neighbors soon knew that Avreimel has a visa to the United States. Wherever I went, people asked: "Are you still here? What are you waiting for?" With the rising tempo of underground activity against the Mandatory government, even my parents would have welcomed my early departure for the United States rather than face the prospect of another round in the Kishle prison or the Latrun detention barracks. But they, more than anyone else, knew why I was still in Jerusalem. I simply did not have the one hundred British Pounds ($500.) for a one-way ticket from Haifa to New York. Worse yet, there seemed to be no prospect of ever getting it. But once again Providence provided the means.

One day, I went to the restaurant of my good friend and pupil, Sh'lomo Feferberg. He, too, had heard of my visa, and he understood why I had not departed. As soon as he saw me he said: "Avreimel, if I had the money, I would give it to you or lend it to you, but one hundred pounds is a lot of money even for me. However, you know Mr. Remez, and Mr. Remez could help you if he wants to. Why don't you talk to him?" Sh'lomo was a very pragmatic person and a real friend. He opened the restaurant register, handed me twenty *Pyaster* (one dollar), the cost of a round trip bus-ticket from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, and said: "The Egged bus terminal is across the street. Take the bus to Tel Aviv, and call Mr. Remez from the station. I think you will be surprised."

I took the twenty *Pyaster* and did as Sh'lomo suggested. Two hours later I called Mr. Remez from the bus station. Mr. Remez himself answered the phone, and immediately invited me

to his home. He welcomed me warmly. "Could I get a lesson in Talmud tonight", he asked laughingly, "and now I am ready to pay for it with an evening meal." My father wouldn't have drunk a cup of water in Mr. Remez' *treife* (non-Kosher) home, but I was liberal enough to join him in a typical Israeli evening repast of bread, cottage cheese with olives, and a glass of tea. During dinner, Mr. Remez said to me: "*K'vod Harav* (Your Honor), in Latrun you spoke about going to the United States. Have you done anything about it?" I brought him up to date, telling him that I had a visa and a passport, in both of which Mr. Ben Zvi had been very helpful, but I am missing one little thing," I concluded, almost choking on my words. "Don't say any more", Mr. Remez interrupted me, and then continued, "You will sleep here tonight. I am an early riser, and when you wake up I will have left the house, but I shall wait for you at the *Histadrut* (Israel Labor Union) office. Try to be there at eight."

I entered Mr. Remez' office at eight o'clock the following morning. After an informal greeting – inquiring whether I slept well and whether I had breakfast, he asked me straight forward: "How much is a one-way ship-ticket to the States?" "One hundred Pounds", I replied. Without saying another word, Mr. Remez sat down at his desk, and after a minute or two he handed me a small piece of paper which he had torn off from the corner of a used envelope, and said: "Please take this note to Mr. Lubyaniker's (later, Mr. Lavon) office at the Palestine Bank. I will ring him while you are on the way, and he will receive you."

I quickly peeped into the piece of paper containing just two brief lines, saying: "Please give Rabbi Abraham Ehrlich one hundred Pounds on my account. D. Remez."

My eyes immediately overflowed with tears, and in a trembling voice I said to him: "Mr. Remez, why are you doing this? The Jewish Agency spends large sums of money to bring young people to Palestine, and you give me a hundred Pounds

to leave". Mr. Remez answered in the following words which I will never forget:

> "United States Jewry is the largest and finest Jewish community in Jewish history since the Babylonian diaspora, but they are short of Jewish knowledge. If I had money and could find the suitable people to do the job, I would send them several hundred Rabbis and teachers like yourself. You said that you wanted to be a Rabbi in the United States, and I want to help you get there, but I want you to promise me that you will also take interest in Jewish education, especially on the elementary and high school levels. I also want you to promise that upon graduation from the university, you will *not* return to Palestine, but remain in the U.S. as Rabbi and teacher."

And then, as though in an after-thought, he added: "I am not giving you a present, as I don't have this kind of money. This is a loan to be paid after you complete your studies and begin to work." When he saw the tears flowing down my cheeks, he pushed me out of his office, saying: "Go in peace, and Good Luck! Keep me informed of your progress."

I was now ready for my adventurous journey abroad for which I had mentally prepared myself for the past 5-6 years. I bought a second-hand modern suit and a Winter coat. My entire wardrobe and all personal belongings fitted into one small suitcase. As long as I shall live, I will remember the day I took leave of my parents for my departure to America.

They accompanied me to the number "2" bus which stood outside the gate of the *Deutcher Platz*, about one hundred meters from our home, and there – on the street leading from our home to the bus – we took leave of one another. My mother stood with her hands folded in front of her, and said: "*Avroom, foor gezinter-hait, ich bin zicher az mir velin zich mer nisht zein* – Go in good health. I am sure we will never see each other again." She shed a few tears, and turned away. It was indeed the last

time I saw her. My father shook hands with me in a very formal way, and blessed me in the traditional Hebrew words: "*Tzes-chem U-vo-achem L'Sholom* – Go in peace and come back in peace." There, they remained standing, while I walked the last fifty meters to the bus by myself.

For the life of me, I cannot recall what else father said to me, if anything at all. Was I surprised by the formality and passivity between my parents and myself? I know that I could not possibly have been touched by my mother; it just was not done! She probably had not touched me affectionately ever since I reached maturity, at the age of six or seven. But what about my father? He loved me with his heart and soul – something I never doubted even when we argued on ritual and philosophical matters. So, why didn't he express it at that dramatic moment with anything more than a formal handshake? And why didn't he say anything that I could and would remember? And why didn't I embrace him? It just goes to demonstrate what years of conditioning can do to us.

On the other hand, I recall with gratitude my good friend and learning *Chavruta* (companion), Reb Nathan Greenblatt,

With Nathan Greenblatt on the Day I Left for the U.S.A.

a young American Talmudic scholar who had come to study at the Hebron Yeshiva. He accompanied me from Jerusalem to Haifa, and stayed with me until I boarded the ship.

It was a rainy Winter day, towards the end of December 1946, on which I boarded the ship that would transport me to a new world – a lone young man, twenty-three years old, a child from a Chassidic home in the old city of Jerusalem, and a product of the Chassidic Chayei Olam Talmud Torah, on his way to the greatest country on earth, and to the famous University of Chicago. The ship itself did not help in assuaging my feelings on that day. It was a rather small U.S. Liberty ship, originally built for military transports, and now sailing under the Egyptian flag with an Egyptian crew on its maiden voyage from Haifa to New York. I had an upper third tier berth in the lowest deck – a windowless basement, with no air to breathe and few bathroom facilities.

We left Haifa towards the evening hours. The following morning we picked up more passengers in Beirut, Lebanon. Four days later, we stopped in Gibraltar for supplies and more passengers, and then headed for the Atlantic ocean with 900 passengers on board – much too many for a small vessel. It was very crowded, and each morning people got up very early to secure a sitting space in one of the small lounges. If, for any reason, you relinquished your seat, you could then search in vain for hours to find another place.

I do not remember meeting any religious people on board, nor do I recall participating in a religious service during the entire journey. We did not have any Kosher facilities, and I do not now understand how I sustained myself for three weeks. As a matter of fact, there is precious little that I do remember about this journey. I often theorized that because events moved so swiftly and so unexpectedly in the previous two months, and because I was so uncertain and apprehensive of what lay ahead, I became so numb to my surroundings that I now have few

memories or recollections of those three weeks on the ship. Only two things are still engraved on my mind.

The first is the thought of how close we had come to real calamity. After a few days in the Atlantic we were overtaken by a fierce storm which tossed the ship around like a box of matches, and flooded the lower decks with water. The ship was tied up with six-inch thick ropes in case of a break up, and passengers were not allowed on upper outside decks lest they be swept over board. For three days we were without contact with the outside world, and when the sea finally calmed down we were informed that we were about a thousand miles off course. The usual fourteen days journey from Haifa to New York lasted twenty one days, and during the last six days the nine hundred passengers subsisted on potatoes and sardines.

I also remember the only silver lining on this grey journey, a gentleman by the name of Henry Kirsch. Henry was of East European extraction who came to the United States before the outbreak of World War II, and did rather well in the diamond trade in his newly found home. He had come to Palestine at the end of 1946 to meet with Jewish diamond merchants from Antwerp, Belgium, and was now returning home on the Liberty ship. I do not recall the circumstances under which we met, but I do remember that we kept company for most of the three weeks aboard ship. He was a family man, father of two grown children, and about twice my age, but we had much in common, primarily because of our Eastern European origins and of our similar modern religious persuasions. At the end of the journey he offered to sell me a diamond ring at wholesale price if and when I met the proper Jewish girl. A year later I took him up on his offer, but the nice girl I had found thought that the diamond was too ostentatious for her. My girl and I kept in touch with Henry and his family until his demise in 1960.

Chapter Seventeen

MEETING MY AMERICAN FAMILY

We arrived in New York harbor on a Saturday morning. Most people quickly disembarked and disappeared. A handful remained on board because of the Sabbath. Since I did not expect to be met by anyone, and I would not travel on the Sabbath anyway, spending the day on deck was more appealing than sitting in an empty and cold pier, and so I too remained on the ship.

Standing on the deck at 10:00 AM, and looking towards the pier, I saw a man and a woman waving towards me. A few moments later, a porter brought me a message saying that the couple waving to me were my uncle's son and daughter-in-law, David and Helen Ehrlich, who had come to welcome me, and that they would wait for me until after the Sabbath.

In 1945, I wrote to my American uncle, my father's brother, to ask whether he, or one of his children, would be willing to send me an affidavit and visa to enter the United States. I told him of my education and rabbinic training to assure him that I would not become a financial burden to them. Instead of answering me, he wrote to my father to congratulate him on my achievement, and concluded with the biblical phrase with which Jacob greeted his long-lost son, Joseph, and his children saying: "I had not thought to see your face, and behold God let me also see your seed." *(Gen. 48:11)* Though not addressed to me, the implication of the letter was very encouraging. It meant that my uncle would try to send the necessary papers to procure an entrance visa to the USA, and for several months I eagerly awaited the letter carrier. Finally, I received a post-card from my uncle, this time addressed to me, in which he quoted a Talmudic adage: "Love labor, and hate the rabbinate." *(Pirkei Avot 1:10)* The correct translation of the Hebrew term "*rabbanut*" in that

saying is "hate mastery", but my uncle (from ignorance or on purpose) translated it as 'rabbinate', and then continued to advise me to forget about being a rabbi, and instead learn a trade. I never wrote to him again, and I had decided that, should I ever reach the United States, I would never have any contact with him. I stuck to my resolution, and did not advise him of my coming to the States. My father had apparently decided to break my self-imposed silence, and notified his brother of my coming, and these two good people volunteered to spend a cold winter day of below-zero temperature and three feet of snow on the ground to welcome an unknown cousin.

Did they come with my uncle's blessing and encouragement, or did they do it against his wish? I never asked and never came to a definite conclusion. I was deeply moved by their kindness and, at that moment, that was all that mattered. However, their presence at the pier put me in a quandary of sorts, in a real dilemma, because the port authorities refused to allow them to join me on board ship for the day. Was I to let them sit on the pier alone for the next eight hours? On the other hand, it was the Sabbath, and one is not allowed to cross over from one domain to another – from sea to land on the Sabbath. I do not now recall what *Halachic* reasoning convinced me that I could disembark in the New York harbor on that particular occasion. Perhaps the *pilpulistic Yeshiva Bachur* in me came to the conclusion that since the ship was fastened to the pier, and thus afforded a direct access from one to the other without touching or crossing the water, I could consider the ship and the pier as one domain, and I was thus permitted to disembark. Be it as it may, that is what I did.

I came off the ship without carrying anything because my single suitcase had been taken off by the stewards, and I was warmly embraced by my cousins from across the ocean. It was literally freezing on the pier, but I was warmed by their unreserved and open expressions of love – a love which we took for granted in our home as well, but was never openly expressed

in any physical shape or form whatsoever. My cousins must have been surprised by the Rabbi's disembarkation on the Sabbath, even as I was somewhat surprised to discover cousins who travelled on the Sabbath, something uncommon in the Jerusalem branch of the Ehrlich family. At that moment, I was happy that my father did what he did in notifying my uncle of my coming, though I had asked him not to do it. My father was wiser and more practical, and he wanted his Avreimel to be welcomed in the strange land, even as our patriarch, Jacob, was welcomed at the well of Haran by his beloved cousin, Rachel.

My English vocabulary was quite limited, but my cousins spoke Yiddish, and for the next eight hours we sat in the cold pier and spoke about our parents and our families, about Palestine and America. After sunset, I was driven to my uncle's home on Georgia Avenue in Brooklyn – passing the snow-covered streets of New York – a novelty for a man who just arrived from the Middle East. We crossed the Williamsburgh Bridge – the first symbol I saw of American *bigness* when compared to the B'nai Jacob bridge across the Jordan river in Palestine.

My uncle's physique was similar to my father's – short and stocky, but in every other way he was the complete opposite. He was shaven, with a small goatee, and the white hair on his head was combed back in a plait – which my father would have frowned upon. He was immaculately dressed in a modern suit as against my father's Chassidic garb. Unlike my father's reserved formality, my uncle was demonstratively warm as he embraced me and expressed his delight in seeing me. But he also noted the ill health of his wife, my aunt, of whom we had heard in Palestine, and had thought very favorably of her even without having met her. As children, we heard it said at home that my uncle's periodic gifts to my father increased since his marriage to his second wife, a fact which was attributed to her own kindness and her influence upon my uncle. I now saw that our impression of her was well founded. As soon as my uncle

stepped aside for a moment, my aunt whispered to me that I should not pay attention to him about her illness, and that I could stay with them as long as I wanted.

My uncle and aunt lived very modestly. I remember thinking to myself: Is this all that America has to offer? I never discussed it with anyone, neither with my uncle nor with his children, but it had been hinted now and then that the uncle had been well off financially in his own business, but had lost everything in the crash of 1929, and has worked as an employee in his son's fur shop ever since.

The following morning, I was picked up by my uncle's older son, cousin Abe, the rich man in the family, who took me to his sister, Rosy Ruck, for what I later learned to identify as a typical American Sunday Breakfast – cold orange juice straight from the refrigerator, eggs, fresh rolls, coffee and cake. In Palestine we would have called it a Solomonic Feast – a feast fit for a king. Later on we were joined by Rosy's three younger sisters and their families who genuinely rejoiced with the appearance of their *green cousin* from Palestine. In the afternoon, Abe took me for a walk to show me how to cross the street (there were no traffic lights in Palestine at that time), and to buy me a warm overcoat, suitable for a New York Winter.

I stayed with my aunt and uncle for the next four weeks, with occasional visits to Abe's fur shop on weekdays, and on *Shabbat* I stayed with Abe or his sister, Ann Lustrin, both of whom were Sabbath observers and had Kosher homes. At the end of the fourth week, I was told that my aunt was to be admitted to the hospital for surgery, and that I would be moved over to Rosy's house. Rosy and her husband, Sam, were warm and kindly people. Their children were about my own age, and I was treated as one of the family. I felt very much at home with them, but after a while I decided that the time had come to make my way to Chicago, my original destination.

I was well received by the dean of the Seminary, Rabbi Greenberg, who explained to me the curriculum of the rabbinic department and the dual program with the University of Chicago. As far as I personally was concerned, Rabbi Greenberg was of the opinion that the rabbinic school had nothing to offer me after six years of intensive Talmudic studies at the Hebron Yeshiva of Jerusalem, and that I could not take advantage of my scholarship at Chicago University because of my inadequate knowledge of English, adding: "The American Consulate in Jerusalem should never have issued you a student visa because you cannot follow class instructions."

It did not take him long to convince me that he was right on both counts. He provided me with a document which would allow me to stay in the country on my student visa until such time when I could enroll at the university. Back to New York I went to try my hand at the second objective of my coming to the U.S.A. – to seek a rabbinic position – and here too I met with a few unpleasant disappointments.

Chapter Eighteen

FIRST EXPOSURE TO AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS

Responding to an advertisement in the Jewish Journal for a Yiddish speaking Rabbi, I went to see the president of the congregation, an East European person, the owner of a dry-goods store on East Broadway in Manhattan. After a thirty-second encounter, he said to me: "I am sorry, Rabbi, but *ve vant* an American Rabbi, who *spicks* English *vell.*" Well, I said to myself as I walked away: "If I cannot meet the language requirements of this East European merchant, what chance will I have in an English speaking congregation?" And back to the books I went to study English ten hours a day (as I used to do in Talmud), while seeking help wherever I could find it – from cousins who were willing to listen to my reading, and from tutors who did not ask too much money for their lessons.

Two months later, when I felt that I could pass an interview in English, I again responded in writing to an advertisement for a *Rabbi/Shochet* (ritual slaughterer) in Alabama[1]. American congregations often look for a *Shochet/Mohel* (circumciser), or for a Cantor/*Mohel*, or a Rabbi/School Principal, but a Rabbi/*Shochet* sounded like a rare combination, and I therefore felt that I had a good chance to get this position. Several days later, I received a telegram from Alabama directing me to contact the community respresentatives at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. I called them in the evening, and was invited to meet the people the following morning. When I

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1. I knew the Laws of *Shechitah*/Ritual Slaughtering from my rabbinic training, and I learned the practical aspects before I left for Cyprus "just in case I needed it." I also received "*Kabbalat Shechitah*" from several Rabbis who granted me Rabbinic Ordination/*Semicah*. It never occurred to me that I might have to use it to procure a position.

stepped into the hotel lobby, I said to myself: "Avreimel, you have come a long way in a short time, from the hovels of Old Jerusalem to the Waldorf-Astoria." At 10:00 AM, I was ushered into the room of two gentlemen still dressed in their pajamas, and apparently recovering from a heavy hangover of the night before. They were utterly surprised by my appearance, and burst out in hilarious laughter. After a moment, they apologized and explained their uncivilized reaction. American Jews, they told me, are accustomed to youthful and clean shaven Rabbis, but a *Shochet* – so young and clean shaven – *that* they had not expected. They called the congregation president in Alabama to report on *what* was standing before them, and then told me that the congregation would be happy to meet me. We went down for a cup of coffee, and then proceeded to an Eastern Airlines office for flight arrangements to Alabama on the following morning.

The president of the congregation received me at the airport and drove me to the fashionable Kings hotel, a non-Kosher place. Breakfast and lunch I managed with vegetables and canned sardines, and for dinner I was invited to Kosher homes. On Friday night, my Sabbath host walked with me to the Synagogue for the *Late* Friday Evening Services[1]. We were the first to arrive. The building was pitch dark, and my host proceeded to put on the lights in the Synagogue. I was only several months away from Jerusalem and the Hebron Yeshiva, now witnessing the flagrant violation of the Sabbath within (what was advertised as) an Orthodox Synagogue. I was so numbed by what I witnessed, that I could not utter a sound.

On *Shabbat* morning, the president took his place on the *Bimah* (Pulpit) near the Torah, to assign the *Aliyot* (Torah honors) to the worshippers. He also extended a warm welcome

1. Sabbath Evening services are traditionally held at sunset. In America, Friday night is a major business night, and stores are usually open until 8-9 PM. In many Jewish congregations, whose members are local merchants, the Sabbath Evening services are held after the store closing hours. Hence, "*Late Services*".

to the visiting Rabbi, and expressed his hope that there would be a good *Shidduch* (match) between the Rabbi and the congregation. After the services, as we crossed the threshold of the Synagogue on the way out, the president pulled out a large cigar from his vest pocket, and I, instinctively, shouted out: "Mr. President, it is *Shabbos*!" Mr. Pres. was embarrassed, but not greatly perturbed, and in a beautiful *Litvish Yiddish* he taught me a telling lesson in American Jewish life. "Rebbe", he said to me, "I have to be president of this congregation like I need a hole in the head. I am the owner of a large department store in town, and I should really be there at this time. But, my father was the founder of this Synagogue, and he feels honored when I serve as president. Speaking for myself, I hope that you will stay with us. If you do, I promise you that I will not interfere with your work, but you will have to promise me not to interfere with my personal life habits." To his credit it must be said that he returned the cigar to his pocket. American Jews are usually very respectful of their rabbis. He pulled out his cigar from habit; he wouldn't have lit it in front of me, and I am sure that he regretted the incident.

On Monday, I met with the Board of Trustees of the congregation, and was invited to stay on at an annual salary of $7,000., a lot of money in 1947 for a young man who a few months earlier could not raise $500. for boat fare to the United States. I pondered over the offer for several days, and came to the conclusion that it was not for me – a single man in a non-Jewish environment, and with a non-observant gentleman presiding over the congregation. On Thursday, I conveyed my decision to the president. He expressed regrets, although he knew I would not stay, so he said, and then added: "Before you leave, you ought to be paid for the week", and wrote out a check for $150. This was the first money I earned in the States, a third of which I immediately sent to my parents in Jerusalem. It was a great feeling, knowing that for the next few weeks mother would have enough money to prepare for *Shabbat*.

During these few months, I was carrying around a letter which Mr. Remez addressed to Mr. Hayim Greenberg who was a member of the Zionist Executive and served as the Jewish Agency representative in the United States. In this letter, Mr. Remez asked of Mr. Greenberg to extend to me whatever assistance I might need. It was certainly a golden opportunity which should have been taken advantage of, but for one reason or other which I do not now recall, I never went to see him. Perhaps because I was not inclined towards the left wing of *Mapai* in the Zionist Movement. Very often, when I do think of it, I tend to believe that it was a mistake not to have taken advantage of it, at least to try. Who knows what might have happened.

It reminds me of a remark which my uncle once conveyed to me in the name of Rabbi Nissan Talushkin, who was my uncle's Rabbi. I arrived in the U.S. just before *Purim* (Feast of Esther), and Rabbi Talushkin invited me to give a *D'var Torah* (Torah Discourse) on *Shabbat Zachor* (Sabbath of Remembrance) before *Purim*. The Rabbi then remarked to my uncle that I would have a hard time in getting established in the States because no one can do it without assistance, and I give the impression of "personal independence", as though I do not need any one. "People are not inclined to offer assistance unless the intended recipient shows that he needs it and wants it", said the Rabbi to my uncle, "and this young Rabbi is too proud to show it, and to ask for it."

Rabbi Talushkin may have spoken of himself, because he was a leading Rabbinic personality at the time, and would gladly have helped me for my uncle's sake; but, after that *Shabbat*, I never went to see him or to ask for anything, until many months later when he went to Palestine and I asked him to see my father. The fact that I never made use of Remez' letter to Greenberg confirms Rabbi Talushkin's observation on a flaw in my personality.

Chapter Nineteen

A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

(on Columbia St.)

And so back to New York I came for a brief stay with cousins Rosy and Sam Ruck, an unexpected move which turned out to be of lucky and happy consequences to my entire life. Rosy's daughter grew up with a girl-friend by the name of Pearl Ulman. In their childhood years, the two girls went to school together and used to visit each other frequently, but of late they had not seen one another for several years. One day, Sam Ruck met Pearl on Columbia Street, where the Rucks lived, and invited her to come up for a visit. Pearl accepted the invitation, and five months later Pearl and I were engaged to be married. Again Providence? Could this have been the reason why I did not get involved with Hayim Greenberg?

Pearl was the daughter of a mild-mannered, Chassidic and scholarly gentleman, Mr. David Ulman, and of Mrs. Channah Ulman, a typical East European Chassidic woman who was "happy with the lot" which her husband provided, or did not provide for her. Pearl once told me that in earlier years her father had undertaken several business ventures which failed becuase of his refusal to work on Sabbath. When I met him, Mr. Ulman maintained a schedule completely out of character of any American Jew I ever knew, but to me he was a man after my own heart.

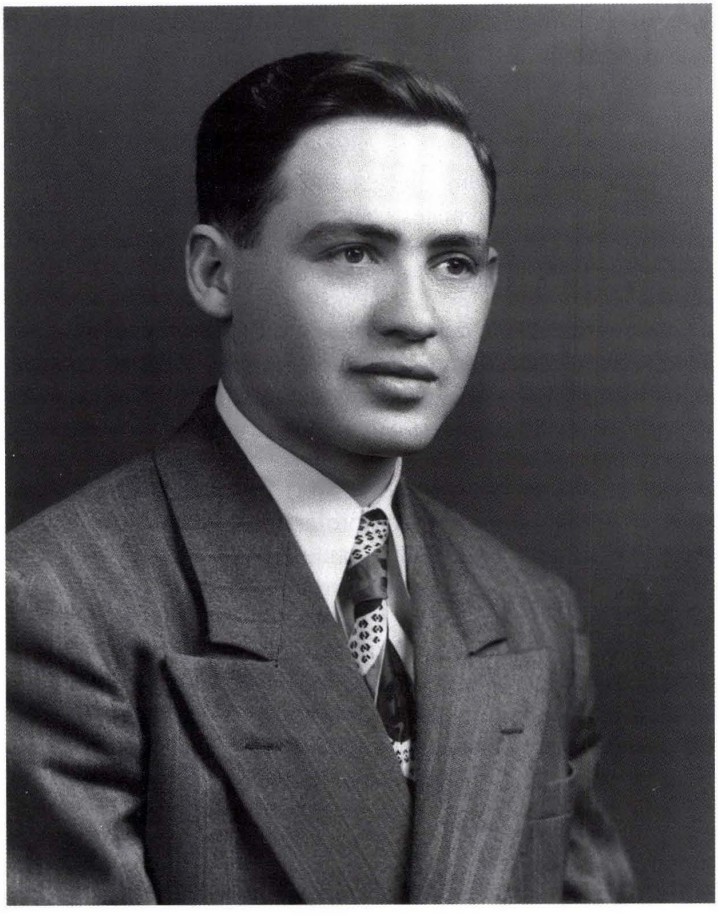
He got up every morning at five o'clock, and went to *Schule* to lead a group of like-minded people in the study of Talmud. After the morning service at 8:00 AM, he stopped off at the grocery store to pick up a few fresh rolls for the children (his wife did not touch bread until it was several days old). He always began his breakfast with a small glass of *schnaps*, and

off to work he went – peddling dry goods in newly developing neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens. He went from door to door until he earned his commission of about $25., the amount he thought he needed to maintain his family, and which he usually accomplished by noontime. Thereupon, he returned home for lunch and a brief nap, and back to *Schule* he went for further study of Talmud until after the evening service. Twenty five years of living in America did not raise the standard of living of the Ulman family above that of the average family in Eastern Europe, or that of a better-to-do family in Old Jerusalem; but David and Channah Ulman succeeded in accomplishing what most American Jews did not. They raised two sons and two daughters as devout and religiously observant Jews, in addition to being decent and ethical people, who later married like-minded mates, and raised traditional Jewish families. All in all, a most rare accomplishment on the Jewish-American scene.

During our dating days, Pearl told me that in her youth she had foresworn ever marrying a *foreigner*, or a *short* man, or anyone named *Abe* – a name she disliked. In may 1947, she met me with all of these *shortcomings*, but I was lucky not to be rejected out of hand. We went out several times during the following few weeks. In June 1947, I accepted a position as Rabbi and *Baal Tefillah* (non-professional Cantor) with the *Anshe S'farad* congregation in Scranton, Pa., a Yiddish speaking community of Galician Jews. I wrote to *Poirel* (spelling her name as it was pronounced by her parents) to express my regrets at the distance between us, but she encouraged me to stay in touch, quoting the American maxim "Distance is no object". I travelled that distance between Scranton and New York quite often during the following months. In October 1947, we were officially engaged, and set a wedding date for December 28th.

I went to Henry Kirsch to tell him of my engagement. He remembered his promise to sell me a diamond ring at cost price, and offered me a stone originally priced at $1,200., for $700.,

to be paid for when I could afford it. I called Pearl to get the size of her finger so that the stone could be properly set, but Pearl refused to accept the ring, saying: "Abe, you do not have the money to pay for it and, when you can save some money, it would be better spent on helping your parents than on an expensive ring." An unusual American girl of unusual European parents. Pearl told me that she had learned it from her mother



who used to send money to her parents in Poland even when there was very little of it at home. Pearl got her diamond ring twenty five years later. In 1970, when we went to purchase an engagement ring for our son to present to his chosen bride, I insisted on purchasing another ring for my bride as a replacement for the ring she had turned down twenty five years earlier.

I wrote to my parents about my engagement. I described to them the kind of family my bride came from, and how she refused to accept the engagement ring. In response, my father wrote to Pearl that he is sending her a "diamond husband" in exchange for her being the daughter of a *Talmid Chochom* (Talmudic Scholar) and for her being of sterling gold qualities. In November 1947, Rabbi Nissan Talushkin, Rabbi of the Georgia Avenue Synagogue, where my uncle attended Services, went for a visit to Palestine. At my request, he went to see my parents, and my father invited him to officiate at my wedding, as it was customary in our circles for the bridegroom's family to choose the officiating Rabbi at the wedding ceremony.

In Scranton, I befriended the most wonderful family I ever had the good fortune to know. Mr. Chayim Marcus came to America at the beginning of the century and worked in a Scranton bakery for five dollars a week, but within a few years he managed to save up enough money to bring from Europe his wife and his children, Paul, Tillie and Helen. When I came to Scranton in 1947, I was immediately adopted by the entire Marcus family. On each weekday, I was invited for dinner either to the home of Paul Marcus and his wife, Rose, or by his sister, Tillie Weiss and her husband Paul. For the meals on Sabbaths and Holidays, I had a standing invitation from Mr. and Mrs. Chayim Marcus, while their children and respective families joined us for the *Zemirot* (Hymns chanted during the meals) and dessert. Even after my marriage, Pearl and I continued to have all Sabbath and Holiday meals with these wonderful people.

My personal progress in America was overshadowed by the deteriorating situation in Palestine/Israel. Following the U.N. decision in the Fall of 1947 for the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, marauding military gangs of local Palestinian Arabs and Arab volunteers from neighboring Moslem countries laid siege to all country roads which went through Arab towns and villages, and to the isolated Jewish communities, such as the Old City of Jerusalem where my

family had lived since 1906. After the proclamation of Israel's independence in May 1948, the newly established State was invaded by six Arab countries with the declared aim of destroying it.

From the meager monthly salary which I received from my congregation, which consisted mainly of low income laboring people, I used to send *Maaser* (tithe) to my parents, but under the new circumstances it was no longer possible to send money through the regular mail services. Instead, I forwarded it to Jerusalem through Jewish merchants who had business in New York while their families continued to live in Jerusalem.

My older brother, Moshe Chayim z.l. decided to join this group of Jerusalemites Jews living in New York. A week before my wedding, I was surprised by a phone call from him that he was in Idlewild (present JFK) airport. Since I was out of town, I arranged to have him picked up by Rosy's son, because Rosy had agreed to house him for several weeks. As for me, I was just delighted to have at least one member of my immediate family at my forthcoming wedding.

My future in-laws came to Scranton for the *Aufruf* on the Sabbath before the wedding when the bridegroom is called to the Torah. The entire congregation of elderly people rallied for the celebration for, in all likelihood, there had not been an *Aufruf* in this synagogue for years or decades. The Service was followed by a festive *Kiddush* reception and a traditional Sabbath meal – all of which was lovingly prepared by the Ladies' Auxiliary of the congregation.

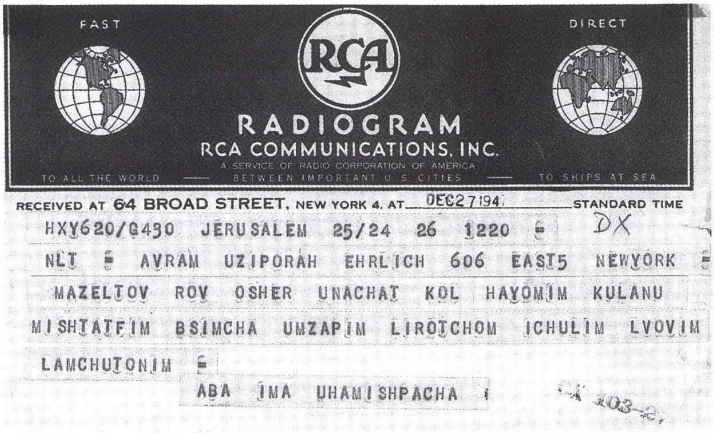
The entire Marcus clan, as well as the president of the congregation and members of the Board, accepted my invitation to the wedding on the morrow, at the Little Hungary Hall in Manhattan, New York. To our great chagrin, when we got up in the morning for our train ride to New York, we discovered that the entire Northeast was blanketed by a twenty-seven inch blizzard, the heaviest snow fall of the century. For a while it

looked as though none of us, not even the groom, would make it to New York. However, by mid-morning, Pennsylvania Railroad decided to venture out on the tracks, and we slowly reached our destination.

The bride was led to the *Chuppah* (wedding canopy) by her parents, while my New York hosts, cousins Rosy and Sam Ruck, substituted for my parents. I could not bestow the honor on my uncle because he was married to his second wife, and it was considered a bad omen for a new couple to be led to the *Chuppah* by a widower. Rabbi Talushkin officiated at the wedding as requested by my father. We spent our honeymoon (week) at the McAlpin hotel in Manhattan, and then returned to Scranton.

Pearl was warmly welcomed into the community. The Marcus women soon became our surrogate parents and in-laws. We rented an apartment in the Marcus complex in the Scranton Flats. Rose Marcus and Tillie Weiss helped Pearl in furnishing the apartment, and the elderly Marcuses extended a standing invitation to have all Sabbath and Holiday meals with them.

Going to the Wedding in the Blizzard: Moshe Chayim z.l. second from right, and cousin Daniel Lustrin, Best Man



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Greetings from my Parents
"Mazal Tov and Much Happiness. We Join you in the Celebration and Look Forward to Seeing You"

My Uncle and Aunt on the right, and Pearl's Mother, Left, at the Wedding Feast

Chapter Twenty

HOW I REMEMBER MY MOTHER, z.l.

In Chassidic societies of Eastern Europe, boys received their entire education in the *Cheder* and *Yeshiva*. Most of them never learned to write in the local language and, since they did not have any personal contact with the non-Jewish population, some of them did not even speak the language of the land in which they grew up. Not so with girls! Since they were not obligated to study Torah, girls were often given a secular education and were even allowed to attend public schools. There was also a practical side to this practice because women were often the main bread winners of the family in Chassidic societies, while their husbands were engaged in the study of Torah.

Amongst members of my Jerusalem family there was a rumor that mother had a general school education in Poland, and that she was able to communicate in Polish, both verbally and in writing. That rumor was never substantiated because she had no one with whom to converse in Polish. We never saw mother with a pen in her hand while at home, and neither did I expect to hear from her personally when I was away from home. Father, on the other hand, had a beautiful handwriting, and he wrote often, and at great length. I also enjoy writing, and so we wrote to one another almost every week, at least twice a month. Father wanted to know everything about my studies, my work and, now that I was married, also about my family. I, of course, was anxious to hear about the welfare of my parents and the entire family, especially in view of the disturbing events in Palestine. Father's letters were also a major source of uncensored news from Palestine.

The situation became more acute after the proclamation of Israel's independence in May 1948, and the invasion of the

newly established state by five neighboring Arab countries whose leaders were determined to crush Israel in its infancy. My parents and family were living in the eye of the storm – in the Old City of Jerusalem – which was under constant bombardment by the Jordanian Arab Legion. I was particularly concerned about the fate of my younger brother, Baruch, and my nephew, Yisralik, son of my oldest sister and only two days younger than Baruch, his uncle and friend. Both of them were active in the Irgun Z'va'ee Leumi underground, and I knew that they would be among the defenders of the Old City. As it turned out, Yisralik had been hit by an Arab sniper while manning a post on top of the famous Nissan Bak Synagogue, falling dead at his uncle's feet, and my brother fell into captivity to the Jordanians with the fall of the Old City soon after the establishment of Israel.

Jews had lived in Old Jerusalem for three thousands years, ever since its conquest by King David, and my parents lived there since 1906, but in 1948 the Jordanians declared Old Jerusalem *Yudenrein* (cleared of all Jewish residents). My parents, my sisters and their respective families, and all Jewish civilians of Old Jerusalem were evacuated to those quarters of new Jerusalem which were abandoned by Arab residents during the battle over the city. The Jewish evacuees were not allowed to take anything with them save the clothing on their backs.

The economic situation of my parents was desperate as was that of all Jerusalem residents now under Jordanian siege. Transfer of foreign currency to private people was prohibted by Israeli law, and I had to resort to clandestine means to forward some financial assistance to them. My check went to my brother, Moshe Chayim, in New York, who handed it over to his Jerusalemite friends, who notified their contacts in Jerusalem to hand over an equal amount in Israeli Pounds to my father. When my father wrote that he received regards from "Yoseph" I understood that he had received ten Pounds (the Hebrew letter "*Yod*" having the numerical value of 10). "Yoseph Hirsch"

meant 15 (with the Hebrew "*Hey*" for the numerical value of 5) and so on, using Hebrew letters as numbers, as we do with Roman numerals.

My father invariably began each letter with the same sentence, saying "I am happy to inform you of our well-being". I knew that it was not always so, especially in view of the shocking events transpiring daily in Israel in general and within the city of Jerusalem in particular. The disposition among members of my family was "not to be the bearers of sad tidings". And so, in the Fall of 1948, on the morrow after the Festival of *Simchat Torah*, out of the blue and without any warning, I received a telegram from my father, containing only four words: "*Zog Kaddish Far Mammen* – Say *Kaddish* for Mother", the prayer which is recited by a son on the demise of a parent. It came as a double shock. First, because I was not aware that she had been ailing and, second, because she was so young, only about sixty years of age (in our family we never asked and never knew the exact age of parents).

Under normal circumstances, I may not have been informed at all of mother's demise. In the Winter of 1972-3 my two older sisters died within six weeks of one another, and I did not know about it until the Summer of 1973. But these were not normal times, and none of my mother's three sons were at home to say *Kaddish* for her. My younger brother was in captivity somewhere in Jordan. My older brother was in Columbus, Ohio, and father did not have his address. I was the only one accessible, and so I was asked to say Kaddish.

Mine was also the task of finding Moshe Chayim. I did not believe in holding on to such secrets, and I thought that he too would want to say *Kaddish* for his mother. I knew that he was in Columbus, working as a fund-raiser for a New York Yeshiva, and would therefore be in touch with the local Rabbis there. I called the Long Distance telephone operator for a person-to-person call, and told her that my brother could be found among the rabbis of Columbus. Within twenty minutes

she had him on the phone, and mine was the misfortune of conveying the sad tidings to him, and thus force him to sit *Shivah* (seven days of mourning) all by himself, away from home and family. At the same time, I decided that Baruch should be spared this experience while in captivity. I shared my thoughts with my father. Surprisingly, he agreed with me, and Baruch did not know of his mother's death until his release from captivity several months later.

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Baruch went through a short debriefing by the Israeli army, and then joyfully made his way home with the anticipation of seeing his father and mother after those traumatic days of war, siege and separation, Suddenly, he was stopped by an eager news-bearer who congratulated Baruch upon his freedom, and then added: "But why are you so joyful? Don't you know that your mother is dead?"

The Talmud asks: "*Nashim Bamei Zachyon*? – By what virtue do women merit a share in the World to Come (Paradise)" seeing that they are not obligated to study Torah, or to fulfill many of the positive *Mitzvot* such as *Tallit* and *Tefillin*, etc.? And the Talmud responds: "By bringing their children to the House of Assembly, and sending their husbands to the House of Study" (Berachot 17a).

This is how I remember my mother, as a woman who devoted her entire life to her husband – so that he should be able to study Torah undisturbed, and to the upbringing of her children as decent and God fearing people. I do not recall her ever asking something for herself. It was as though she did not have a life of her own. When she was not in the kitchen preparing a meal for her husband and children, she sat for hours mending stockings and other clothing items. When she had free time, she read the *Tzeneh Ur-ena* – the Yiddish rendition of the Torah and commentaries, or the *T'china* – a Yiddish Book of Petitions for special occasions.

When we moved to the *Deutcher Platz* in 1937, her favorite sittting place was on a low stool on top of the stair-landing overlooking the *Batei Machsse* courtyard and the Mount of Olives. At the end of the day, when she saw me coming up the stairs from *Cheder*, she put aside whatever she had in hand, and entered the kitchen to dish out whatever she had prepared for supper. When she remained seated, I knew that she had nothing to cook, and I would have to fend for myself.

In the 1940s, mother was ailing, and she had a standing appointment in Hadassah Hospital every Friday. When my younger sister was married, I would prepare the soup for the Sabbath Eve meal when I came home from the *Yeshiva* for *Shabbos*.

Mother's Grave Stone on Har Hazeitim
There is no picture of mother
after the Family Portrait of 1922

I can still see her in her white dress and apron which she wore on the High Holy Days, holding in her hands a heavy *Machzor* (Holiday Prayerbook) with its Yiddish translation, with tears flowing profusely down her cheeks, sobbing and pleading aloud: "*Mein man zol zein gezund und sh'tark, und meinne kinder zolon zein gitte und herliche yidden* – Grant my husband good health and well-being, and may my children be good and devout Jews." The truth is that we were good children. Even when we hurt for want of this or that, we did not complain to mother because we were careful not to hurt her. And she too felt for us. If I did something of which she did not approve, she would merely say: "*Avroom, ess past nisht far dir* – It is not becoming behavior for someone like you". To say to us "*ess past nisht*" meant that she held us in high esteem, and a higher standard of behavior was expected of us. We tried to behave properly when she was with us, and today we pray that our memories of her may be an inspiration to all of us.

There comes to my mind another brief and revealing anecdote from those turbulent days of wars and State building in Israel. During the War of Liberation I received a telephone call from a woman I did not know. She identified herself by name, and as a sister of Mr. David Remez, minister of Communications in the first Israeli government. In a trembling voice she said: "I just arrived from Israel, and I bring you regards from my brother. You probably know, Rabbi, that it is not allowed to take out any foreign currency from Israel, and I came without any money. My brother told me that he had lent you some money, and he gave me permission to ask you for twenty five ($25.) dollars. Could you please do it?" I sent her the money that same day. How much does this incident reveal of the idealism, the honesty and the character of those (irreligious) early Zionist pioneers and State Builders of Israel, especially when compared to what we see today?

Chapter Twenty One

KNESSET ISRAEL OF WOOSTER, OHIO

After my marriage, I had the benefit of a "live-in" tutor in English. In addition, the Nun teachers of the St. Ann's Parochial School near our home happily assisted the eager Rabbi/Student in his mastery of the English language. I devoted to it every waking hour, and made rapid progress. With it came a renewed awakening of the purpose for which I had come to the States, and I soon reached two conclusions. First, that this Galician *Sh'tibel* (small East European synagogue) which I was now serving, would not advance me in my quest for a career in the American rabbinate; Second, that I would not get a rabbinic position in an American congregation without having a college diploma. How to go about getting a college diploma and where, was the sixty-four-thousand dollar question. Going back to Chicago was now out of question. Even if they would reinstate my scholarship, I now had a family and needed a job.

Slowly but surely, I came to the conclusion to seek a rabbinic/teaching position in a university town with a small Jewish community. A small congregation which cannot afford a full time Rabbi, and to whom I could offer the dual services of Rabbi/Teacher, may overlook my not having a college education. Whatever salary they might offer would have to suffice for two people, and I would have enough time to attend classes at the local university. That opportunity came knocking on my door with an invitation from a small Jewish community in Wooster, Ohio, through the recommendation of Rabbi Lawrence Charney, Pearl's cousin through marriage, who served as Rabbi in a Conservative congregation in nearby Canton, Ohio. We once talked of Divine Providence (*Hashgachah P'ratit*). Here it revealed itself to me once again in full glory.

Wooster was a typical small Western town of 15,000 residents, and served as the County Seat of a rural area with a population of 50,000 people. Wooster College was high on the list of Liberal Arts institutions with a great reputation in the sciences and philosophy. A large number of the 1300 students enrolled in the College majored in philosophy in preparation for a religious ministry, or in the sciences as pre-medical students. In addition, Wooster was the home of the Ohio Experimental Station which employed 300 PHDs in agricultural sciences, and the seat of the Ohio Presbyterian Synod with a large number of retired Ministers. Together, they gave the town a cultural atmosphere of the highest magnitude.

The Jewish community consisted of eighty families, comprising about three hundred men, women and children. Many of these people were the descendants of the Shapiro-Cohen-Brenner-Abramson families whose Lithuanian ancestors had come to this rural community at the beginning of the century via Cleveland-Akron-Canton. The elders started out as scrap-metal and junk (*sh'mata*) dealers. Most of their children remained in this prosperous town – some of them in their parent's business, but on a very large scale, while others went into the professions as physician or lawyers, and in the clothing business. Gradually, they were joined by Jewish families outside of these clans, who brought with them a considerable number of young children. In a class by itself was the Freedlander family, headed by Mr. Herman Freedlander.

Herman's father came to Ohio in 1890. When the old Freedlander passed away, Herman, then a high school teenager, left school to become head of the family, caring for his mother and his sibling sister and brother. Herman was apparently successful in all of his endeavors, economically and educationally. His sister became a reputable educator in Cleveland and his brother became a famous surgeon. When I came to Wooster in 1949, the Freedlander Department store was known throughout Wayne County and beyond.

The Jewish community owned a small building near the High School on Grant Street, in the older section of town. The lower floor was converted into a Prayer Hall for Sabbath and Holidays. On Saturdays, the services were read by laymen who were familiar with the Hebrew prayers, and for the High Holy Days the community engaged a Cantor from Cleveland. After WWII, when the native born sons came back from the army and established their families, and younger families with children moved into town, the community felt the need for a full-time Rabbi for themselves and for the 50-60 children who now resided in Wooster. The community needed a young Rabbi/Teacher, and I needed a small Jewish community in a college town, and Rabbi Charney served as *Shadchen* (matchmaker) to bring us together.

The community decided to convert the upper floor, above the *Schule*, into a one-bedroom apartment to be made available to us rent free, all utilities included. In addition, I would be paid a weekly salary of $100. which in 1949 was a living wage for a young couple. There was an unwritten understanding between us that in the course of time the community would embark upon a building campaign for a new edifice that would have a Synagogue, several classrooms for the Hebrew School, and a modern apartment for the Rabbi's family. In my own mind, the most significant part of the *Naddan* (dowry) in this match was the prospect that some day down the line I would try to enroll in the local college. To the best of my knowledge, there was only one Jewish student in Wooster College during the one hundred and fifty years of its existence, a girl from a nearby community who studied there for one year. For me, however, Wooster appeared to be the ideal set-up for what I wanted most, a college education in a fine liberal arts school. I could not and did not dream that it would come about as soon as it did.

Chapter Twenty Two

MAKING A DEAL WITH WOOSTER COLLEGE

Shortly after my arrival in Wooster in August 1949, members of my congregation told me of an unusual Minister, a Rev. Bates, Pastor of the College, a liberal man with a warm disposition towards the Jewish people, and they advised me to seek his acquaintance. I called him one day in September. He was thrilled to hear that Wooster now had a permanent Rabbi, and he immediately invited me to his office. I found him to be as fine a gentleman as his reputation was among my people. Rev. Bates showed keen interest in the composition of the Jewish community and in our religious and educational plans, and I expressed my interest in the college, saying that "some day I might want to take a few courses at the school". "Why some day?", the good Rev. asked, and continued: "Today is registration day on the campus; why don't we go over and take a look?"

And off we went, the new Rabbi with the popular college Pastor. We were ushered in to the head-registrar, Prof. Southwick, without having to stand in the long queue of students waiting in line for registration. A school catalogue was brought in, and we selected four courses of study – two in English, one in Philosophy and one in Education – for a total of eight hours per week, and I registered as a part-time student. Normally, a student would then proceed to the bursar's office for confirmation of tuition payment, and then return to the registrar for class assignments. In my case, Prof. Southwick gave me the class-section assignments without requiring financial arrangements. I remember coming home that day, and shouting to my wife from downstairs: "Poy, I am a student at the school". A child's dream in the Old City of Jerusalem came true that day, seven thousand miles away, in a small Ohio town, thanks to the

courtesy of an unusual Christian Minister, in an unusual college, and under unusual circumstances. At 7:00 AM on the following day, I reported to class and listened to a professor expounding theories of philosophy. Tears were rolling down my cheeks as my mind went back to the Chassidic Chayei Olam Cheder and the *Litvish* Hebron Yeshiva, on one of the most wonderful days of my life.

Several weeks later, I received a call from the college office to report to Prof. Southwick's office. He inquired about my impressions of the school, and then casually asked how I intended to pay the school tuition. He filled me in on the school's financial requirements, and I told him of my salary and my family responsibilities, both at home and in Israel. We both realized that I could not possibly handle the school tuition. Mr. Southwick suggested that I "edit" the courses, at a cost of one dollar per course, but I would not be able to take the class tests, and would not receive any credits towards a degree. I explained to Mr. Southwick that a college degree was paramount to my rabbinic career in America, and I offered him an alternative. "Suppose", I said, "you let me take the class tests, and keep my grades on file in your office. Some day, when I pay whatever I owe to the school for my education, you will grant me the credits and the degree. It may take several years, but I will at least know that down the road I will have a college degree."

I did not then, and would not now venture to guess what passed through Mr. Southwick's mind when he contemplated for several minutes on the Rabbi's audacity. Surprisingly though, he turned to me and said: "Rabbi, you have a deal, but it must remain *between us*. Such a thing was never done before, and in all probability will never be done again; but never before you did we have a Rabbi on the campus. As far as the instructors are concerned, you are a regular student. They will turn in your grades to this office, as they always do, and the grades will be kept in your file until you meet your financial obligations for your degree." I could not believe my own ears, but there it was

– a college registrar of a 150 year old institution, for the first time in the history of the school, approves a "deal" offered by a Rabbi he had met only two-three weeks ago. And then something even stranger than fiction happened. In January 1950, at the end of the first college semester, I picked up my mail, and there I found a college card with the grades and credits of the past semester. Pearl and I looked at each other, and did not know what to make of it. Finally, I said to her that my mother used to say: "*Avroom, ven men tshepet dir nisht, tsheppe oich nisht* – When people don't bother you, don't bother them." I filed away the card, and never talked to anyone about it.

I then registered for the second semester, again for four courses – eight semester credits, which was the most I could carry under the circumstances, and at the end of that semester, I again received my grades and credits. Since the going was good, I did the same for the Summer semester. The next five years in Wooster were blissful years in every sense of the word – in family life, in intellectual growth, in the rabbinate, in human relationships within the Jewish and Christian communities, and in personal fulfillment.

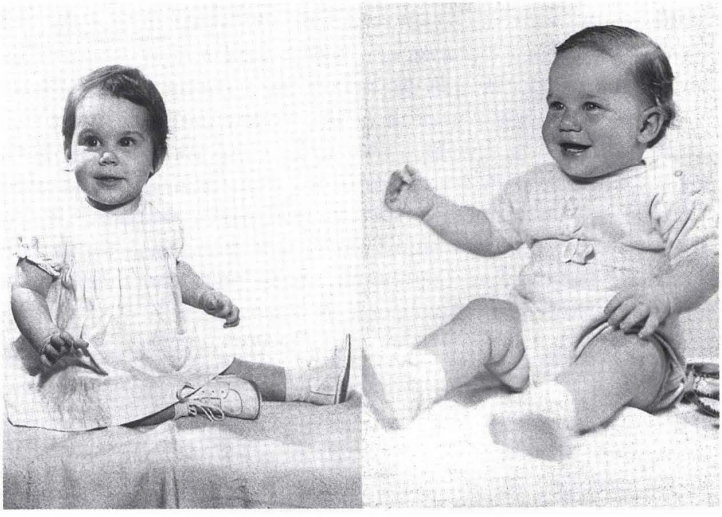
Chapter Twenty Three

THE BIRTH OF OUR SON AND DAUGHTER

The price for all these was unfortunately paid by Pearl. She was isolated and lonely since I was occupied twenty-four hours a day with college, congregation, sermons, adult education and religious school classes. She once told me that, except on the Sabbath, she saw only the top of my head bent over the books. Her relief came with the birth of our *B'chor* (first) child, Michael – Mordechei, at the end of October 1949. His arrival was celebrated by the entire Jewish community, and Pearl was busy and happy thereafter.

The first to join in the celebration was the Freedlander family. As is customary in America, several weeks before the anticipated birth, Pearl and I went to the department store to order everything that the baby would need – crib, bassinet, clothing, etc. and we asked the store to hold the layette until after the birth of the baby, and to send the proper colors for a boy or a girl. When we notified the store of Michael's birth, the Freedlander truck pulled up a few hours later to deliver all we had ordered and much more. The driver handed us a note from Herman, to congratulate us and to tell us that the entire shipment is his personal gift. Within a few weeks we heard from every Jewish household in the community as they all attended the *B'rit* (Circumcision) and *Pidyon Habben* (Redemption) ceremonies. Families who maintained Kosher homes brought to these celebrations their favorite baked goods on sterling silver platters. Three years later came our lovely daughter, Chaya Esther – Michelle. By that time, we were well integrated in the community. Young and old, Jews and non-Jews rejoiced with us as though a child or a grandchild had been born to them. Everyone in town knew the Rabbi and his family, and we were

warmly greeted by all city folk wherever we walked in the streets or in the town recreational parks.



I never thought that people of different families and diverse backgrounds could develop such a close kinship and social relationship as those which existed between members of the congregation, the town residents in general, and my family. We left Wooster in 1954. Ten years later we drove through Wooster, and decided to stop off for a night. Our first stop was at the gas station to fill up the tank. The attendant looked into the car, and nochalantly said: "How are you Rabbi?", as though he had been seeing me every day for the past ten years. Then I checked into the Englander hotel, and dialed the home of Raizel Shapiro, the matriarch of the Shapiro family. I uttered only one word "Raizel", but Raizel immediately recognized my voice and in Yiddish she shouted out: "*Vei is mir, der Rebbe is do* – Woe to me, the Rabbi is here". Then I called the home of Sam and Rose Brenner. Sam was chairman of the building committee when we built the new Knesset Israel Temple of Wooster, and Rose was one of the women I trained to serve as a history teacher in my

religious school. Rose invited us for dinner. After dinner, we noticed that people were slowly filling up the living room. In all, about 20-30 men and women came in to greet us, people with whom we worked, prayed and socialized during the five years we lived in Wooster, and whom the Brenners now invited to see us again. In the course of the evening, I saw Morris Cohen, the elderly patriarch of the Cohen family , sitting in a corner and crying. I walked over to him and asked: "What is the matter, Morris?" Morris stood up, embraced me, and said: "Rabbi, we have not had such an evening since you left. We miss you!" I could not help but cry with him, cry with joy and gratitude for the five memorable years Pearl and I had in the midst of these wonderful people in Wooster.

I have run too far ahead of the story, and I should now return to the beginning. From the outset, even during the first college semester, there was an extraordinary relationship between the Rabbi and several school academicians. First came Prof. Frederick Moore, head of the English Dept. He excused me of the Freshman (#101) English course because "you don't need it", he said. Instead, he offered to assist me in "developing a sense of the language", as he put it, a "feeling" of what is right and what is wrong in a sentence. Every Friday morning, for two whole years, I came to Freddie's (as he was affectionately called on the campus) office with my Sabbath sermon in hand, and Freddie taught me how each sentence should be worded for better effectiveness and gramatic correctness.

After Michael's birth, Freddie expressed interest in seeing him. Since Freddie was a bachelor, Pearl occasionally invited him for a Sunday dinner, when this venerable and usually very formal sixty-year old Professor would sit down on the floor and play with the baby as he would have done with his own grandchild, if he had had one.

Then there was Prof. William Craig, head of the Speech Dept., offering private lessons in diction and voice projection. His assistant Prof. Logan helped in the proper pronunciation of

the "th" and the "r". Dean William Teusch wanted to know more about Judaism, and we met often for personal conversations on this subject. Instructors from the Dept. of Religion occasionally invited me to lecture in their classes on the Old Testament. The president of the college, Prof. Howard Lowry, would come to the Temple during the *Kol Nidrei* service on *Yom Kippur* night. Whenever I saw Prof. Southwick on the campus, we would smile to one another. He knew, that I knew, that there was something "funny" about our financial "deal" which was not being carried out to the letter; so we smiled without ever mentioning the subject.

There was also a rabbinic position to look after, and here, in this small community, I had the opportunity for religious and communal leadership on the highest level. After several months in the community, I set for myself three objectives:

a) To see that every Jewish family became affiliated with and supportive of the local synagogue;

b) To enroll every Jewish child in the religious school, and to attend classes six hours a week; and

c) To build a new and modern synagogue with facilities to serve the traditional purposes of the *Schule* as a House of Prayer (*Bet Tefillah*), House of Study (*Bet Midrash*), and House of Assembly (*Bet Knesset*).

During my first eight months in Wooster, I visited every Jewish home in the community – spending an evening with the family, cajoling the people to attend Sabbath services, and to register the children in religious school. These personal efforts brought the desired results in increased synagogue and school attendance, and the need for a new and large synagogue center was clearly established. Whenever and with whomever I broached the latter subject, I was told that the answer, the key, was in the hands of the Freedlander Foundation. Without their assistance there is no chance for a small community to embark on such a project.

Chapter Twenty Four

THE TEMPLE WHICH RABBI EHRLICH BUILT

Mr. Freedlander's civic involvement in Wooster was legendary. He gave generously for the construction of the public school and city playgrounds. He donated buildings, and established endowment funds for Wooster College. He referred to these activities as "civic responsibility" and "civic pride", saying: "Wooster was good to me, and I am only giving back part of what I received." But Herman was not affiliated with and did not contribute to the Jewish community of his home town. His affiliation was with *The Temple* of Cleveland, and Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver was *his* Rabbi. I had met Mr. Freedlander soon after my arrival in Wooster, and we greeted each other politely whenever we met on the street or in his department store, but I knew that synagogue-wise he did not belong to me. The Wooster synagogue was just too small for him. He may have felt that he never *received* anything from it, and had no obligation to give *back*. It occurred to me, that the reversed order might work here – make him feel part of the community by first *giving* to it, and then he may be ready and willing to *take* whatever we did have to offer. I knew of Mr. Freedlander's "civic pride" as a Jew, and I decided to exploit it.

One day, I called Herman and invited myself to his home as I had done with other Jewish families. He was too much of a gentleman to reject my overture. We talked for a while. He related bits of his history, and I told him of mine. I also told him what I thought he would like to hear – that I had made contact with the local Christian clergy, and that I regularly attended the weekly meetings of the Ministerial Association. He voiced his approval, and then asked whether there was anything special that I had come for. I answered that I had come to talk about building

a new synagogue and "to solicit your interest and help". "Do you think that this small group is capable of embarking on such a project?" he asked. I told him that there were several well-to-do families in town, and "if each of these people gave according to their ability we could do it by ourselves, within the Jewish community. But if these families do not come forward, I have the offering of the Ministerial Association to give us the proceeds of one Sunday's church collection towards this project."

I said the last sentence slowly and deliberately, because I knew Mr. Freedlander would not allow me to take church collections for the Jewish community, and I was right. He immediately asked whether we had any idea of costs. I told him that we estimated we would need about $100,000. If the well-to-do families would give us a third, we could probably get another third from the rest of the congregation, and the bank would lend us the balance. Apparently, Mr. Freedlander was convinced that I meant what I said. When I got up to leave, he accompanied me to the door and said: "Rabbi, I will start you off with ten thousand ($10,000.) dollars on condition that this project will be financed by the Jewish community; there will be no church collections!" We smiled at each other. The ice between the Freedlanders and the local congregation was broken, and the personal friendship between him and myself was sealed.

Following this breakthrough, the congregation responded generously to a building campaign, including the other wealthier families, and within three months we had pledges totalling over $60,000., and the local Meadowbrook Bank gave us a $40,000. mortgage.

The question now was *where* to build – on the site of the old Schule or somewhere else. A parcel of land in the newer section of town would certainly be preferable, but very costly. When it became apparent that, for financial reasons, the congregation was inclined to build on the old site, Mr.

Freedlander expressed a desire to add our land to the playground which he had put up between the *Schule* and the nearby Central High School. In exchange, he offered to pay for any parcel of land the congregation would select elsewhere.

My hunch regarding Mr. Freedlander's desire to become involved with the local congregation was also correct. He began to attend *our* religious services in the small building on Grant Street. He also appeared at the monthly B'nai Brith meetings, and stayed on to play cards with the "boys".

When money was no object, the site became easily obtainable, and a suitable parcel was found on popular Cleveland Road, not far from the Community Hospital, an area the city was developing, and to which many Jewish families were gradually moving. The parcel was large enough for a *Schule*, a social hall, an apartment for the rabbi's family and a parking lot.

Six months later, the ground-breaking ceremony took place. As the building was going up, I invited Mr. Freedlander to view

AT THE CORNERSTONE laying of Knesseth Israel Temple Sunday, left to right, Sam Shapiro, Meyer Shapiro, (bricklayers, in rear and at right of stone), Congressman John McSweeney, Yale Cohen and Rabbi Abraham Ehrlich of the Wooster Temple.

WALMER STUDIO PHOTO

the progress. When we reached the upper level where the sanctuary was to be, Herman inquired about an appropriate memorial for his late wife. I suggested "stained glass windows" which were not in the plans because of cost, and Herman said "You have it, Rabbi." This was his third gesture towards the beautiful Knesset Israel Temple which now stands on Cleveland Road, Wooster's main thoroughfare, and has served the Jewish community since 1952, just three years after my coming to Wooster. I have since then met several Rabbis who have served that small community subsequent to my departure. They told me that the apartment that was built for my family was converted into religious school classrooms, and the Freedlanders had put up a Rabbi's Home in the back of the synagogue building. They also told me that to this day, the Jewish members of the congregation refer to the *Schule* as "the Temple which Rabbi Ehrlich built". For me, this is religious fulfillment in the truest sense.

A year later, when Mr. Freedlander remarried, and invited me to officiate at the wedding, to be held in my Study, I and everyone else realized that Herman now belonged to us. After forty years of affiliation with *The Temple* of Cleveland, Herman became a member of Knesset Israel in Wooster.

In recent years, the Reform rabbinate has broken with Jewish tradition in areas which adversely affect the entire Jewish community. The granting of Jewish status to children of non-Jewish women (Patrilineal Descent), and the ever increasing number of Reform Rabbis officiating at mixed marriages, (presently at the 90% level as against 10% only thirty or forty years ago), are of great concern to Jews the world over. Orthodox and Conservative Rabbis are now compelled to investigate the lineage of brides and grooms, the children of Reform congregations, to ascertain their Jewish status.

This was not the case when I started out in the rabbinate. In 1951, I was invited to co-officiate with the renowned Rabbi

Barnett Brickner at a wedding to be held in the bride's home, a member of the Reform Temple. When Rabbi Brickner saw me in my *Kippa* (skullcap), he said to me in Yiddish "*Ess vet nisht pasten* – it won't look nice for me to stand bare-headed while you wear a *Kippa*." He apologized to the assembly for the slight delay in the procedures, telling them: "I sent our *Shamash* (Sexton) to the Temple to fetch some *Kippot* so that all of us will wear them during the wedding service like my younger colleague who will officiate with me".

This was my experience with the earlier generation of Reform Rabbis, most of whom respected the convictions of their more traditional colleagues and the concerns of *K'lal Yisrael* – the Jewish community at large. In the course of changing times, I also had to adjust to the problems. I once officiated at the wedding of a congregant who married a girl from a nearby Reform Temple. The wedding was held at the Reform Temple which had a Kosher caterer, and the bride insisted on her Cantor's participation in the service, a man who regularly officiated at mixed marriages. Since the *Sheva* (seven) *B'rachot* are obligatory in the wedding service, I could not agree to their being recited by that Cantor. Neither could I deny the bride's request. Therefore, when the Cantor concluded his chanting of the *B'rachot* in Hebrew, I recited the *Sheva B'rachot* in English in their entirety.

Dedication of the Temple in May 1952

Chapter Twenty Five

A RETURN VISIT TO ISRAEL

On a Friday afternoon in the Fall of 1952, two secret service men came up to my Study to inform me "in secret" that President Harry Truman would be stopping off in Wooster on Sunday morning, and that I was chosen as a member of the delegation to receive him at the local Penn. Train Station. The President was on his famous "Whistle Stop" campaign on behalf of the democratic candidate for the presidency, Adlai Stevenson, and he stopped in Wooster to attend a Sunday Service at the local Baptist Church.

I was asked not to tell anyone about it, and was given an official lapel band for identification as an official member of the reception party. I felt very proud of shaking hands with the President of the United States. Even my grandchildren were impressed when they saw my photograph with the President in our family album.

Some members of the official committee wait on the presidential train. Left to right are Ralph Fisher, D. P. Bodenbender, Henry Massaro, Oscar Schrader, W. E. Krauss, Raymond Dix, Chester Shamel Major Carl Witt, Brian Bradford, and Rabbi Abraham Ehrlich.

In 1951, I received a letter from Mr. Aaron Remez, son of my 1946 benefactor – Mr. David Remez, and Ambassador of the State of Israel at the King's James Court in Great Britain. In his letter, Mr. Remez informed me of his father's demise, and added that his father had left considerable personal debts, and not enough resources to pay the debts. He wrote that among his father's papers was a note, stating that he had loaned me $500. to pay for my transportation from Palestine to New York, less the $25. which he authorized for his sister in 1949. Mr. Remez concluded with the remark that the Executors of his father's Will would appreciate the periodic payment of this debt, which I did within the following twelve months.

Four times a year, when I recite *yizkor* on *Yom Kippur* and on the Pilgrim Festival for members of my family and my friends, I include the name of that Zionist Leader, Scholar and Gentleman who put a young man on the road towards his rabbinic career.

As I was paying my debt to Mr. Remez for my journey from Palestine to New York, it occurred to me that the time had come for a visit to Israel, to see my father after four years of separation. The problem was financial. My regular salary in Wooster did not leave much for a journey that would cost at least one thousand dollars, and in this small community there was not enough "side income" from personal rabbinic services. The Talmud says: "God leads a man in the way he wants to go" *(Makot 10b)*, and He did. One day, a Jewish social worker from Cleveland called for an appointment to see me. She told me of an Ohio State institution for mildly retarded elderly men and women in Apple Creek, about 5-6 miles from Wooster, with a considerable number of Jewish patients. She said that Christian clergymen often come there to conduct services for members of their respective denominations, and she asked whether I would be interested in a similar arrangement for the Jewish patients.

I drove to the hospital, and met with the director. We decided to schedule one service to see the people's reaction. To

our great surprise, over sixty Jewish patients attended, and many asked me to come again. The director told me that the government paid a small fee of $10. per service. I agreed to come out every Sunday morning at 7:30 AM, as I was due in my own religious school at 10:00 o'clock. The prospect of having to drive to Apple Creek on Sunday mornings on snow-covered roads during the Winter months, was not very attractive, but I decided to try it for a while – first, as a service to these unfortunate people and, second, it held out the prospect of a visit to Israel some time in the future.

The trips on many a Sunday morning were difficult, and at times even dangerous, but I persisted because the people came regularly in ever increasing numbers, and always expressed their gratitude for the 30-40 minute meetings. I received a check each month, which I deposited in a special account for the express purpose of going to see my father.

In July 1953, three months after the birth of Michelle, I left for Israel aboard the Al-Italia ship, while Pearl's parents came to Wooster to stay with her and the children.

The original itinerary called for New York – Le Havre, France aboard the ship; a few days stop-over in Paris; an overnight train from Paris to Marseille, and a four-day crossing of the Mediterranean, Marseille-Haifa, aboard an Israeli vessel. But, upon reaching Paris, I was so overcome with emotions in anticipation of seeing my father, that I changed to a TWA flight from Paris to Tel Aviv, with refueling stops in Rome and Athens, and thus reached Israel six days sooner.

I met my father in the home of my second sister, Rachel, and he received me with the same formal handshake like the one with which we parted six years earlier; but, to my utter surprise, my sister and I kissed one another in a most spontaneous embrace. I was surprised because, normally, within Chassidic families, brothers and sisters never touched one another, affectionately or otherwise. I doubt whether Rachel ever kissed

or embraced one of her own mature sons. The mutual spontaneous embrace between us was undoubtedly the result of a special feeling (I would hesitate to say affection) which existed between us ever since childhood, even as I felt towards Yentil, my oldest sister.

My father was rather surprised by this embrace, probably more so on the part of my sister than mine. His immediate reaction was an exclamation: "*NU, NU!*". "*Nu Nu*" meant "Break it up". I turned to him and reminded him that the Partriarch Jacob kissed his cousin Rachel when they met at the well of Haran (Gen. 29:11). This was a reminder that my second name is Jacob and my sister's name was Rachel, but father had his answer ready: "*Mish nisht arein Yaakov Avinu; Dos hot zutin mit Kabbalah* – Don't bring up Father Jacob; that was a mystic encounter!" Rachel and I laughed at this retort. We certainly got off easier than we might have.

After several hours of reminiscence about the traumatic years and the personal difficulties they experienced since we parted, with special emphasis about mother, of blessed memory, I left the house to make lodging arrangements in a hotel in the center of Jerusalem. Father had his own small apartment which had been assigned to him and mother on Palmach Street, following their expulsion by the Jordanians from the Old City in 1948, and I told my father that I would meet him there in the afternoon. When I entered his room, father got up and, with outstretched arms, advanced towards me, even as I was walking towards him. We embraced one another, and he broke down, sobbing and crying profusely, whispering over and over again: "*Di bist aggiter zin, Di bist aggiter zin* – You are a good son, you are a good son". When he calmed down, and we talked for a while, I asked him to explain what he meant when he said that I was a good son, and father replied: "Avroom, you remember what used to happen at home on Thursday nights when mother asked for a few *Shilling* for *Shabbos*, and I had to run around among friends asking a *Shilling* from this one and another

Shilling from that one. *Yetzt, konstu zich forshtelen vos dos meint az ich kon gebben ayiddin a Shilling oif Shabbos* – Now, can you imagine what it means to me when I can give another Jew a *Shilling* for *Sabbath*". And once again he began to sob and repeat "*nor zulib dir, nor zulib dir* – only because of you, only because of you."

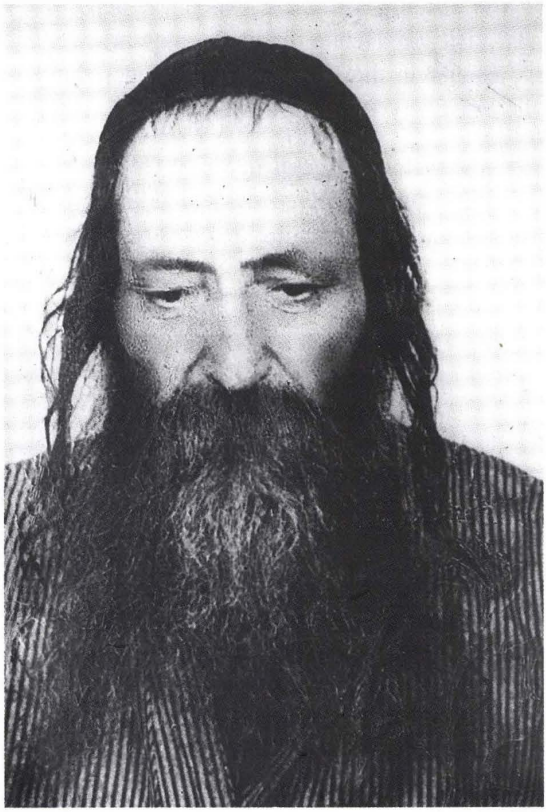
When I left my parents' home in December 1946, I vowed to myself that as long as I would have *parnassa* (sustenance) for my family, my parents would also be properly provided for. On that afternoon, as I listened to my father, I thanked God for enabling me to fulfill and redeem that vow.

I knew that father was a *Tsadik* (righteous man) in the full sense of that term. He served God with all his heart, his mind and his strength. I never heard a derogatory word from him against any man, not even against those who wronged him. Father loved the Torah and studied it every waking hour, day and night. Father was a great *scholar.* In his eulogy for my father, the head of the Jerusalem rabbinic court (*Bet Din*) said: "When I had to render a decision on Jewish Law, and Reb Nachum was in *Schule*, I did not have to consult the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of law) because Reb Nachum knew it all by heart."

I knew that father was also a humble person – *ish anav*. An elderly gentleman of Yerushalayim told me that the Agudat Yisrael Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Reb Yosef Chayim Zonenfeld, invited my father to become a member of the *Bet Din* – Religious Court of Jerusalem. But in his great *humility*, father turned down the offer, preferring instead to remain a rank-and-file *Yeshivaman – Echad min hachavura* – one of the group, and to study Torah *lishma* – for the sake of the Mitzvah.

During this visit, I learned that father was also a very wise man. Throughout the entire six weeks, when we saw each other almost daily, father did not even once inquire about my personal religious life. I am sure that he knew the kind of congregation I was serving. I have no doubt that he knew of my studies at the

university, but he never brought up the subject. Why? Because father also knew my religious philosophy, and the transformation in my religious practices, and he had made peace with it on that morning in 1939 when he gave me the *Tsetalle* (note) to enter the Hebron Yeshiva and he said to me: "*Avroom*, I know that you will not be a *Chassid*; at least you will be a *Talmid Chacham* (Talmudic Scholar)". During these weeks, I admired him all the more for his wisdom.



My Father at Our Last Meeting in 1953

During this visit to Israel I was also delighted to see my young brother, Baruch, who had gone through many tribulations since I saw him last, before my departure to the States, including the underground war against the British as a member of the *Irgun*; the defense of the Old City of Jerusalem during Israel's War of Liberation; the death of his nephew and pal (only two days younger than himself) at the hands of an Arab sniper; and the *seven months* of captivity in Trans Jordan.

The joy became complete when Baruch was engaged, during my visit, to Hanna Briliant, a grand-daughter of my first-class teacher in the Chayei Olam Cheder thirty two years earlier, the legendary Reb Mordchalle.

I did not stay long enough in Israel for their wedding, but several months later I received their wedding picture with my father officiating, the last picture I have of my father who passed away in 1959.

At the end of my visit, when I saw father for the last time, I gave him my *Tallit* (Prayer Shawl) which Pearl had given me for our wedding. He *davened* (prayed) in it every day until his demise in 1959, and was wrapped in it for his funeral. A few weeks later, I received my father's *Tefillin* (phylacteries) which my siblings thought that I should have, and I have *davened* with them on every weekday since then. The memory of that *Tsadik*, the God Fearing, Torah Loving and Wise man, is a blessing to all of his children, and their descendants. Even his great-great-grandchildren, who have never seen him, speak with reverence and love of "*Der Zeidde, Reb Nuchim* – Grandfather, Rabbi Nachum".

My journey to see my father led to the performance of another *Mitzvah* – the preservation of a child, one of my own flesh and blood, in which Pearl and the Wooster community, both Jews and non-Jews, played major roles.

When I entered the home of my youngest sister in Jerusalem, I saw a boy about five years old lying listless in a crib. I was told that Simon was a polio victim from early infancy, one of the 10,000 people, mostly children, who were struck with polio four years earlier, in the last epidemic before the discovery of the Salk vaccine. The state of Israel, itself in its early infancy, just emerging from its War of Independence, still undeveloped and poor, was unable to deal with a medical catastrophe of such major proportions. I left Israel with the sad realization that Simon had little chance for proper medical treatment under the prevailing conditions, and with a feeling of utter helplessness to extend any assistance.

When I returned home and described the situation to Pearl, she said that she would be willing to take Simon into our home if we could bring him to the States, I told her that his father would have to come with him, and they might have to stay for many months, but she was nonetheless willing to undertake it. Simon and Sam Brenner, financially and socially influential residents of Wooster, and members of my congregation, offered

to issue affidavits for my nephew and brother-in-law, and to provide other legal assistance necessary to admit them to the United States. The Wayne County March of Dimes organization, which had its headquarters in Wooster, agreed to pay for Simon's polio treatment as though he were an American citizen, and the Akron Children's Hospital formally accepted him as a patient.

Within a few months, Simon and his father arrived in Wooster and into our home. March of Dimes, the American Polio organization, made sure that Wooster and the surrounding communities would know of the event. Pictures of the Chassidic black-bearded father, with the blonde boy wearing long *pai'ot* (earlocks), appeared in local newspapers – quite a sensation in a small mid-western community. Simon's physician at Akron Children's Hospital was a Lebanese Moslem, and the Christian Dr. Edwin L. Mollin, director of the Orthopedic Dept, fell in love with little Simon. Even after I had left Wooster, Dr. Mollin brought Simon from Jerusalem to his hospital for additional surgical procedures, and for a goodly number of years he sent to Jerusalem the orthopedic shoes and braces which Simon required. Towards the end, Dr. Mollin travelled to Jerusalem to visit his patient. All in all, this is a story of a Thousand and One Nights, and all that remains to be said is: What a community, what a country, and what a doctor!

In between hospital treatments, Simon stayed with us. He was only several months older than our Michael, and Pearl would wash them together in the bathtub. Simon became very much attached to her, and never forgot their relationship. Simon grew up to become a useful man of the Jerusalem community. He married, has a wonderful family, and is fully employed. When Pearl and I were in Israel in 1975, Simon and his wife came to visit us, and brought with them their five-weeks old daughter. Simon placed the baby in Pearl's arms and said to her: "You have a great share in this child". And we all wept. Several weeks ago, as I was writing this chapter, Simon called from

Jerusalem to tell us that his little Menuchie is engaged, and invited us to attend the wedding during our forthcoming stay in Jerusalem. Our Sages were right when they said: "*Mitzvah goreret Mitzvah* – One Good Deed leads to another Good Deed" *(Pirkei Avot 4:2).*

Chapter Twenty Six

CONFRONTATION WITH THE CHIEF RABBI

My father did not discuss with me my personal religious work or religious life style, but someone else did try to do so. One evening, when I returned to my Jerusalem hotel, the desk clerk handed me a note from the secretary of the Chief Rabbi, Isaac Halevi Herzog z.l., asking whether I could report to the Rabbi's home on the following morning, at 10:00 AM. I arrived in the Rabbi's home on time, and was seated at a table, but the Rabbi was late. As I looked down on the table to see whether I might find something to read, I noticed a United States Aerogramme addressed to the Rabbi, and on the upper left corner was a return address to Rabbi Y.G. with a Columbus, Ohio address, which immediately solved a puzzle that had kept me awake part of the night; namely, why would Rabbi Herzog want to see me, and how did he know that I was in the country? I did go to the revered Rabbi in 1946 for Rabbinic Ordination, and I did see him again before I left on my rabbinic mission to the D.P. Camps in Cyprus, but why would he want to see me now? The letter bearing the name of Rabbi Y.G. of Columbus solved the puzzle for me.

Several weeks before I left for Israel, a Mr. Z., a member of my Wooster congregation, invited me to officiate at the *Brit* (Circumcision ceremony) of his second son. Among the out-of-town guests was Mr. Z's father from Columbus, and he brought with him *his* Rabbi from Columbus, the well known Rabbi Y.G. This guest Rabbi was as much a surprise to Mr. Z. of Wooster as he was to me, but Grandfather Z. apparently wanted to honor *his* Rabbi. He perhaps wanted to have a *great* Rabbi, or an *Orthodox* Rabbi for his grandson's *Brit*, rather than a lesser known and Conservative Rabbi.

Without consulting his son (as I later found out), Grandfather Z. approached me to ask whether I would relinquish the honor of officiating at the *Brit* in favor of Rabbi Y.G. I told him that I was in no position to relinquish or to refuse, that I had come at the request of his son who is a member of my congregation, and I would do whatever he wants me to do. Grandfather Z. then went to his son, and his son told him (as he later related to me): "Dad, Rabbi Y.G. is *your* guest, not mine He is welcome to stay, but I invited *my* Rabbi of *my* congregation, and he will officiate". I could see from afar that Grandfather Z. was very unhappy, and that Rabbi Y.G. was fuming, but I decided to go on with my work. Rabbi Y.G. was of no concern to me.

Y.G. was indeed a well known Rabbi; he was also known as a *zealot* who was ready and willing to renounce and pounce on those who did not agree with him, and before the hour was over he thought that he had reason to teach the young non-orthodox rabbi a lesson. In Jerusalem, the father of a circumcised child recites two *b'rachot* (blessings); the first for the fulfillment of the *Mitzvah* of circumcision, and the second for having lived – *Shehecheyanu* to reach this happy occasion. This is done even for the second or third son in the family. In the United States, the second *B'rachah* (Shehecheyanu) is recited only at the *Brit* of the first son. The only circumcision ceremonies that I previously attended in the United States, were those at which I officiated, and I always did as I was taught in Jerusalem.

And I did the same on this occasion. When the *Mohel* (circumciser) performed the circumcision, I told Mr. Z. to recite the two *B'rachot*, and Y.G. began to shout that the young Rabbi does not know what he is doing, that he renders decisions against the law (*moreh shelo kahalachah*). When the zealous Rabbi quieted down, I asked the people to be seated, and explained to them the difference in practice between Jerusalem and Wooster. I also told them that while our sages were against

the recitation of unnecessary *B'rachot* as an act of "taking the Name of God in vain", they were very lenient with the recitation of the *Shehecheyanu* on any and all occasions.

This incident came back to my mind as I was waiting for Rabbi Herzog to come in, and noticed the Columbus letter on the table. When the Chief Rabbi finally arrived and sat down, he immediately came to the point, saying: "We heard from the States that you are a *moreh shelo kahalachah*". I apologized for having seen the U.S. Aerogramme, and told him that I am aware of the source of the rumor that reached him, and I proceeded to tell him what had happened in Wooster with Rabbi Y.G. I saw a faint smile on his face. He did not say any more on this subject, but immediately followed up with another question: "*Ben Yerushalayim b'kehilah shamranit* – How does a Jerusalem Rabbi come to a Conservative community?" I told him that Pearl and I had not changed our personal traditional life-style one iota, but, as a Rabbi, I felt that a well trained and observant Jerusalem Rabbi would do well, and would be even more effective, in a Conservative congregation. At this point, the Rabbi became very personal and asked: "How many members of your congregation have become *Shomrei Shabbat* (sabbath observers) under your influence?" I answered by first telling him that a goodly number of people had turned their homes to Kosher; I told him of the success we have had with the *Schule* and the Religious School, and then added: "As for their becoming *Shomrei Shabbat*, as a *Ben Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem born man), I am not aware of any *Shomer Hatza'ir* (left wing) *Kibutzniks* who became *Shomrei Shabbat* under the influence of Israel's Chief Rabbinate."

I wanted to tell him that Conservative Judaism is an Halachic movement. I wanted to explain that when the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly contemplates a change in traditional ritual practice, the first question is: Is there a historic precedent in our tradition for such a change? Could this change be made within the context of *Halachah*? And the second question is: Assuming

that this change can be made within the Law, would its introduction enhance or hinder Jewish life today? Only when both of these questions can be answered in the affirmative is the subject explored on the basis of written responsa, and then voted upon.

But, Rabbi Herzog became visibly angry, and was in no mood to listen. He got up and said "*Gamarnu* – We are finished", and walked out. I knew right there and then that I should not have added the last sentence on the *Shomer Hatza'ir*, especially considering his status compared to mine, and his age compared to mine, but I was young and I, too, was angry for his having turned against me personally, for not admitting that most of his congregants in Dublin, Ireland, from where he came to Palestine, were not any more *Shomrei Shabbat* than Jews of my congregation. Still, I should not have said it. I left the Rabbi's home, mumbling to myself "*nisht alle rabbonim zennen azoi k'lug vi mein tatte* – not all Rabbis have the wisdom of my father."

Chapter Twenty Seven

FOREGO A SAUSAGE AND SEE PARIS

On my way back to the States, I flew with TWA to Paris for an over night stop, and to board the Al Italia ship on the morrow from Le Harve to New York. It was early evening, on a rainy night. Before retiring to the hotel, I walked into a restaurant for some refreshments. I could not converse with the waiter at the counter, but a gentleman sitting next to me offered his assistance. He asked whether I would like to have a few sausages with a glass of beer, and I answered that I would not eat any meat, but would gladly have the beer.

After a few moments, the gentleman turned to me and said: "You did not want anything in meat; are you perhaps Jewish?" I introduced myself as an American Rabbi on his way to the States after a brief visit to Israel. He inquired what I intended to do for the rest of the evening, and I told him that since it is raining outside, I would probably retire to the hotel for the night. He introduced himself as a Jew living in Paris, and then invited me to spend a few hours with him, as "it would be a pity to spend the only night you have in Paris in a hotel, and I will gladly show you the sights and sounds of this beautiful city".

I hesitated placing myself in the hands of a stranger in a strange city, but he *was* Jewish and seemed to be a cultured person, so I decided to take a chance. I asked for his name, and he said to call him "Andre", which meant nothing to me. He had a car parked across the street, and he drove around the beautiful Paris boulevards for about half an hour. Our first stop was at the Eifel Tower for an unforgettable view of the city. He would not let me take out my wallet, saying: "For this night, you are my guest". He asked whether, being a Rabbi, I would be willing to enter Parisian night clubs. I really did not know what that would

be like, but I agreed to come along. He seemed to have free access to all places – either with keys or through name identification – and for the next few hours we made the rounds to a variety of places.

We talked incessantly about France and Israel, and about the Holocaust. At 2:00 A.M., we drove up to my hotel. I thanked him for five entertaining and informative hours, completely free of charge and in the company of a very charming and intellectual gentleman. I asked what I could do for him from the States, and he asked me to send him picture post-cards of Synagogues from wherever I may be. I asked for his full name and address, and he handed me a business card. As I glimpsed at it, I discovered that my evening host is the prominent French novelist, Mr. Andre Schwartz-Bart, author of "The Last of the Just", and that this great adventure came to me as a reward for having given up a few forbidden (non-kosher) sausages.

When I came back to Wooster, I found another surprise for me. The Synagogue services were usually read/chanted by laymen of East European origin who were versed in the prayers and the *Nusach*/Melodies, but we always engaged a Cantor for the High Holy Days.

When I returned from Israel in late summer, I found that nothing had been done about it by the Ritual Committee, and that it was too late to find a suitable candidate. I had no choice but to do the job myself – a formidable task for one man to conduct and chant the services, read the Torah, blow the Shofar, and preach the sermons. After the Holidays, I was presented with a gift of $500. in appreciation, an amount close to what the Cantor would get.

My father used to write to me frequently and at length, but one subject he never broached – he never asked for money, and never intimated that he did not have enough. A few days after Yom Tov, we received a letter from father asking whether we could assist in preparing for Baruch's forthcoming wedding. We

could not turn down such an unusual request, but neither could we say "yes" when we did not have the "substantial" sum which this request warranted.

And then Pearl came to the rescue. I had given her the $500. check to purchase a new stove which she had been asking for. After dinner on the day we received father's letter, I complimented her on the delicious meal, as I usually do, and Pearl responded: "You see, Abe, we had a good meal from the old stove, which proves that we can get along without a new one for a while; so, here is your gift for your father." The check was sent to him the next morning.

Chapter Twenty Eight

KEEPING HALACHAH IN A CONSERVATIVE CONGREGATION

Going back to my meeting with the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Herzog's first question was legitimate and properly phrased: "*Ben Yerushalayim b'kehilah shamranit* – How does a Jerusalem trained Rabbi come to a Conservative congregation?" It is true that the first graduates of the Jewish Theological Seminary, at the beginning of the century, who were the first generation of Conservative Rabbis, came from traditional Orthodox homes. The same is true of many conservative Rabbis of my age, the second and third generations of Conservative Rabbis who were the products of Orthodox institutions like Yeshiva University and others. However, ninety-nine percent of them were born in the United States, and they went through the elementary and secondary schools in the American atmosphere, with a liberal attitude towards religion. But how does a boy from the Old City of Jerusalem, a child of a Chassidic/Kabbalistic home, a student of a Chassidic *Cheder*, a graduate of the Hebron Yeshiva, and a Rabbi ordained by the *Bet Din* (rabbinic court) of Jerusalem become a Conservative Rabbi?

I do not believe that there is a straight forward and logical sequential explanation for this transformation, except that, for one reason or another, from the age of eighteen on, when it came to religious matters, I thought differently and felt differently than the people by whom I was brought up and educated.

The basic principle of Orthodox Judaism is that the Torah is "*min hashamayim* – handed down from heaven" verbatim, in its most literal form, and that the rabbinic teachings of the Talmud were likewise divinely ordained, because they were based on the Sages' interpretation of biblical texts. Therefore,

they are not subject to change and reinterpretation because "no rabbinic court (*Bet Din*) of a later generation can annul the decision of an earlier rabbinic court unless they (the latter teachers) accede them (the earlier teachers) in wisdom and numbers" (*Megilah 2a).* One could claim that there are now a far greater number of rabbinic teachers than there were in Talmudic days, but not even the most recognized authority of our generation would dare claim that he accedes in wisdom any teacher of the Talmudic days.

At present, fifty five years removed from the age of eighteen, I would not try to verbalize exactly what I felt and thought at that time regarding these principles. Nor could I logically explain the process of doubt that had set in within me. All I can recall is that I had sufficient knowledge of the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Law) to realize that the Codes were based on a consensus of opinion to which other codifiers were opposed, and which later Rabbis questioned, and modified or changed. I also learned that many rabbinic positions on Religious Law were not based on biblical texts, but on historic situations which prevailed at the time, and were then annuled or modified when the historic conditions changed.

Examples on this theory abound throughout the *Talmud*, the Commentaries and the Codes. Here are just two:

The first *Mishna* of *Ketubot* states that a virgin woman should be married on Wednesdays, because the courts (*Batei Din*) hold sessions on Thursdays and, if the groom should believe that his newly married wife was not a virgin (as he had thought her to be), he could then take her to court on Thursday.

Centuries later, the *Amora* (Babylonian Teacher) Sh'muel bar Yitzchak stated that "the Mishnaic ruling was the result of Ezra's enactment (4th century B.C.) that court sessions should be held on Mondays and Thursdays; but if there is a place where the court is in session every day, then a virgin woman may be married any day" *(Ketubot 3a).*

In this instance, Rabbi Sh'muel teaches us that the Mishnaic law regarding a virgin's marriage on Wednesdays was the result of a *historic* enactment by Ezra; therefore, wherever and whenever that *historic* enactment is not practiced, the ruling of the *Mishnah* need not be observed, even without a new vote or a new ruling.

Of even greater significance is the following example. In the Torah, the Holiday which we now call "*Rosh Hashanah*" is designated for one day only – on the first day of the seventh month *(Lev. 23:24)*, which is now called "*Tishrei*". The Hebrew month begins on the day of the New Moon. Since the moon reappears every twenty nine and one-half days, the Hebrew month consists of 29 or 30 days, alternately. The exact day of *Rosh Chodesh* (beginning of the month) was determined by the Courts on the testimony of two witnesses who testified on the sighting of the New Moon, and the people of the Diaspora were then advised of the decision by means of bonfires or messengers, to know on which day to observe the Festivals of the coming month.

Rosh Hashanah was a special case because it is celebrated on the first day of the month, and there was no way to inform the people of the Diaspora when the month of *Tishrei* began. The sages then decided (since the days of Ezra in the 4th century B.C.) that *Elul*, the month before *Tishrei*, should always be of 29 days, and the people of the Diaspora should always observe *Rosh Hashanah* on the 30th day from *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, the beginning of which they had already been informed. According to some sources, they actually observed the Holiday for two days, on the 30th and the 31st days from *Rosh Chodesh Elul* (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 19b, and see Tosafot on 18a). This Holiday also presented a problem in Judea (Israel). If the witnesses on the sighting of the New Moon appeared late in the day on which *Rosh Hashanah* had to begin, the rituals of the Holiday (like the Temple sacrifices) could no longer be observed. The Sages, therefore, ruled that even in Judea (Israel)

Rosh Hashanah should be celebrated for two days, on the 30th and the 31st days from *Rosh Chodesh Elul.*

In the third century of the common era, about 6-700 years after Ezra, the Babylonian *Amora*, Mar Sh'muel fixed the calculations of the Hebrew Calendar on the *Sod Ha'ibur* – Astronomical Scientific Data – whereby the exact dates of *Rosh Chodesh* and the Holidays were no longer dependent on the sighting of the moon by eye witnesses, and the people were never in doubt, not in Judea and not in the Diaspora.

The prominent Talmudist and Codifier of the 12-13 centuries, Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel, known as the *Rosh*, reports that following the establishment of the *Sod Ha'ibur* in the third century, the people of *Eretz Yisrael* (Israel) observed only one day of *Rosh Hashanah*, by all the generations before us, until the scholars of Provence urged them to reinstate the second day, and adhere to the custom of bygone generations *(Rosh, Talmud Beitzah, section 4).*

A similar debate was held in Babylon concerning the observance of the Second Day of Yom Tov on the three Pilgrim Festivals of Pessach, Shavuot and Succot. Following the establishment of the *Sod Ha'ibur*, some Babylonian *Amoraim* wanted to cancel the Second Day, but the Judean Sages urged them to hold on to the custom of past generations to observe two days *(T.B. Beitzah 4b).*

Once again we see that a time honored law (the two days of *Rosh Hashanah*) which had come into practice for about seven centuries because of certain *historical* factors, was no longer considered mandatory by many Codifiers (like Rabbi Ephraim and Rav Hai Gaon) after the *historical* factors had changed. And even those sages who urged them to continue with the observance of two days, it was merely for the sake "of a custom of passed generations".

In other words, there were apparently *historic* factors in the development of Jewish Law, and these ever changing factors

have to be taken into consideration in our understanding and practice of Rabbinic Law today. And this is the basic tenet of Conservative Judaism; namely, that the development of Jewish Law is a continuous process by Sages-Scholars-Rabbis who have the required *Knowledge* of the Law and the proper *Reverence* for it.

In short, at the age of eighteen, while still a student in the Hebron Yeshiva of Jerusalem, my outlook and belief in certain doctrines of tradition had changed to the point that ten years later I was able to identify with the Conservative movement in America. When I assumed the responsibility of a Conservative congregation, I knew that sooner or later I would be faced with a dilemma for which I was not emotionally prepared, when I would have to make decisions on the applications of Jewish Law which could not strictly be based on the Codes which I had studied. Here is an example.

Mr. and Mrs. N.B. and their three small children lived in Millersburgh, Ohio, a small town about fifty miles from Wooster, the only Jewish family in a completely non-Jewish environment. The family usually joined us for the High Holy Day services in the company of family members who resided in Wooster. One day, Mr. B. called me to inquire whether it would be alright for him to come regularly to Sabbath morning services with his children. He told me that his children, then ages 6-10, ought to have closer contact with the *Schule* and with other Jewish children, but his livelihood, as owner of a local department store, precluded his moving to Wooster. Would I allow him to come to *Schule* while knowing that he would drive on the Sabbath to get there? I promised him an answer within a few days.

For the next few days I agonized over the problem. There was no doubt in my mind that driving on the Sabbath is a violation of the Law on several counts. But I was equally convinced that keeping the children away from frequent contact with the synagogue and other Jewish children would be

tantamount to writing them off from the Jewish fold. I could, of course, try to convince the B's to move to Wooster, but I knew that it was not realistic while the parents were in the store seven days a week from nine o'clock in the morning to nine o'clock in the evening. On the other hand, I asked myself how beneficial would be the presence of the children at a service which they could neither follow nor understand?

After extensive soul searching, I told Mr B. that I would sanction his coming to *Schule* with the children on the Sabbath, providing:

a) that they would come regularly, every Sabbath;

b) that the children would remain in the synagogue after the services for instruction in Hebrew reading and language, and the study of Jewish Laws and Customs; and

c) that the children would not be driven around on the Sabbath for any other purpose (which they normally did).

In return, I promised that I would provide a Hebrew teacher for the children for which he would pay. Mr. B. accepted my decision on the stated conditions, and faithfully abided by them until I left the community about two years later.

I knew that my father and my teachers would have frowned upon this decision as a desecration of the Sabbath, but they were not faced with such agonizing questions. My decision was based on my understanding and my conviction that the rabbinic dictum "that the sanctity of the Sabbath may be violated to save a Jewish *nefesh*" applied not only to the saving of a Jewish *body*, but also to the preservation of his Jewish *soul*, which is the real meaning of *nefesh*. Was I right or wrong?

My conscience bothered me for many years, but my conviction in the correctness of the decision was vindicated when I returned to Wooster fifteen years later and learned that the three children had subsequently begun to attend religious school classes on weekdays; that they celebrated their Bar/Bat

Mitzvah in the synagogue that Rabbi Ehrlich built; and that all three children had married Jewish mates, an uncommon accomplishment in rural America even in those days. That, I said to myself, is the true meaning of "saving a Jewish *nefesh* and the *nefashot* (souls) which may follow", and I felt personally fulfilled in the realizations that my rabbinic decisions preserved the Jewishness of this family.

Chapter Twenty Nine

THE GENTLEMAN WHO PAID MY COLLEGE TUITION

On a bright day at the beginning of 1954, I was asked to report to the head registrar of Wooster College, Prof. Southwick. After some pleasant amenities, the Prof. asked whether I recalled the financial "deal" we had made four years ago, and whether I ever wondered why, in spite of that deal, I was receiving my grades and credits. I told him that I remembered and I wondered, and then repeated what I said to Pearl four years earlier that "when people do not bother me, I do not bother them". The Prof. smiled and said that everyone involved in the mystery was delighted by my reaction, or inaction, for "Any inquiry on your part would have put us in a dilemma; but the time has now come to break the silence, and solve the riddle." The Prof. went on to explain that shortly after we had made our "deal", a member of my congregation called him to inquire how the Rabbi was handling his tuition obligations and, when he was told of the "deal", the gentleman asked that all financial obligations incurred by the Rabbi should be directed to his office, with the explicit provision that the Rabbi never be told who his benefactor is. Then, the Prof. went on to say that it is college policy that every student, no matter how affluent his/her family is, must personally earn 10% of his/her school tuition. We, therefore, prevailed on your friend/benefactor to reveal himself, and to accept from you 10% of what he paid in tuition towards the degree you will receive in June.

Prof. Southwick stood up and opened the door to an adjoining office, and there was Mr. Herman Freedlander, slightly embarrassed, but beaming with charm and happiness. After a friendly embrace between us, and a few warm tears on my part, it was agreed that Herman would receive from me ten

dollars a month for five years, corresponding to five years of kindness and friendship, though far less than 10% of the funds he expanded for my college education. Forty years have passed since that day. I have told and retold this story a hundred times to my children and grandchildren, to friends, congregants and audiences, and it has always brought forth a few joyful tears from the listeners. Upon each forward step in my career that I have taken since then, I recalled Herman Freedlander's kindness with fondness and gratitude.

As a footnote, let it be recorded that after two years of the "ten dollar a month" deal, Herman wrote to me to consider the balance as "fully paid".

Chapter Thirty

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

There is an American expression to the effect that "Under every cloud there is a silver lining". Conversely, there were also several lengthy shadows hanging over the bright lights of my relationship with Wooster College and the Wooster Christian community.

Most instructors treated me with the utmost respect due to a Rabbi. Some even displayed open affection. I was often invited to lecture in the deparments of Religion, Philosophy and History. Occasionally, I spotted my instructors in the Congregation on Sabbaths and Festivals, especially at the *Kol Nidrei* service on *Yom Kippur*. But there were also several unpleasant experiences with unkindly lecturers and Clergy.

1. One of the popular instructors in the department of Religion was a Prof. S. who had taught Christianity and Philosophy at the University of Cairo for fifteen years. He had a habit of singling me out whenever he discussed a principle of faith in Christianity, saying: "We are fortunate to have the local Rabbi in our class. Would you, Rabbi, give us your opinion on this subject?" Usually, I refused to get involved, and I would tell him that I had come to class to listen and to learn, and whoever is interested in my opinion on any subject, is invited to come to the synagogue, the place where I teach.

When I took a course in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Prof. S. remarked that "Jews who took exception to the Nazi Racial Laws, should lay the blame at the feet of Ezra who forced the Jews of his generation to divorce their foreign wives". In response, without having been asked for my opinion, I told the good Prof. that Ezra's objection to the "foreign wives" was not

racial, but religious, and that a foreign woman who accepted Judaism was warmly welcomed by the Jewish people, hundreds of years before Ezra, as was the Moabite Ruth, the great grandmother of David, the most beloved and revered King of Israel.

The Prof. refused to acknowledge his error until I related the incident to the head of the department, Prof. A., who insisted that Prof. S. publically apologize to me and to the students for his antisemitic remark. This had little effect on the Prof. from Cairo, and he continued to refer to his uncommon student "as the local Rabbi", until he received a more telling lesson from his own student body.

One day, the Prof. was expounding on the significance of the doctrine of the "Virgin Birth" in Christianity, and, as he often did, he asked "the local Rabbi" to express his opinion on the subject. At first, I refused to answer, but when he insisted, I casually replied that "I do not believe in it". "Why not", he persisted, "is it because you do not believe in miracles, but the Old Testament is also replete with miracles, like the Revelation at Sinai."

Thus provoked, I replied: "Prof., there is a vast difference between the two. If you deprive Sinai of its miracles and deny all the events surrounding it, you still have the Ten Commandments as a moral code for all civilizations; but when you take away the miracle of the "Virgin Birth" from Christ, what do you have"? "What do you have"?, I repeated, and the fifty students in class responded: "Pabst Blue Ribbon"[1], and then applauded themselves for this brilliant response. The truth is that I did not intend that ending to my argument, but it was indeed brilliant when it came from the students, and the good Prof. never again referred to "his local Rabbi".

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1. In a popular television commerical for "Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer" during the 1950s, the Bartender climbed on the Table with a glass of Beer in his hand, and asked his customers: "What will you have"?, and the customers responded "Pabst Blue Ribbon".

1. In the 1950s, Rabbis were deeply involved in "Brotherhood" activities with Christian clergy. They exchanged pulpits and participated in joint non-denominational services, etc., all with the aim of bridging the gap between Christians and Jews, and between whites and blacks. Through my acquaintance with Rev. Bates, I was invited to join the local Ministerial Association which until then was a fellowship of Christian clergy. The sudden presence of a Rabbi at Ministerial meetings undoubtedly put some pressure on them, but to me it was a novelty and a new experience. It was also welcomed by members of my congregation who sought ever closer ties with the non-Jewish community, amongst whom they lived and from whom they made their living. It also enabled me to learn first-hand the working of the Christian Churches, and revealed to me the inherent negative attitudes of some clergymen towards the Jewish people, even on the part of the liberals amongst them.

A Rev. T. from the Lutheran Church was known in the community as a liberal and open-minded person towards other races and religious groupings. One year, before the Easter holiday, the Ministers were planning a combined community service on Good Friday, and decided to schedule seven half-hour services on the theme of the "seven personalities around the Cross", with each section of the service to be led by one of the clergy. When they began to assign specific "personalities of the Cross" among themselves, Rev. T. jokingly remarked to invite the Rabbi to lead a service on the theme of the "Thief at the Cross". I thought that it was a distasteful provocation, and expected that one of the clergymen would take exception to this foolish remark. When no one spoke out, I said to him: "Rev. T. this entire conversation does not relate to me, but I would like to remind you that when a Jew comes to the Cross he comes as Christ and not as the thief". Rev. T. never tried another joke like this in all the years that followed.

3. In the Winter of 1953-54, about six months before graduation, I was invited by the Department of Religion to join

its staff as an instructor in the "Jewish Scriptures" (Old Testament), and I was asked to prepare outlines for two introductory courses. When I submitted the material, and after it was approved by the department, my candidacy was duly presented for approval to the "College Curriculum and Personnel Committees". Soon thereafter, I was invited to an intimate and closed meeting with the College Administration. They confided to me that the invitation extended to me by the Department of Religion had caused them great consternation because, unbeknown to most people on the school staff, a standing one-hundred year clause of the College Constitution prohibits the hiring of non-Christian instructors in the college in general, and especially so in the Department of Religion. Hiring me would require an amendment to the College Constitution by the Presbyterian Synod, which is the official governing body of the College, and such public exposure would cause great embarrassment to the school. They did not openly request my withdrawal, but in deference to an institution which had done so much for me, and due to my personal friendship with people in the administration, I reluctantly withdrew my candidacy with a feeling that an injustice had been done to the school, to me, and to the students. A large number of pre-ministerial Presbyterian students had been denied the opportunity of studying the Jewish Bible with a committed Jew and Rabbi, rather than with prejudiced instructors like Prof. S.

In spite of these incidents, the Lights in the lovely town of Wooster far exceeded the Shadows, and surprisingly manifested themselves in the most unexpected ways.

4. The most respected social club in Wooster was the Rotary Club. Its membership consisted of the "Who is Who" of the professional and business people in town. After two years of service in the congregation, Mr. Freedlander thought that his Rabbi ought to be a member of Rotary, and told me that he would appreciate my participation in the Club, while offering to pay the annual dues and for the luncheons at the weekly

meetings, which members were required to attend. Mr. F. worked out all the details, and I received a formal invitation to join Rotary.

The weekly luncheons consisted of a full meal, usually varieties of non-Kosher meat products. At my first luncheon, I ordered a can of sardines, with fresh salad on a plastic plate and plastic utensils. After two weeks, the Chef came out to meet the gentleman who ordered the sardines. He wanted to know whether I joined the club, and whether I would attend the club meetings on a regular basis. I answered in the affirmative, and explained to him that I follow a Kosher diet. When I came to the meeting on the following Tuesday, the Chef invited me to the kitchen. He showed me a new frying pan and a set of new dishes and utensils which he purchased, and he told me that each Tuesday he would prepare for me a meal of fresh kosher fish and vegetables. To allay my hesitation, he also showed me the kosher soap to wash these dishes, and the closet in which they would be kept under lock and key. He told me that I would be welcome to come into the kitchen whenever I wanted to make sure that everthing was to my satisfaction.

For three full years, this rather unassuming black gentleman catered to my religious needs without having been asked to do so, because he felt that "the Rabbi should not have to eat sardines fifty two weeks a year". This was respect of the highest degree, and more than compensated for the arrogance of Prof. S. and Rev. T.

Chapter Thirty One

BETH ISRAEL OF BRISTOL, CONN.

Armed with a BA degree in Philosophy and Education, and having been denied a teaching position in Wooster College, I was now determined to ply onward towards a PHD, and I applied for admission to the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literature at Yale University. Yale U. required a "National Apptitude" Test for admission. When I found out that this test would be administered in Wooster on the Sabbath, I was about to give up, but the officer in charge encouraged me to write to Princeton, N.J. about my problem, for "you never know what they might do". I wrote to Princeton, and a few days later I was informed that a special representative would come from Princeton to Wooster on a weekday to administer the test to me. He came from 500 miles away, and sat with me for three hours, and the special cost to me was $6.00. Only in America could this happen.

The United States is also a land of sharp contrasts. To my great surprise, I was admitted to Yale, and to the Department of Near Eastern Languages, as I requested. The Yale U. catalogue stated that the PHD course requirements could be spread out over seven years. This meant that I could continue my studies on a part-time basis, but I needed a position in the vicinity of New Haven.

Most Rabbis of the Rabbinical Assembly were graduates of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Non-Seminary Rabbis who wanted to join the Rabbinical Assembly were required to present *Semichah*/Rabbinic Ordination from a recognized rabbinic institution, a B.A. certificate from a reputable College/University, and proof of having served in a

Conservative Congregation for the two years prior to their application for R.A. membership.

In the Summer of 1954, I had fulfilled the first two requirements, but I was missing the third, because Knesset Israel Synagogue of Wooster did not qualify as a Conservative congregation because it did not belong to the United Synagogue of America. I was, therefore, not entitled for placement by the R.A. Nonetheless, the Executive V.P. of the R.A., recommended me to a rabbinic position in Bristol, Conn. because, as a small congregation of less than 200 families, not many R.A. members would apply for it. The position was desirable to me for two reasons. It was close to Waterbury, Conn. which had an excellent Hebrew Day School for my children, and it was close to Yale U. in New Haven. I came to Bristol with my family in August 1954, and we were welcomed at the door of our home by the president of the Sisterhood who handed us a dinner invitation from Dr. and Mrs. Harry Hershman who had a Kosher home. It became a love affair at first sight between the Hershman and Ehrlich families for all the years from 1954 to the present.

Chapter Thirty Two

RESHAPING CONGREGATIONAL STANDARDS

Unlike Wooster where, as the first Rabbi in town, I had to start everything from scratch, Beth Israel Temple of Bristol was a well established congregation with a large Synagogue edifice, a new school facility with six classrooms, and a beautifully furnished Study (office) for the Rabbi. On the same grounds was also the Rabbi's residence, a private five-room house with a garage and a good size lawn. The congregation belonged to the United Synagogue of America, and the Constitution called for the engagement of a Rabbi recommended by the Rabbinical Assembly of America (Conservative).

At the first Late Friday Evening services, the entire congregation was invited to an *Oneg Shabbat* reception in honor of the Rabbi and his family. On that occasion, I noticed a fundamental contrast between the congregation I had just left and the one I now stepped into. The leadership of the Wooster congregation was of East European origin with a *Cheder* and Yeshiva education. In Bristol, I faced a congregation of young American Jews, highly educated professionals and merchants, most of whom had only recently come to Bristol from the larger nearby cities of Hartford and New Britain. While physically my new congregation was much more firmly established, religiously the situation was far below my expectations. Religious services were poorly attended, and the school's educational standards were dismal. In short, I had my work cut out for me.

It appeared to me that the most effective way to reach the adult congregation would be through the children. If the children would feel closer to the Synagogue, the parents would follow. I, therefore, concentrated on raising the level of learning in our religious school. Instead of one 2-hour session a week on

Sundays offered heretofore, we began the Fall session with two 2-hour classes each week, for a total of four instruction hours per week. The curriculum included Hebrew language, Prayer, Bible, History, Laws and Customs. I had anticipated some resistance from children and parents; surprisingly, there was none. The children were glad to come, and the parents agreed to chauffeur them twice as often, especially when we offered more instruction without raising the Synagogue dues or school tuition[1].

The most formidable problem we faced was the school staff. Religious school teachers were scarce, and the congregation could not afford to pay them. The answer was "Home Talent". I offered to take on part of the Hebrew language instruction myself, if qualified congregants would volunteer to handle the courses which could be taught in English under my direction and tutelage. And it worked! Within a few months we mobilized the assistance of committed and talented people:

– A brilliant physician with a good Jewish background, Dr. Harry Hershman, taught Laws and Customs of the Holidays and Festivals.

– His wife, Beverly, a graduate nurse with a similar good Jewish background did the same.

– Dr. Maurice Mack, our talented *Baal Tefilah*, taught Prayer and the *Nusach Hatfillah* (chanting the services).

– His wife, Ann, a popular public-school teacher, taught History, and Biblical stories in the elementary grades, and

A judge of the Conn. Appelate Court. Mr. Harold Missel, taught History to upper classes of 11-13 years old.

They were provided the necessary books, and met with me several times a month for guidance in handling religious material.

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1. The following details are set forth for the benefit of small congregations which might face a similar situation.

Gradually, the more capable children were called upon to participate in the conduct of the Friday evening services, such as leading the congregation in responsive reading of the Hebrew prayers; chanting the *Kiddush* (Santification of the Sabbath); and chanting the Sabbath/Prayerbook hymns of *Yigdal, Adon Olam* and *Shalom Aleichem.* Competition among the children for these honors was fierce, and their parents and friends came to the services to listen to the children and to *qvell* from *Nachas* (parental pleasure). All this also led to higher motivation towards scholastic achievement. At the end of the first year, a class of ten year old children chanted the entire Friday evening services to the congregation, and thereafter attendance at the Sabbath services surpassed my fondest expectations.

For the school year of 1955-56, we mobilized four additional lay teachers – two attorneys and two educated merchants, and we increased the hours of instruction to six hours per week, in accordance with United Synagogue standards. Bristol now had one of the better religious schools in Conn., and every Jewish child in town, between the ages of eight to thirteen attended our school. Every child except the three children of Dr. and Mrs. B. Dr. B. had a fine Jewish background and education, and was a member of the Temple, but on principle he refused to send his children to religious school, saying "I just don't believe in it".

And then came an unexpected turn about. One day, the doctor called and asked me to meet him at the hospital. Upon my arrival, the doctor informed me that his father had suffered a stroke, and was now in a coma. The physicians were of the opinion that without brain surgery he would die; with surgery, he might recover and live for several years, or remain in a vegetative state. The doctor now wanted to know what he ought to do from a religious/ethical point of view? After a lengthy discussion, it appeared to me that the doctor would have preferred doing nothing, and that I should therefore try to help him to change his own mind without directly telling him what

to do. And so I turned to him and said: "Suppose your twelve year old daughter was lying in that room instead of your father, what would you do"? "Of course, I would go for surgery", he replied. "Well", I said, "here is your answer, doctor, and you reached it on your own". The operation was performed the same day, and the patient completely recovered.

Several weeks later, the doctor called again and said: "Rabbi, I was willing to trust your judgement with my father's life; I see no reason why I should not trust you with my children's religious education". He thanked me for my guidance at that crucial moment, and asked me to register his daughter and two younger boys in our school. Thereafter, and for the duration of my stay in Bristol, we had 100% attendance of Jewish children in our school.

Chapter Thirty Three

YALE UNIVERSITY AND THE J.T.S.

I came to Bristol in August 1954, and in September I drove to New Haven to meet Prof. F., the head of my department, and to register for the first semester. Prof. F. told me that as far as he could remember, no Rabbi ever received a PHD from *his* department. I told him that I would work hard to be the first, and he responded by saying "we shall see". He told me how to go through the registration procedure, and then return to his office.

When I returned with the registration cards for two four-hour courses in the Fall semester, Prof. F. said it would not suffice "because you must carry full sixteen hours per week". "But your catalogue stated that the course requirements could be spread out over seven years, and with eight hours per semester, including summers, I could finish in five years," I argued with him. "Rabbi", he responded, "what you said is quite right, and the course requirement of the last two years may be spread out over six years, but for the first year you must be a full-time student, with sixteen hours a week". I tried to explain to him that I could not be a full-time student while serving a congregation, and that I had moved to Bristol to study at Yale, based on the information of his catalogue, but the deaf Prof. refused to budge, saying "This is our policy, and it cannot be changed to suit you". When I got up to leave, the Prof. triumphantly remarked "I told you that no rabbi ever got a PHD in *my* department."

Colleagues and congregants encouraged me to challenge him in the Yale administration. Perhaps I should have listened to them, but I had learned in Wooster that you cannot always fight the system. I also knew that even if I did prevail with the administration, the Prof. would probably have made my stay at

Yale intolerable. So I gave up on Yale and continued my post graduate studies at the University of Conn. during the Winter and Spring semesters, and at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in the Summer. Giving up on Yale was another Shadow amidst the many bright Lights in my educational career, a heavy cloud above a silver lining.

My son, Michael, was now ready for the first grade, after two years of nursery school in Wooster. There was no question about his going to a Hebrew Day School, as it was the dominant reason for having left Wooster in the first place. Pearl's parents preferred his going to a Yeshiva like the Rabbi Jacob/Joseph School of Manhattan where they raised their two sons and where Michael would recieve a more intensive Jewish education. They even offered to have Michael stay with them through the week, and come home to Bristol for *Shabbat*. They also promised to supervise his going and coming to and from the Yeshiva. Pearl and I reluctantly agreed to send a young child to Manhattan because we, too, favored a thorough Jewish education, but we knew that the grandparents were trying to bite off more than they would be able to chew, and so it was. After three-four weeks, grandma called to tell us that they give up, and consented to place Michael at the Waterbury Hebrew Academy where we had planned to send him.

Although only ten miles from Bristol, it was a major undertaking for a six year old. In moderate weather, we shared the driving with another family whose son, a year or two older than Mike, also went to the Academy. In the Winter months, the Conn. hills are at times impassible, and route #9 between Bristol and Waterbury was especially treacherous. The boys had to travel by bus. In the morning, we took them to the bus station and waited until they were picked up, but waiting for them at the station in the afternoon was nerve-wracking, because we never knew whether the bus was making the run, and whether the boys had made it to the bus. Since I would not study at Yale, thanks to Prof. F., there was nothing special to keep me in

Bristol, and the thought crossed our minds to seek a congregation in N.Y.C., but we realized that it was not practical becuase a) I could not get a position without the R.A.; b) that the R.A. would not offer a N.Y.C. position to a non-member; and c) I could not apply for membership until I served at least two years in my present position. We, therefore, remained in Bristol. The boys took the daily adventure to and from school in good spirits, and the two sets of parents bore the burden for the following five years for the sake of their children's religious schooling.

Living and working in Bristol became increasingly pleasant from every aspect. We enjoyed the beautiful home provided by the congregation. Gradually, we developed a wide circle of social friends from all walks of life, especially among the leadership of the community and among the faithful tatendees at religious services and Adult Education classes, which I taught. Although not officially a member of the national R.A., I was warmly welcomed by the R.A. Rabbis of the Conn. region. I regularly attended their monthly meetings, and a goodly number attended my weekly study sessions in *Talmud* and *Shulchan Aruch* which I offered to them. I continued my studies at the University of Conn. twice a week, and took several graduate courses at the Jewish Theological Seminary in the Summer months. Studying Talmud with Prof. Abramson, Poetry of the Middle Ages with Prof. Spiegel, and Rabbinic Values with Prof. Kedushin was intellectually stimulating and spiritually rewarding.

Rabbi Seymour Siegel was the Director of the RA Seminary Graduate Program and, in view of my extensive background in Talmud, he suggested to me to pursue a course of study that might lead to a D.H.L. in Talmud. He also advised me to meet with Prof. Saul Lieberman to choose the proper courses and a thesis. I agreed, and Rabbi S.S. made the appointment for me. Although the Prof. and I both came to the U.S. from Israel, the Prof. chose to speak in English. He inquired about my

background in Talmud and general studies. I told him of my years at the Hebron Yeshiva in Jerusalem, and I mentioned in particular my study in his monumental work on the *Tossefta*. I also recalled to him the time when he was summoned to the J.T.S. as chairman of the Talmudic department, and how he had tried to persuade several young Talmudist from Jerusalem to join him at the J.T.S.

Suddenly, the Prof. turned to me and asked in Yiddish: "*und vos kont ihr ton do* – and what do you think you can do here"? I later discovered that this approach of "*Bitul* - talking down to students" was one of the Prof.'s characteristics, but this was my first meeting with him. I remembered how the *Rashei Yeshiva* (Deans) of Hebron Yeshiva in Jerusalem related to us with utmost respect and deference, almost like equals, and Prof. L. caught me by surprise. Maybe I should have asked Rabbi S.S. to brief me on the genius and giant I was going to meet, or may be he should have taken the initiative to brief me, since he knew the Prof. Be it as it may, the Prof.'s untoward question knocked the wind out of me, and I responded: "Since the *Tossefta* has already been written, I will have to find something else to do". The Prof. apparently took my words to imply that if he had not written the *Tossefta*, I would have tried to do it now, and he took strong exception to this implication, for he turned to me and tersely said: "*Nisht mit mir* – Not with me", and that was the end of my single encounter with one of the greatest rabbinic minds of our generation. I have since regretted having lost the opportunity of working with and learning from this great man.

But I continued to study at the Seminary "*shelo al menat l'kabel p'ras* – not for the sake of the reward of a DHL", but for the sheer pleasure of learning from the other great minds at that institution which was so much different from the Jerusalem Yeshiva on the one hand and from Wooster College on the other. This learning experience at the Seminary convinced me more than ever before to indentify with the Conservative movement, and in 1957 I forwarded my application for

membership in the Rabbinical Assembly which was duly granted.

My daughter, Michelle, reached school age in 1958. The prospect of having to send a five-year old girl to the Waterbury Hebrew Academy was unacceptable to us. She was also the only Jewish child in the neighborhood, and she needed Jewish friends. I, therefore, set in motion the search for a pulpit in New York City. The congregation understood my motives for such a move, and we have maintained our friendship with many of its people to this day.

Chapter Thirty Four

HALACHIC PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Several rabbinic/Halachic problems which I faced in Bristol, and their subsequent solutions, are worth recording, albeit not in their chronological order.

A. An Organ on the Sabbath

To enhance the beauty and inspiration of the Friday evening services, and thereby increase attendance and participation, we organized adult and children's choirs to sing during the services on alternate *Shabbatot*. We engaged a professional musician who trained and rehearsed the choirs with piano accompaniment. As should have been expected, when it came to their actual appearance before the congregation, they missed the piano accompaniment, and they requested my permission to use the piano on *Shabbat*, a practice which was sanctioned by the Law Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly and widely instituted in Conservative congregations in Conn. and throughout the New England region. My good friend, Dr. H.H., who presided over the congregation, took up their cause and offered to donate an electronic organ to the synagogue.

Beth Israel Temple was the only synagogue in Bristol, and it served the religious needs of a mixed membership of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jews. As is usually done in such communities, the Conservative route is adopted as a compromise between the extremes; the Reform members consented to the observance of the *Kashrut*/Dietary Laws and the laws of *Shabbat* within the Synagogue, and the Orthodox agreed to mixed seating, to English readings in the services, and to the use of the Rabbinical Assembly prayer-book which contains several liturgical and theological deviations from the traditional *Siddur*. As far as the Bristol congregation was

concerned, the majority of our members identified themselves as Conservative to begin with, and everyone was happy with the middle of this status.

When the subject of the organ on *Shabbat* was brought before a general congregation meeting, it became apparent that the delicate balance was in danger, and the congregation could break asunder over this issue. The people who identified themselves as Orthodox, although not strictly observant of the Sabbath laws, became very emotional about it. Several of them cried openly and profusely during the congregational meeting, charging that they were being driven out of the synagogue to which they had belonged for decades. The congregation appealed for rabbinic guidance. I knew the sentiments of the congregation and that the majority would vote in favor of the organ. I also knew that the Orthodox people, who constituted about one third of the membership, would leave us, and I had to save the congregation and the school.

I told the congregation that intellectually I could accept the Rabbinical Assembly ruling on the permissibility of the use of an organ on the Sabbath in a Synagogue for the enhancement of religious services, because:

1) Playing a musical instrument is in itself *not* a biblical violation of the Sabbath;

2) The prohibition against using a musical instrument is of rabbinic origin lest it be repaired when broken, and fixing an instrument constitutes a biblical violation of the Sabbath;

3) Such rabbinic prohibitions are called *Sh'voot* which did not apply to the *Bet Mikdash*/Temple in Jerusalem, because the *Kohen*/Priest who presided at the Temple worship knew to distinguish between what is permitted and what is not. Therefore, the playing of musical instruments was part of Temple worship even on Shabbat and Festivals; and

4) The Rabbinical Assembly is of the opinion that, with the destruction of the *Bet Mikdash*, the synagogue has taken its place, and the Rabbi now fulfills the role of the *Kohen*/Priest to teach the congregation what may and what may not be done on the Sabbath; therefore, a *Sh'voot* prohibition which was permitted in the Temple, may now be permitted in the synagogue.

This is the theory which I could accept scholastically. However, I told the congregation that personally I would not feel comfortable with the use of an organ in the synagogue on Shabbat, and I sympathize with those who object to it. "As a Conservative congregation, you have the right to vote in accordance with the Rabbinical Assembly permission to install the organ, but our main concern at this juncture should be the harmony of the membership, and the survival of the congregation". I then pleaded with the assembly that only those who are ready to commit themselves to attend the services when the organ is used, should vote in the affirmative. "Don't install an organ for my benefit, for I can worship without it". Conversely, I pleaded with the Orthodox inclined members, that only those members who are *Shomrei Shabbat* at home, should vote in the negative, because people should not impose restrictions on the congregation which they themselves do not observe at home.

When the motion for the installation of an organ was put to a vote, no one voted for it and no one voted against it. The motion was then referred to a small committee which decided to accept Dr. H.'s donation of an organ to be played only at the Late Friday Evening Services, and only on those alternate *Shabbatot* when a choir sings at the services. It was not to be used on Shabbat morning, and not at all on the Festivals and the High Holidays. At first, we had banner attendance when it was announced that the choir and organ would participate at a service, but after a few appearances, when the novelty wore off, and the choir appeared less frequently, the synagogue was left

with a beautiful organ for the celebration of weddings and other public events, but never again used on the Sabbath. The congregation survived without an organ at services, and continued to flourish to the delight of all concerned.

In dealing with this challenge, I recalled the verse of the Psalmist *(119:126)*: *"Et la'asot la-Shem, heferu Toratecha"*. According to Rava *(T.B. Berachot 63a)*, this sentence may be read as it is written – *mereisha lesseifa* – to be translated "It is time for Thee, Lord, to work (to punish the sinners) for they have violated Thy law". But the sentence may also be reversed, says Rava – *Messeifa lereisha* – in which case the Psalmist says "They (the righteous) have violated Thy Law, because it was an occasion to serve the Lord", on which Rashi comments "like Elijah on mount Carmel, who offered a sacrifice on an unlawful height – *Bamah* – (to serve the Lord against the priests of Baal). We, likewise, reluctantly permitted a temporary violation of a *Sh'voot*, to save a congregation in its service of the Lord.

B. Status of a Convert's infant child:

A Ms. B.S., and her fiance, Mr. B.C. invited me to officiate at their approaching wedding. I knew the groom's family well, as they were frequent worshippers in the synagogue, but I seldom saw the bride's family, and I had heard it said that the bride's mother, Mrs. S. was not Jewish. During the interview with the young people, Ms. S. did tell me that she celebrated her Bat Mitzvah at the synagogue, and that she was president of the Hillel Chapter at the University of Conn. where she was now studying. When the young people left my office, I called Mr. S. to inform him of his daughter's invitation, and to inquire about the basis of the rumor I had heard.

Mr. S. confirmed that his wife was not Jewish when he married her, but she was subsequently converted to Judaism by the Rabbi of New Britain. In the course of our conversation, I ascertained that his daughter was born *before* her mother's conversion and, to my great surprise, I also learned that the

Rabbi *did not* convert the infant girl with her mother, as the law permitted him to do.

I then told Mr. S. that technically his daughter, having been born of a non-Jewish woman, was not Jewish, and would have to be formally converted if she wanted me to officiate at her wedding. Mr. S. was surprised, even shocked to hear what I said, and he shouted: "B. went through her entire life as a Jewess. She studied in your Hebrew School, she celebrated her Bat Mitzvah in your synagogue, and now serves as president of Hillel. If you now think that she is not Jewish, you tell her". After I calmed him down a bit, I explained to him that he had made two mistakes. First, Mrs. S. should have been converted before marriage, or before B. was born. Secondly, since B. was born before her mother's conversion, you should have told the Rabbi of New Britain that you had a baby-girl at home, and he should have converted her together with her mother. Therefore, I said to him, you will have to tell B. about it, but once she knows her present status, I shall arrange for her formal conversion to Judaism with utmost discretion, without anyone knowing about it, not even her fiance, if she does not want him to know. And so it was. Normally, a candidate for conversion has to go through a course of study in Jewish history, laws and practices for 6-8 months; but, with B's background in religious school and Hillel, this was not necessary. We went to a *Mikvah* in New Haven, where no one knew her, and in the presence of two additional rabbinic colleagues she went through immersion in the *Mikvah*, and the conversion procedures. Several hours later she returned to Bristol as a Jewess, albeit a converted one.

A few days later, I invited the couple to my study for a pre-nuptial discussion, as was my custom to do. As we began to fill out the necessary forms, I was shocked to discover that the bridegroom to be was a bonafide *Kohen*/Priest who is prohibited by Jewish law from marrying a convert. I did not know whether B. had told her fiance of her conversion, and could not tell the young people of the new complication. I merely suggested that

we meet again 2-3 weeks later, so that I might chart a course of action in this difficult situation.

The Torah does not explicitly preclude a *Kohen* from marrying a converted woman. But, by rabbinic interpretation, every non-Jewish woman was classified by them as a *Zonah*/Harlot because non-Jews were *Sh'tufei Zimah*/Sexually Lascivious in their personal practice, and they also abandoned their children (daughters) to licentious behavior, and, as a *Zonah* she is unfit to be married to a *Kohen*. According to the *Talmud* and *Shulchan Aruch*, this prohibition applies even to a non-Jewish girl who was converted to Judaism before the age of three years, because she is the product of people who are addicted to harlotry/*Z'nut*.

But it occurred to me that this attitude should not apply to B. because Mrs. S. was converted to Judaism when B. was in her infancy, and B. grew up in a Jewish home environment which is not addicted to harlotry, and should therefore be allowed to marry a *Kohen*, especially in our days when the certainty of priestly status of any *Kohen* is somewhat in doubt, as our sages often pointed out that the races and religious groupings of the world intermarried. In addition, the sweeping rabbinic generality on the lascivious addiction of all non-Jews could perhaps be mollified, as they too changed their behavior in the course of centuries since that ruling, and it is unacceptable in these days to classify every non-Jewish girl as a harlot.

I shared these thoughts with a colleague from New Haven, Rabbi A.K., a scholar of the old school with *Semicah*/Rabbinic Ordination from the Yeshiva of Preshburg, in Hungary, and a member of the National Rabbinical Assembly Law Committee. Rabbi K. completely and whole-heartedly agreed with my reasoning and conclusions. On that basis, I officiated at the wedding of these young people who were determined to build a Jewish and Kosher home within the Jewish community. Mr. B.S. also agreed that he would never lay claim to his Priestly/*Kohen* status.

C. A Remarried Holocaust Survivor Finds His First Wife:

A more difficult and complicated case was that of the B. family which mirrored the tragedy that had befallen Polish Jewry during the Second World War. When I came to Bristol, I found two boys, ages 9 and 11, registered in the religious school. They were the sons of Mr. and Mrs. B. who lived on a nearby farm, and were coming to services with the boys on Sabbaths and Holidays. When the older boy reached age 12, I called the parents to schedule a Bar Mitzvah date, and to tell them that their son would have to attend a special weekly class session for instruction in Prayer and Torah cantillation. Thereupon, Mr. and Mrs. B. asked to meet me in my Study for "a very private and personal matter", and this is the tragic tale which they unfolded before me.

Mr. B. came from a Chassidic family in Warsaw, and was properly married to a Jewish woman of a similar background. In September 1939, they escaped Eastward before the approaching German army, and settled down in the Russian sector of Poland. In 1941, when the Germans invaded Russia, they ran again, but this time they were separated. Mr. B. found shelter on the farm of a Catholic family, and spent the war years with them. At the end of the war, he began to search for his wife while staying on the farm. When he found no trace of her, and knowing what had happened to millions of Jews under German occupation, he assumed that his wife was among the Holocaust victims, and he married the daughter of his host who, together with her parents, had risked their lives to save him. In the course of time, they came to the United States, purchased a farm near Bristol, Conn. and raised their children.

The Catholic Mrs. B. held on to her faith, but was determined to give her husband a proper Jewish home. The boys were circumcised and officially converted to Judaism in accordance with Jewish Law. Mrs. B. maintained a Kosher home, observed the Holidays and Festivals, faithfully chauffeured the boys to religious school three times a week, and

occasionally came to religious services with her husband and children.

At this point, Mrs. B. asked for permission to speak, and said: "Rabbi, my Catholic parents are long gone. My husband and children are good Jews, and I have lived as a Jewess for the past twenty years. I believe that the time has come to unite the entire family under one faith. I want your guidance in converting to Judaism, and then give us a Jewish wedding". I saw no impediment to converting Mrs. B., but giving them a Jewish wedding without first knowing what exactly had happened to the former Jewish Mrs. B. was not that simple. I immediately realized that I needed time to work this problem through. I also felt that I ought to talk with each of them separately to see whether there was more to this tragedy than met the eye, or was more than they were willing to communicate in front of each other.

I first invited Mrs. B. to come in by herself. I found her to be an exceptionally quiet and fine person. Her motive for conversion was as pure as it was simple: "I want my son to have a Jewish mother when he becomes Bar Mitzvah", she said to me, and then continued: "The children are growing up as Jews. Ten years from now they will be ready for marriage, and we would like them to marry Jewishly, and I want to spare them the need to retell the story of our lives time and again, and get into unforseen complications. When my sons meet Jewish girls, they should be able to tell the Rabbi that they have Jewish parents". Further discussion revealed that she knew more about Judaism than about Catholicism, as she had obviously learned a good deal from her husband and from reading on the subject. All she needed was a formal acceptance of faith, and the conversion procedure. The complications yet to be faced all came from Mr. B.

Then, I invited Mr. B. to my Study to learn more about himself and his background, and to find out whether he had more information about his first wife than what he told me at

our first meeting. After some prodding, he admitted that he had heard rumors that she did survive the Holocaust, and that she had reached Toronto, Canada. Apparently, since he had already remarried, he was not inclined to follow any leads or try to locate her; but, as far as I was concerned, a Jewish wedding for Mr. B. was for the time being out of the question. We had to try to trace the rumors about the first Mrs. B. The second obstacle came up when we began to talk about his family background, and I discovered that Mr. B. was not only a Chassid, but also a Kohen of the Priestly tribe who could not marry a converted woman.

I related the details of this tragic episode to Prof. B.C. of the department on Jewish Law at the Jewish Theological Seminary who suggested that in view of these complications the best course would be "to do nothing", but I could not accept his suggestion. It was easy for him "to do nothing" while sitting in the ivory tower of the J.T.S. I had to face a Jewish man in my congregation. I was deeply concerned about the two Jewish boys in my religious school, and their younger sister still at home, and I decided to follow the leads wherever they might take me, and then base my decision on facts.

I sent out a letter to 15-20 Conservative Rabbis in Toronto and Montreal, asking whether they came across a Holocaust survivor by the name of Mrs. B.? One of them responded with the information that a Mrs. B. from Poland has been affiliated with his congregation for several years, and that she recently married a traditional member of his congregation. So we now had a legitimately married Chassidic Kohen living with a non-Jewish woman in Conn., and a legitimately married Jewish woman from a Chassidic family now living with another observant Jewish man in Canada. I wondered whether under these circumstances Prof. B.C. would still hold on to his suggestion of "doing nothing"?

I called in Mr. B. to share the information I now had about his former wife, and I asked him whether he would be willing

to send her a *Get* – Jewish Bill of Divorce. Without any hesitation he consented to do whatever I would tell him to do. I notified my Canadian colleague of my suggestion, but he called me back, saying that her present husband does not know anything of her history, or that she was married before, and that the former Mrs. B. refuses to do anything that might jeopardize her present status even if it meant living with the Canadian traditional man while legally still married to her former husband. In my return answer, I offered the Canadian Rabbi to write the *Get* in Bristol, and mail it to him, and that Mr. B. would appoint him (the Rabbi) as his *Sheli'ach*/representative to hand over the *Get* to his member (former Mrs. B.) in strict privacy, without her present husband knowing anything about this transaction. The Rabbi and the former Mrs. B. agreed to these terms, and it was so done, and thus we relieved the former Mr. & Mrs B. of their utmost dilemma – of living with other spouses while legally married to each other.

I never found out how my Canadian colleague handled the problem of the former Mrs. B. with her present husband. The wedding he had performed for them before she received the *Get* from her former husband was not valid; therefore, a new marriage ceremony was now required, but the Rabbi had promised the woman that her husband would not know about her history and the *Get*. What a "*plonter*/of twisted complications". I did not discuss it with my Canadian colleague because I still had my own *Tsoress*/headaches, and I trusted that my worthy colleague would somehow solve his.

Now that my Mr. B. was free to marry another woman, the question remained what to do about the present Mrs. B. who wanted a Jewish wedding (after her conversion) with her husband who is a Kohen, and thus prohibited from marrying a converted woman. Should I follow Prof. C. suggestion "to do nothing", or should I press ahead? I reasoned as follows:

A. If I do nothing, Mr. B. will continue to live with a non-Jewish woman which is a transgression of biblical law.

B. As a *Kohen*, he is also violating a rabbinic law by living with a *Zonah*/Harlot woman which, according to rabbinic interpretation, is the status of all non-Jewish women, as explained above.

C. In addition, I have the problem of the three legally Jewish children living in a mixed union of a Jew and non-Jewess which this fine non-Jewish woman is trying to overcome.

D. If the woman converts, and I refuse to officiate at their Jewish wedding, Mr. B. will no longer violate #A. above, because she will now be Jewish, but he will still be in violation of #B, because she will retain the status of a *Zonah* even after her conversion. At the same time, the children will continue to live in a home where the parents are not legally married, whereas a *Kohen* who marries a converted woman commits a one-time rabbinic prohibition, but the marriage becomes legally valid.

E. Then, I added the other consideration mentioned above regarding the marriage of a *Kohen* to a converted woman, namely:

   1) The certainty of the status of any proclaimed *Kohen* truly being of the Priestly tribe is now somewhat in doubt; and

   2) The ancient rabbinic conception of every non-Jewish woman being in the category of a "licentious harlot", because non-Jews abandon their daughters to harlotry, could be, and perhaps should be modified. The present Mrs. B. and her parents, who risked their lives to save the life of a Jew, do not fit into this conception.

I shared these considerations with my learned colleague from New Haven, Rabbi A.K., and other members of the local Law Committee, and they all agreed with my reasoning. Accordingly, I officially and legally welcomed Mrs. B. into the Jewish fold in the presence of her husband and children, and

then officiated at her wedding to Mr. B., with the understanding that Mr. B. would never lay claim to his Priestly/*Kohen* status.

Six months later, when I watched their older son chanting the *Haftorah* on his *Bar Mitzvah* Shabbat to the delight of his younger siblings and to the joyful tears of his Jewish parents, I knew that I had done the right thing, in spite of the trepidations that I may have been party to a rabbinic transgression of marrying a *Kohen* to a converted woman. I was now certain that we had established a fine Jewish family between a survivor of the Jewish tragedy in Europe and a gracious woman who may be in the category of "the righteous among the nations", having sheltered a Jew at the risk of her own life.

D. An Insoluble Problem:

Unfortunately, not all rabbinic problems have such happy endings. Liberal as we are and try as we may, certain problems are not soluable within Jewish Law, as the following episode will illustrate.

On two consecutive Friday nights I saw an unfamiliar woman at the Sabbath services. On the second occasion, I walked over to her during the *Oneg Shabbat* reception to welcome her. She introduced herself as Mrs. D., a Christian woman who resided in Bristol, and who would like to attend our Sabbath services regularly. I told her that the Synagogue is open to the public, and she would be welcome any time. Several weeks later, she asked my permission to attend our Adult Education classes. In response to several questions, she told me that she had served as a Sunday School teacher in Old Testament classes at a local church; that the church had arranged for her attendance at a Bible Conference at the Hartford Theological Seminary; that when she asked certain questions on Jewish Scriptures, the lecturer appeared evasive; and she then decided to learn more about Judaism on her own. I invited her to attend our Adult Education classes, which she did on a regular

basis, and her husband gradually began to come with her to our Synagogue on Friday evenings and Sabbath mornings.

Before Passover, she attended a pre-Pessach Seminar on the preparation for and the celebration of the festival, and Mrs. D. asked for directions in preparing her non-Kosher home for a Kosher Passover. Instead, I invited her to attend our community *Seder*. In the course of time, Mrs. D. made her home Kosher according to all legal requirements, and her husband, a prominent engineer in a local industrial complex, did not object, in spite of the restrictions this imposed on him. One day, Mrs. D. asked to be formally converted to Judaism. I asked Mr. D. how he felt about his wife's intention? He told me that he felt very comfortable in our midst, and would go along with everything Mrs. D. wanted to do with herself, but at this he would draw the line. "I am not a church goer, but I would not denounce the faith into which I was born".

If ever there was a *Giyoret Zedek* / a Righteous Convert without ulterior motives, it would have been Mrs. D., but here we came to an immovable object. Mr. D. was not willing to join his wife in conversion. Mrs. D. wanted to stay married to her husband. And I could not convert a woman while knowing, that as a Jewess, she would stay married to a non-Jew, thereby creating a mixed marriage which is explicitly prohibited in Scriptures. One of the requirements in conversion is that the convert promises to live by the *Mitzvot*/Commandments of the Torah. A convert does not have to explicitly accept each *Mitzvah*, but neither is he allowed to explicitly exclude any of the Mitzvot. Mrs. D. had told me that she would not abide by the biblical *Mitzvah*/Commandment against intermarriage to a non-Jew; therefore, I could not officiate at her conversion. It was a heartbreaking impasse for her and me, but these are the rules, and I advised Mrs. D. to continue living by the *Mitzvot* of the Torah while maintaining her status as a Christian woman, which she did whole-heartedly.

Just before I left Bristol, In 1959, my younger brother, Baruch, asked me to arrange for him a visa to the United States with his wife and children. With the recommendation of Rabbi Joseph Smith of Temple Beth El in Waterbury, Conn., the congregation issued Baruch a two year contract as a teacher in its Religious School. Mr. and Mrs. William Silver, members of my congregation in Bristol, guaranteed Beth El to cover any undue expenses which might accrue to the congregation.

It turned out that this convenient arrangement did not materialize, but I was nontheless delighted to have brought my brother to the States because of the advantages he took of the American opportunities. While serving as a Hebrew teacher in Springfield, Mass. and in Monsey, New York. Baruch managed to get a B.A. from Rockland Comm. College, and a P.H.D. in Jewish History from Yeshiva University. Upon his return to Israel, he served as Principal of a Teachers' Institute in Kerem B'yavneh. I admired Baruch for his achievements, and I was happy to have had my small part in them.

Chapter Thirty Five

BETH ISRAEL OF PORT WASHINGTON, N.Y.

Finding a suitable rabbinic position in metropolitan New York was not an easy undertaking because of the large number of Rabbinical Assembly men applying for each opening, and the R.A. policy of placing men according to seniority. Since I had only recently joined the R.A. membership, my name was at the bottom of the list, and the chance of getting a placement recommendation to a desirable pulpit was not practical. Furthermore, I had two other strikes against me. The first was being foreign-born, a stigma you never truly overcome no matter how long you are in the country and how well you have mastered the language. The second was my traditional background – of having been raised in a Chassidic home and ordained by an Orthodox Yeshiva in Jerusalem. These factors precluded my being accepted by a liberal congregation which favored a more pliable Rabbi, one who would be more responsive to the bidding of the congregants in ritual matters such as *Shabbat, Kashrut*, participation of women, etc.

Ever since the beginning of the process of rabbinic interpretation of biblical law, Rabbis were classified either as *Mekilim*/Lenient in the application of the law, or as *Machmirim*/stringent in its application.

The fact is that two Rabbis of equal learning and reverence may differ in their decisions, one may be a *Machmir* and the other one a *Meikil*, because what comes into play in rendering a decision on ritual questions is not only knowledge and piety, but also character and attitude. Some Rabbis say "*Yikov haddin et hahar* – Let the law take its course" no matter how much and whom it hurts. Others are more sympathetic towards the applicant, and bend towards leniency whenever possible, so that

the average person can live within the law. In my youth in Jerusalem, the Chief Rabbi of the city was known as a *Meikil*, and the one who was appointed to the position after him was known as a *Machmir*.

When my mother sent me to a Rabbi to inquire about the Kashrut of a chicken, she would say to me: "*Avroom*, go to Reb Velvel because he is a *meikil*, and not to Reb Fishel who is always *machmir*.[1]" I myself was as liberal in ritual matters as the law would permit me to be, but I would not go against the law just to please a congregant.

In general, it may be said that the knowledge of the average American congregant for which qualifications to look in the selection of a Rabbi is rather superficial. For a Rabbi to be tall, good looking, and a good speaker are often more advantageous than being a man of scholarship, reverence and dedication. Only after a year or two of service in the congregation do the Rabbi's real qualifications come into play to determine his tenure with the congregation.

When I was interviewed for the position in Port Wahsington, N.Y, a member of the board of trustees asked me: "What would happen if the board and you were to disagree on any matter?" I told her that, as Rabbi of the congregation, I would attend all meetings of the Board and the Ritual Committee because it is much easier to prevent the wrong decisions from being made than to change them after they have been voted upon, and I added: "In administative matters, my opinion does not carry any more weight than the opinion of other members, and the majority would prevail, but in religious matters the Rabbi's opinion is the law for the congregation, because he speaks in the name of the Law, and lay members do not have a say in it". This principle was accepted by the Board, and was the basis of my relationship with the congregation throughout the thirteen years of my service there.

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1. See pages 75-76, above, what Rabbi Frank said on this Subject.

It was challenged only once. When the board was about to vote on a ritual matter, and I said to them that they cannot vote on this question "because I already told you what has to be done," one board member spoke up and asked: "Rabbi, was that your personal opinion or was that the Law?" When I told him that "It is the Law," he demanded that I prove it to him. I went to my office, and returned with the proper book. I opened to the page, and asked him to read it to the Board. The Board members felt uncomfortable with this confrontation and his *Chutzpah*. No vote was taken on that point, and neither did he or anyone else ever dare do it again.

I sat with members of the Board for several hours as we tried to learn about each other. At first glance, the P.W. congregation would be a come-down compared to Bristol. The community was young, and in its first stages of development as a suburban congregation. It did not have a regular synagogue building, and lacked proper religious school facilities. The congregation did not own a home, and the Rabbi would have to rent an apartment.

On the plus side was the quality of its membership which consisted of young professional people and successful businessmen who had left the metropolitan New York City for better living conditions in suburbia. Although the present membership was small, about 150 families, they were of a high educational and financial calibre, and there was great potential for rapid growth because of its close proximity to New York City. The location of the community was excellent from every point of veiw. It was close to Manhattan and Queens where Pearl's parents and siblings lived. It was close to Great Neck, which had an outstanding Hebrew Day School for our children. It was part of Long Island which had a Jewish population of half a million people and sixty congregations, forty of which were Conservative. And I would be able to continue my studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan.

The congregation was willing to commit itself to the building of a new Temple and School within two years, and to the acquisition of a home for the Rabbi as soon as a suitable location for the Temple was found. On that basis, I accepted the congregation's offer for a two year engagement at a favorable salary. In August 1959, we moved into a comfortable apartment within walking distance from the existing synagogue, and we registered our children for the new school year at the North Shore Hebrew Academy in Great Neck. Four other families then expressed interest in a Hebrew Day School education for their children. This brought the number of children from our congregation to nine, and we shared the burden of transporting them to and from school.

The congregation engaged a professional full-time *Chazzan*/Cantor who was also responsible for preparing students for *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. We had an excellent *Baal Korah*/Torah Reader, a truly committed person who also served as chairman of the Religious Committee. Being close to New York City, we had no difficulty in finding and hiring professional Hebrew School teachers, so that my responsibility was mostly in rabbinic work, in adult education, and as principal of the religious school. Taken together, it was a formidable job. There was also great satisfaction in the educational realm as we immediately increased the hours of religious instruction from four to six per week, and enrolled all congregational children in the school program. The number of regular adult worshippers steadily grew from week to week, and so did the number of people enrolled in our adult education classes in History, Principles of Faith, Going Through Life With Judaism, Etc., which I taught, and which we maintained at a high level.

Equally important was the friendship and social relationships we established with a considerable number of families of our age and interest, with those who had children of comparable ages to our own, and who maintained Kosher homes. We spent social evenings in our respective homes which

added immeasureably to our quality of life. Members of the congregation used to sponsor the *Oneg Shabbat* reception following the Friday evening services in honor of a family event – birth of a child, a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, a Wedding Anniversary, etc. Such gatherings encouraged greater attendance at services, created a family atmosphere within the congregation, and encouraged ever larger numbers of young families to join the synagogue. There were now two hundred children of school age in the congregation, and the need for a new school facility was urgently felt by all members.

Chapter Thirty Six

THE DEMISE OF MY FATHER, z.l.

The religious services on the High Holy Days and on the *Succot/Simchat Torah* Festivals were well attended and well received. On the morrow after the last day of *Yom Tov*, we were informed of my father's demise on the previous day, eleven full years after mother's departure, but on the Hebrew Calendar their Yharzeit dates are just one day removed. Mother passed away on the 22nd day of Tishrei, 1948, the day of *Sh'minee Atzeret and Simchat Torah* in Israel and the day of *Sh'minee Atzeret* in the Diaspora, and father passed away during the night of the 23rd of Tishrei, the day after *Simchat Torah* 1959 in Israel, and the night of *Simchat Torah* in the Diaspora.

Father was the first in the family to have lived to full age of 72-75 (we never knew the exact age of our parents), while mother, her two oldest daughters, and a son passed away before they had reached the age of 62. He was ailing for several weeks before his demise, and stayed in the home of my second sister, who lived near a synagogue in the Hungarian quarters in Jerusalem. On *Simchat Torah* (in Israel), father managed to go up to *Schule* to watch the *Hakafot*/Torah Processions, to be called for an Aliyah to the Torah, and to recite the *Yizkor*/Memorial Service. He expired that same night after he had *davened* the *Maariv*/Evening service and recited the *Havdalah* benedictions.

Readers of this book are already familiar with my father's reptutation as a Talmudic scholar, a prominent Kabbalist, a righteous man, a Chassid, and a man of great Wisdom and Compassion. I shall, therefore, quote only a few lines from the fourteen page letter which I received from my brother-in-law, Reb Avraham Mordechei Yuzevits:

With a broken heart and trembling hands I take a pen to tell you of the great loss we have suffered with the departure of the Crown of our Heads, a Cedar of Lebanon, a Giant of Torah, a Master of *Kabbalah*, a respected and beloved person by all who knew him: "*Oy Na Lanu Ki Chatanu* - Woe unto us for we have sinned." Many thousands of Jerusalem people gathered to accompany him to his eternal rest following the immersion of his entire body in a *Mikvah* (Ritual Bath), a post-mortem honor which is bestowed on singular people of the generation. Your sister and I were so proud and happy with his presence in our home, and now we feel breaved and orphaned: "*Oy Na Lanu Ki Chatanu*".

In Jerusalem, burial took place on the *Har Hamenuchot* cemetary, on the morrow of his demise, a working day in Israel, but in the States it was still the *Simchat Torah* Festival, and we could not be called until after the funeral. Thus, I did not attend his funeral nor that of my mother who passed away during Israel's War of Liberation. I found comfort in the knowledge that Pearl and I had done the best we could to compensate for their distress and poverty in their earlier years by making them as comfortable as possible in their latter years. In my response to Reb Avraham Mordechei's letter, I offered to cover all expenses he incurred in the funeral and for the *Matzevah*/Memorial Stone, but Reb Avraham Mordechei replied that when they opened father's personal box they found that he had saved enough money to cover all expenses.

During the *Shivah* week, Pearl said to me: "Throughout the years we have sent our *Ma'asser*/Tithe of what we earnd to your father. Now that he is gone, I do not think that we should benefit financially by his demise". She went on to suggest that we divide the *Ma'aser* among members of our family in Israel. We thus pledged ourselves at that moment, and we can now say in the words of the Psalmist (Ch. 116): "*Nedarei laShem Ashalem... B'tocheichi Yerushalayim* – Our Vows we have paid unto the Lord... in the midst of Jerusalem, *Halleluyah*."

Each year, on the day after *Simchat Torah* in Jerusalem, a *Minyan* of my parents' children and grandchildren go up to the *Har Hazeitim* and the *Har Hamenuchot* cemeteries to recite the appropriate Psalms and to say *Kaddish* for our righteous parents and grandparents, and we pray that their memories may inspire us to a more noble and consecrated living.

Father's Grave Stone on Har Hamenuchot

Chapter Thirty Seven

AN UNUSUAL TEMPLE PRESIDENT

By the end of my first year in P.W., the congregation acquired a parcel of land for building a new synagogue to facilitate the religious, educational and social needs of a growing community, and a professional fund raiser was engaged to launch a Building Fund Campaign. Pearl and I then went about looking for a suitable home within walking distance of the new Temple site, to be purchased by the congregation for our use as we were promised. When we found the house we wanted, we knew that financially it would be more advantageous for us to purchase it on our own, but the thought was soon discarded for two reasons. First, we needed about 5-7 thousand dollars for a down payment, which we did not have. Second, the County and City tax would amount to $3,000. annually, an amount which we could not afford on our annual income, but which the congregation, as a charitable institution, would not have to pay. Therefore, I gave the information to the congregation president, Mr. Sol Rabinovich, and asked him to bring the proposition of purchasing the home to the Board of Trustees in accordance with our original understanding. I also hinted that I might leave the congregation if the proposition was turned down.

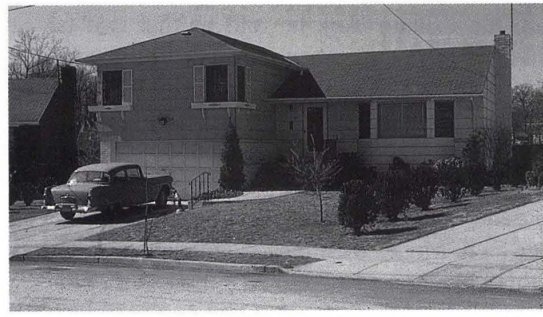
Since the Agenda of that meeting included a personal matter, I did not attend that Board meeting. On the following morning, Mr. R. came to our apartment, and from his facial expression we could see that he did not carry good tidings. He told us that many Board members felt that the congregation could not afford to undertake the building of the Temple and the purchase of the Rabbi's home simultaneously. He added that the congregation was anxious for me to stay on, and was willing to extend my contract for another three years with a substantial raise, but they asked that I be a little patient with them because

eventually a Rabbi's home would be purchased. Mr. R. told us that the vote was evenly split, for and against the purchase of the home, and that he cast a "nay" vote so as not to split the congregation at such a crucial a moment.

Sensing our disappointment, Mr. R. tried to calm us and to make sure that we stay on with the congregation in a comfortable home which we could purchase for ourselves. Concerning the County Tax, he told us that two tax attorneys had volunteered to rewrite my contract with the congregation in such a way that we would save more in federal income tax payments than we will have to pay in City and County taxes. Then he asked me how much we needed for a down payment to purchase the house ourselves?. I told him that we needed five to seven thousand dollars, but we could probably put together part of it on our own. Mr. R. then placed an evelope on the table and said: "In this envelope you have five thousand dollars which is my loan to you for an unlimited time. You will also find a Savings Bank Book in my (his) name with a five dollar deposit. Each month you will deposit in this account any amount you can save at your convenience. I do not want any interest from you, and all accumulated dividends will be yours. When the book has five thousand dollars in it, you will return it to me and the loan will be fully paid-up. Don't be in a hurry, take as much time as you need, and enjoy your new home". He appeared to be embarrassed by the experience, but also very satisfied, even proud of what he did. He wished us a Good *Shabbat*, and left.

Within a few weeks we purchased the home we wanted, a seven-room one family home containing three bedrooms, a large eat-in kitchen, a dining room and a sunken living room, a large den/playroom, a basement and a two-car garage. The home was in excellent condition, ready to be moved into, and in the back there was a half acre well kept yard with a swimming pool. Here we lived until we moved from P.W. twelve years later. Here we raised our children, and celebrated their *Bar/Bat Mitzvahs*. In the large outdoor garden we celebrated our son's engagement, and

here we enjoyed the formal Dinners on *Rosh Hashanah* nights and the inspiring *Seddarim* on Pesach nights with the participation of about twenty five people of family and friends, on each occasion.



Our Beautiful Home in Port Washington, 1961

Mr. R. was the owner of a major home furniture establishment in Manhattan. He came to see us after we moved into our home and invited us to his place – with an offer to help us furnish our home as befitting a "suburban Rabbi". When we arrived at his store, he personally escorted us through 15-20 sample furnished rooms to select whatever we wanted. At the end, Pearl was embarrassed to tell him that we had not seen anything we really wanted. Mr. R. gave us his personal passes to the showrooms of famous furniture manufacturers in the city, and told us to mark down the styles and numbers of whatever we select, and bring the notes to him. We did as instructed, and several months later a huge truck pulled up to our home and unloaded seven rooms of the finest furniture the country offered. Mr. R. came to inspect the place to make sure that each item arrived in perfect condition, whereupon he handed us the bills he had received from the manufacturers, with the merchants's discounted price for cash delivery, and he added only 10% to

these bills for bookkeeping and shipping. Once again he encouraged us to take our time in paying for all this in convenient installments as we see fit. To us it meant a 55-60% discount off the regular price, and we enjoyed this furniture until we moved to Israel in 1975, when our married son took his bedroom furniture to his home, our daughter took whichever items she wanted, and the remainder was sold at an auction for higher prices in 1975 than we had paid for them in 1961.

It was a home fit not only for a suburban Rabbi but also for a suburban millionaire. It was the best, and so was Mr. R. No Rabbi could dream of having so devoted a congregational president and personal friend.

Mr. R. grew up in a committed Jewish home, and studied in a Yeshiva where his father was president. He was imbued with a positive attitude towards Jewish living and with a strong dedication to the synagogue. He had a standing appointment with me on Friday mornings, when he would come for an hour or two to discuss Temple affairs and plan the agenda for the forthcoming Board meetings. He did not hesitate to take exception or criticize some of my pronouncements with which he did not agree, but always with respect and love. Nor did he ever question the religious decisions I had made, saying that this was my exclusive prerogative. His children – two boys and a girl – attended the N.S.H.A. with our children, and I officiated at their *Bar/Bat Mitzvha* celebrations and school graduations.

At one of these sessions he remarked that I did not appear to be happy with my work, and I told him that he was indeed very perceptive. I was not very thrilled with the religious and educational progress that we were making, to which Mr. R. responded with a sermonic lecture to his Rabbi, saying:

"In the first Temple in Jerusalem our forefathers came for the sole purpose of worshipping God. They offered sacrifices of Thanksgiving - *Korban Todah* to God for His Benificence; they

offered Sin Offerings - *Korban Chatat* for personal or communal transgressions; and they offered variable sacrifices when they came to the Temple on the Holidays and Festivals. Whatever the specific ritual, the purpose was to communicate with God".

"With the appearance of the Synagogue, our people came to the House of God for one of three purposes. They came to the *Bet Tefilah* – House of Prayer to Worship God; they came to the *Bet Midrash* – House of Study to learn Torah; and they came to the *Bet K'nesset* – House of Assembly to tend to communal and personal social affairs. In our days, our affiliation with a synagogue/Temple is much more complex, especially so in the western countries. Some people, albeit the minority, come to the synagogue regularly for worship and study of Torah, while the majority come only occasionally for *Yizkor* – Memorial services, or for the High Holy Days. Some have no interest either in worship or in study, but still want to give their children a smattering of Jewish education and identification, and they consider the synagogue as the proper place for rites of passage, be it a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* or a wedding. Those among them who have no children, may join a synagogue as an insurance policy for the Rabbi's services at a *Simchah*/Happy occasion, or at a funeral. There are Jews who affiliate with the synagogue to meet their neighbors socially and professionally."

"The fact that hundreds of our people are willing to pay a thousand dollars a year for any of these purposes, shows that we are meeting their expectations, and they are happy with the synagogue and with you as their Rabbi. The number of those who come to religious services and to your adult education classes is steadily increasing. You should be happy with them and with your accomplishments. Like the Four Species - *Arba Minnim* on *Succot*, which are of different qualities, and together enable us to fulfill the *Mitzvah*, our people join the synagogue for varied reasons and motives, some more to your liking than others, but together they make up a congregation and

enable us to offer to each of them what they seek." It was a lecture suitable for a Rabbi, and I have often quoted him on this subject.

Mr. M.G., one of the attorneys who volunteered to rewrite my contract with the congregation, was teaching tax law at New York University. He came up with an idea which would allow the congregation to allocate several thousand dollars a year as a "Parish allowance to the Rabbi", and would not be included in my salary. At the same time, I would be able to deduct an equal amount from my reported salary for the very same purpose. The income tax which I would save through the "double deduction", would more than equal the sum I would have to pay in County Tax upon having the parish house registered in my name. This idea required the consent of the I.R.S. – Internal Revenue Service of the United States and of Congress. When finally approved as "The Rabbis's Law", it benefitted many other rabbis and non-Jewish clergy who then purchased their own homes instead of living in synagogue/church parish homes owned by their respective communities.

Launching the Building Fund Campaign:
L. to R. Sol Rabinovich, Chairman;
Rabbi Ehrlich; and Daniel Horowitz, Pres.

Chapter Thirty Eight

BINGO OR THE RABBI

The congregation engaged the service of an outstanding synagogue architect, and we built a beautiful synagogue with a *Talmud Torah*, a Social Hall, a *Bet Midrash* and Library, and a Study-Office for the Rabbi. The facilities were large enough to accommodate a much larger congregation than we had at the time, but a survey of the Jewish community gave us reason to expect a considerable increase in the number of Jewish families in Port Washington and the congregation. In the following years, we did see substantial growth in the membership and religious school enrollment, but not as much as we had anticipated. It became apparent that we had over-built, and the congregation was unable to meet its annual budget.

In those years it was common practice in churches and some synagogues to raise funds through the game of Bingo which attracted hundreds of players/gamblers to these religious institutions. Several Board members proposed to solve our budgetary problem by introducing a night of Bingo at Beth Israel, even as it was done in several local churches, claiming that we might raise about $30,000. a year to ease our financial burden.

A special Board meeting was called for this purpose. The meeting was long and tumultuous, with members speaking emotionally for and against the motion, but it appeared that the *ayes* would carry it. Before the vote, the president asked for my opinion. I told the assembly that although Jewish tradition is against gambling, and the *Mishnah (Sanhedrin* 3:3) considered the gambler as an unreliable person, unworthy as a judge or witness, the reference there was for an habitual gambler, who made a living from it. "Our tradition has not spoken out against an occasional game of chance, such as a night of Bingo. Therefore, I cannot tell you that playing Bingo is forbidden, and

I cannot tell you not to sanction it within the congregation, or to invite the general public to our premises for this purpose. However, I do want you to know that I will not serve as rabbi of a congregation where Bingo is played on a regular basis".

The president asked me to explain why I felt so strongly about this, and I told him to recall what he once told me about the objectives of a Temple. Jewish people come to Beth Israel to attend religious services and adult education classes; they join our Temple to give their children a religious education and to interact socially with other Jewish children in our youth organizations. Non-Jews come to Beth Israel to celebrate the *Bar/Bat Mitzvahs* of Jewish friends, and occasionally they come to hear a lecture by the Rabbi. But I do not want to hear a Jew or non-Jew saying: "I am going to Beth Israel or to Rabbi Ehrlich's Temple to play Bingo. Therefore, if the Bingo proposition is accepted by the Board, you will have to look for another Rabbi."

When I was finished, the president lowered the gavel, and said: "There will be no Bingo at Beth Israel." Two members of the Board, the original sponsors of the Bingo proposition, announced that they would resign from Temple membership in protest of the president's arbitrary decision. The other members of the Board dispersed without taking a vote, but with the realization that our serious financial problem would have to be solved by other means.

On the following Friday, the president came to my study for our regular weekly *schmus*/discussion, and said: "Rabbi, last Tuesday night I backed you up all the way, now you will have to help me; do you now have any idea how to deal with our financial crisis?" I reminded him that the congregation did not look with favor upon my involvement in financial or administrative matters, and in principle I agreed with them; however, if the congregation would permit me to speak with individual members on this matter, I might be helpful. The president responded that he was willing to go out on a limb

again and, without consulting his colleagues on the Board, he would allow me to do what I consider proper for a Rabbi.

I drew up a list of thirty members whom I considered to be "well to do" and generous, with whom I would speak separately. I invited each of them individually to my office and related to them the grim financial situation of the Temple, and of what had transpired at the Board meeting. Then I suggested to them that the president's courageous decision ought to be matched by congregants with equal courage and generosity by pledging voluntary annual contributions to the Temple over and above their annual dues and building fund payments. They asked for how many years this was expected of them, and I told them "as long as God will be good to you". Your annual statement, I explained to them, will include your voluntary contribution. If you had a good year, you will pay it, and perhaps increase it; if you feel that you cannot do it that year, just strike it out, and nothing will be said. This will be a deal between you and your God.

Within a month I spoke with seventeen people, and each of them made his personal deal with God in various amounts for a total of $20,000. per annum. One gentleman who pledged $1,000. a year, sent in a check for $1,500. requesting that the additional $500. be used for the installation of an air-conditioning unit in the Rabbi's Study. And then, what I had feared might happen did happen. A certain Mr. A. whom I invited to my Study, became indignant upon hearing my appeal, and assured me that he would make a stop to it, and he did. At the following Board meeting, he took exception to the Rabbi's initiative and to the president's compliance with it. He found many listening ears who proceeded to vote against the Rabbi's intervention in personal matters, and I was asked to stop my personal campaign. But several Board members joined the seventeen who had already pledged, and the system worked throughout my stay in P.W. Moreover, ten years after I left, I was told by the treasurer that the majority of them continued to pay their pledges all those years. Their Deal with God was

obviously beneficial to them, and to us. Thus we preserved the honor of the congregation, and solved its financial crisis.

Among the members of my congregation were Judge Manny LeVine and Mrs. LeVine who wrote the famous American song "The Wild Rose of Texas". When Judge LeVine was elevated to the Appelate Court of Nassau County, the Port Washington Chamber of Commerce sponsored a Saturday night dinner/dance in his honor. Judge LeVine was a popular citizen of Port Washington, and about five hundred people made reservations for the 7:00 PM splash. A week or two before the scheduled affair, I received a formal invitation to honor the Judge with my presence, and I was assured that kosher meals would be provided for Mrs. Ehrlich and myself.

I responded with a note to the committee, stating that the mid-Summer Sabbath would conclude at 9:00 PM, too late for dinner, but we would stop by after that hour to extend our congratulations to the Judge. The chairman called back to inform us that the affair has been delayed in our honor to 9:00 PM, and that we would be expected for dinner. No sooner did I finish the recitation of *Havdalah* at nine o'clock on Saturday night, when a limousine drove up to take us to dinner. As we walked in, the entire assembly stood up for the singing of the American anthem, and they were asked to remain standing for the Invocation (introductory prayer) to be delivered by the "Judge's Rabbi".

A slight oversight had occurred, since no one had told me that I would be called upon for the Invocation, but over the years I had learned to be properly prepared for such extemporaneous honors. These typical American people deserved to be commended for having delayed a major Saturday night affair for two full hours in keeping with the religious observance of the local Rabbi, a brightly shining light for others to walk by.

Another bright light of my Port Washington experience was the goodly number of young professional families who became deeply involved in congregational life through regular attendance at religious services and adult education classes, and

with a personal commitment to ritual observance like *Kashering* their homes. These people also assumed a role of leadership in the community, and sought the personal friendship of the Rabbi and his family, as examplified by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Frankel who came to P.W. from N.Y.C. as newlyweds, without prior affiliation with a congregation.

When I heard of their arrival, I invited myself to their home to solicit their affiliation and support. I found them to be well educated and thoughtful people who would be an asset to our congregation – not just dues-paying members, and they proved me right. Mr. F. a CPA, volunteered his service as treasurer of the Temple, and Mrs. F. a high school teacher by profession, began as a member of the Education Committee and later as chairperson of the Comm. Mrs. F. then asked Pearl to assist her in *Kashering* her home, and this led to a long standing social relationship between our families. Their children, referred to me as "Uncle Rabbi" and called Mrs. Ehrlich "Aunt Pearl". Mr. F. once called the attention of the Board to the fact that Rabbi Ehrlich's name, who was instrumental in the building of the Temple does not appear on the list of "The Builders of the Temple" which hung in the main lobby of the synagogue. On the occasion of a joyous family event, the F's contributed $1,000. to the Building Fund in honor of the Rabbi, and this entitled Mrs. Ehrlich and myself to a personal plaque among "The Builders", not just as Rabbi. To this day, twenty five years since our departure from P.W. the F's and we dine together at least twice a year, and speak often with one another by phone. These two young people represented a group of twenty-thirty couples who went through a religious transformation, and committed themselves to a traditional/Conservative life style which they learned and adopted during the thirteen years of my service at Beth Israel. Several years ago, when the congregation moved leftwards under the influence of changing rabbis and members, and veered towards the practice of an egalitarian stance, these people, *my* people, broke away from Beth Israel to establish a *Mesorati Chavruta* – Traditional Fellowship, and they

asked my guidance for this process. It pained me to watch this serious split in *my* congregation, but I was gratified by the commitment of *my* people to a religious tradition which I had worked so hard to inculcate in them.

In November 1962, we celebrated our son's *Bar Mitzvah. Mordechei*/Michael did us proud on that *Shabbat* with his participation in the Friday Evening and *Shabbat* Morning Services. He also read the Torah and chanted the *Mussaf* - Additional Service. With these achievements he set a "standard" in the congregation which most students strove to emulate, and many succeeded.

Michael had a special standing with his maternal grandparents as their only grandson from among their nine grandchildren. My father-in-law, Reb Dovid Ulman, was delighted with his grandson's "performance" on his Bar Mitzvah Shabbat with only one slight regret that Michael would not carry the "Ulman" name to future generations.

Reb Dovid began ailing soon thereafter, and passed away in April 1964. He was a unique person even among his Chassidic and learned colleagues of the "Nine und Ninetziker" (99 Cannon St.) Schule where he *davened* (prayed) and taught the daily *shiur* (class) in Talmud.

My *schviger* (mother-in-law) turned down the invitations of her four children to move in with any one of them. She preferred staying on the lower East side of Manhattan where she had her *Schule* and friends, and where she continued doing her charitable work. In her latter years, she was engaged in one of the sacred *Mitzvot* in Judaism – to prepare deceased women for their traditional burial. The small renumerations she received from the *Chevra Kaddisha*/Holy Burial Society she gave away to needy people, including members of my family in Jerusalem. Pearl and I moved to Israel in 1975, and our mother/*schviger* passed away on a Sabbath in July 1976, during our regular Summer visit to the States. When I saw her the last time on the

previous Thursday, she repeatedly called out: "Michael, Michael". It would be appropriate to quote here what I wrote above:

> "David and Channah Ulman succeeded where most American Jews did not. They raised two sons and two daughters as decent people and religiously observant Jews... a rare accomplishment on the Jewish-American scene even in those years".

The memory of their lives and good deeds is a blessing among us.

Chapter Thirty Nine

THE SUCCESS OF THE "SHIURIM TEXTBOOKS"

The reader may have noticed by this time that I always speak of the "religious school" rather than the "Hebrew school", and I do so deliberately, because in the course of the years, I came to believe that a disproportionate chunk of the six hours our children study in the Hebrew school, is being allocated to the study of the conversatiional Hebrew, which cannot be mastered even to a reasonable degree. It is also being done at the expense of other religious subjects which do not receive adequate time and emphasis.

Within the limits of six hours per week, I felt that the ability for meaningful participation in a Sabbath service is to be preferred over the ability of using the Hebrew language in shopping for a cucumber in a supermarket, especially since very few students would ever have the opportunity to engage in the latter. Similarly, the ability to conduct a Passover *Seder* is more important than learning Hebrew Grammar. At the same time, I recognized the importance of Hebrew in our religious life, whether it be in observance of ritual and prayer, or in the understanding of Jewish values and concepts. I, therefore, advocated the teaching of Hebrew with a selected "religious vocabulary" rather than conversational Hebrew.

In 1964, I published a lengthy article in the Torch Magazine which was published by the Men's Clubs of the United Synagogue of America. In this article, I articulated my philosophy and approach to religious school curriculum in Conservative afternoon religious schools, and the practical steps I had taken in implementing that philosophy in my school.

The article caused a considerable stir on the national level, for and against the stand I took regarding the place of teaching conversational Hebrew in the afternoon Hebrew School, as I well expected. I was, however, surprised by the positive response from teachers and school principals who supported my thesis and asked for samples of my material.

This unexpected reaction from colleagues who were personally engaged in the educational profession, encouraged me to embark on the realization of a dream I had carried in my mind for many years; namely, the creation of a series of textbooks which would combine the teaching of the Hebrew language with the teaching of basic Jewish values and religious skills.

The first year textbook, "*Shiurei B'rachot*" was ready for publication in the spring of 1966. With a vocabulary of two hundred and fifty words, "*Shiurei B'rachot*" taught four basic concepts: God the Creator, God the Father of all Men, God the Provider, and the *Birchot Hanehenin* – the blessings we recite before taking any nourishment, as our Thanksgiving to God for His Beneficence. A companion Reader "*Shiurei K'riah Uktivah*" taught the skills of Hebrew reading and writing.

I sent copies of these texts to commercial publishers of Hebrew educational material and to the publishing houses of the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements. I received glowing evaluations from each of them, but none offered to help with the publication. I went to see Dr. S., head of the Education department of the J.T.S., and to seek his advice. He told me that these texts should be published, which the commercial publishers would not do because they are not interested in competition, so "Why don't you do it yourself", he said to me. "And if you are afraid of these giants, let me remind you that the small haberdashery next to the Macy's and Gimbels stores also makes a living. You have a good idea; run with it, and good luck."

The president of our local Meadowbrook Bank was of the same mind. Upon seeing the manuscripts and listening to my ideas, he called in the man in charge of personal loans, and said: "I think we ought to give the Rabbi a break! He has been with us for seven years, and has a commitment from the congregation for another three years. He does not have collateral to offer, but he won't run away". Then he turned to me and said: "Rabbi, you now have a $10,000. credit line. Use it as you see fit. Every three months we will debit your checking account for the interest on the amount you used, and when you begin selling your books you will make installments on the principle, at your convenience."

The two texts were ready for distribution in the spring of 1967. Pearl and the children helped in mailing sample pages and a cover letter to 1500 congregations, and the response was a resounding success as orders came in from congregations and Hebrew bookstores, and a second printing was ordered for that Fall. The second volume in the series, "*Shiurei Chaggim Uzmanin*" for the teaching of all Holidays and Festivals was printed in 1968, together with a companion Workbook which was written with the assistance of Rabbi Eugene Katz. In the summer of 1969, I published the third text "*Shiurei Torah - Hasipurim*", an abridged version of the narrative portions from the Five Books of Moses, with a companion Workbook, and the fourth text "*Shiurei Torah – Hamitzvot*" – on the Commandments of the Torah was published in 1970, with a companion Workbook. The books were illustrated by Mrs. Lenore Holland with the assistance of Mrs. M.T., and two students of our religious school. About two hundred congregations in the USA, Canada and Great Britain used these texts, including some Hebrew Day Schools. The bank continued to extend additional credit as required, but when the fourth volume came off the press in 1970, the *Shiruim* Publishing account was in the black with a considerable credit surplus. Spiritually, it was exhilarating and gratifying to know that thousands of children

were getting their religious education from books which I created and produced. Financially, the success of this enterprise was the first foundation-block on which I later built my early retirement.

Chapter Forty

A FAMILY VISIT TO ISRAEL AND EUROPE

In March 1965, we celebrated Michelle's *Bat Mitzvah* at the traditional age for girls, on her twelfth birthday. She led the congregation in the Friday evening/Sabbath service, and chanted the *Haftorah* – prophetic chapter – of *Parshat Hachodesh*. About two hundred congregants and friends shared a traditional *Shabbat* dinner with us. On Sunday, we had a reception in our beautiful home for members of the family and out-of-town friends who could not attend the *Bat Miztvah* service because of the Sabbath.

My first contract with the congregation in 1959 for a two-year term was followed by a three-year term in 1961, and a five-year term in 1964. With this sense of permanency and financial security, Pearl and I began to think of a family visit to Israel. Michael was then sixteen years old and Michelle was twelve, and they both appeared to be ready for such a journey. The congregation approved an extended two-month vacation for the Summer of 1965, of which we decided to spend six weeks in Israel and one week each in Paris and London. I was also granted a generous gift to defray the cost of this pilgrimage.

We arrived in Jerusalem at the beginning of July, and met the family in the home of my second sister, Rachel, who lived in the Hungarian Quarter near Mea Shearim. After an hour's rest, Rachel set the table for lunch, laden with all kinds of *Yerushalmi*/Jerusalem dishes. My children, who had heard me tell and retell of the poverty which prevailed in my parents' home and in the homes of my older siblings, now remained seated with their hands folded in front of them, without touching a thing. My sister immediately "caught on" to the scene, and said to me in Yiddish which the children could not understand:

"Tell the children that things are not what they used to be; there is plenty of food in Israel these days, and no one goes hungry. Tell them to eat to their hearts' content," and they did! as soon as I translated to them what Rachel said. Rachel was thrilled to watch them enjoy her cooking and to hear them whisper in Hebrew "*Zeh Tov, Zeh Tov me'od* – this is good, this is very good".

Pearl and the children looked unlike anyone else in the family. My sister observed them lovingly, and murmured: "*Amerikaner Kinder, und azoi eidel*/American children, and so genteel". After dinner, I observed Michael standing at the window with his uncle, R. Avraham Mordechei, the great Chassid dressed from head to toe in typical Yerushalmi Chassidic garb, and the modern clad *Amerikaner Kind*. Reb Avraham Mordechei held in his hand several unfinished sets of *Tefillin*, with which he demonstrated to Michael the various stages of development from the raw calf-skin to the beautiful perfectly finished "Phylacteries"

Rachel in the Kitchen

With Avraham Mordechei and Michael Describing the Tefillin, 1965

My Oldest Sister, Yentil, and Husband

which were being hand-made by this most righteous man. I did not at that moment realize the deep impression which the uncle was making on his American nephew, and the emotional everlasting bond being established between them. Ten years later, when Michael's daughter was born, he decided to name her "*Rachel*" in memory of my sister who had died two years earlier. When Michael and his family came to visit us in Israel in 1984, I took them to see Uncle Reb Avraham Mordechei. As we were leaving his home, Pearl overhead Michael saying to his wife: "Do you now see why I virtually fell in love with this man eighteen years ago?

My sisters – all five of them – fell in love with Pearl. They just could not have enough of her as they constantly marvelled at her *zugelozenkeit* – openness and friendliness, her *yiddishkeit* – Jewishness, and of course her *shenkeit* – beauty. Pearl is fluent in Yiddish and was able to speak with them in *their* language, and they reciprocated by telling her "*du bist nisht unzer shveigerin* – you are not a sister-in-law, *du bist unzer shvester*, you are our sister". What surprised me most was that my brothers-in-law acted the same way. "Yerushalmi Chassidim" do not usually walk side-by-side with women, not even with their own wives and daughters, but always several steps ahead of them. At home, the women folk always sit at the end of the

My Second Sister, Rachel, and Her Family

The Girls of my Fourth sister, Rivkah

dinner table, separate from the men. And here I saw my brothers-in-law walking with Pearl in the street, and talking enthusiastically with her. We were their steady guests for all Sabbath meals, and at the dinner table I was seated to the right of the host, with Pearl on my right and our children next to her. At *simchah*/family celebrations where men and women occupy separate rooms, my oldest brother-in-law, Reb Yaakov Barzesky, a famous Bresslever Chassid, always asked me to call Pearl over to the *mechitzah* – separation, so that he might greet her personally, and then, as a *Kohen*, he would bless her with the priestly benediction.

We rented an apartment in the center of the city, and for the next six weeks we spent a lot of time visiting my sisters and their respective families (my brothers were in the States), as well as with my childhood friends whom Pearl now met for the first time. We could not visit the West Bank, comprising one half of historic Israel, which in 1965 was still under Jordanian rule, but we visited the Jewish cities of Israel to the length and breath of the country - from Metula in the north to Eilat in the south, and from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean sea.

My Youngest Sister, Freidel, and Family

On our last day in Israel, as we were boarding bus #15 on our way from Geula to our apartment, I remarked to Pearl that we had succeeded in seeing every person whom I wanted to see except for Rabbi Yitzchak Halperin, who taught me the art of Circumcision prior to my departure to Cyprus in 1946. As we were standing in the bus, someone slapped me on my back and shouted: "*Avreimel*, what are you doing here?" The man was none other than Rabbi Halperin. He immediately invited us to his home, but I told him that we would be leaving the country on the following morning, on our way to Paris, and we still had several things to do on that day.

Upon hearing the word "Paris", Rabbi Halperin told us that he had a son living in Paris, and he gave us his son's name, address and phone number. He also said that he would call his son that evening and ask him to meet us at the hotel where we were going to stay. It turned out to be a lucky encounter, as the Paris Halperin did receive us warmly and served as our personal guide through the Jewish neighborhoods of the city. During the following week, we toured the general sights of beautiful Paris and its boulevards. We also visited the Versailles Gardens. For *Shabbat*, we pre-paid for the Sabbath meals at the Flambaum's Kosher restuarant, and purchased the entrance tickets to the Louvre Museum. *Shabbat* morning we went for services to the Baron Hirsch Synagogue where Michael and I were given Torah honors. There, Michael came to understand the rabbinic wisdom in stipulating that we should preferably pray in Hebrew although one may fulfill his duty by praying in any other language which he understands.

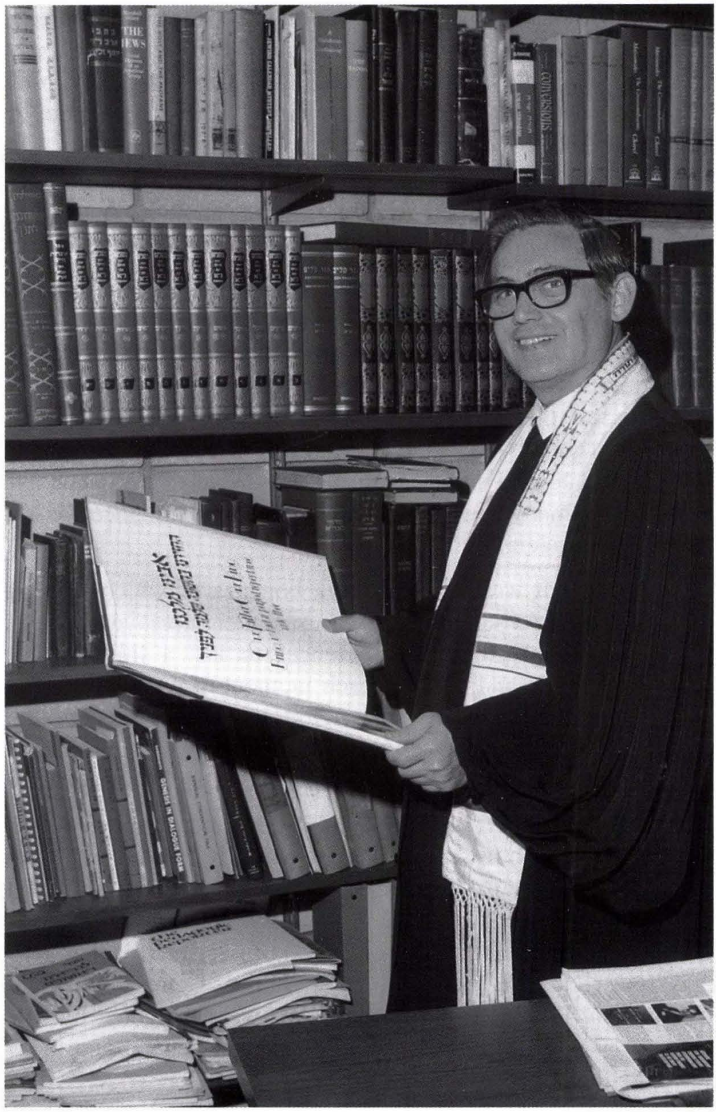
When we walked into the synagogue we felt like complete strangers. Worshippers and ushers did come over to greet us, but there was no common language between us since we did not speak French and they did not understand English. But the moment the *Hazzan* – Cantor ascended the *Bimah* – pulpit, and chanted the opening sentence of the *Shacharit*/Morning service, we immediately knew and felt that we were among our Jewish French bretheren.

After the services we had lunch in Flambaum's restaurant where we met fellow Jewish travellers from the four corners of the earth who had one thing in common – they all wanted a traditional Kosher *Shabbat* meal. We made the acquaintence of one particular couple from Queens, N.Y., Max and Jenny Weil. When we met again four years later in a Winter resort hotel in Miami, it developed into a lasting friendship to this day. The afternoon we spent at the Louvre, only to discover that even the long Summer afternoon was not long enough to see its accumulated treasures.

On Sunday, we took the ferry accross the English channel and were met in Dover by a niece and her husband who were residing in London. The Jewish hotel where we had made our reservations was overbooked, and we were sent to a hotel on the outskirts of the Jewish neighborhood, but we nonetheless enjoyed a great week in this beautiful city, with its general historic and Jewish sights, with the assistance of my niece and nephew and many Jewish residents whose acquaintance we had made in Jerusalem.

Together, it was an eight-week bonanza of which I would not have dreamt when I left Old Jerusalem eighteen years earlier – a series of pleasurable experiences to last a lifetime. We travelled in style and enjoyed each moment of each day. When we returned home to Port Washington, we recited the *Hagomel* blessing in the synagogue to thank God for having kept all four of us in good health, and for having brought us safely home.

For the next two years, our family life and my professional work flowed smoothly and rather uneventfully. In May 1967, our son, Michael, graduated from High School and was granted a scholarship to the New York University system. He chose to matriculate at the University of Buffalo in the Fall of that year, and to spend the Summer as a Junior Counselor at the Connecticut Ramah Summer camp. We were delighted by both choices, and felt confident in his progress in general and in his Jewish education.



A Graduating Class in Port Washington With Cantor Henry Fried in Center

Chapter Forty One

THE SIX DAY WAR / ANOTHER VISIT TO ISRAEL

And then came May 1967. The Jewish people of Israel and the diaspora will never forget those anxious and frightful days, and will always remember the glorious victory of Israel's Defense Forces - *Zahal* in June 1967. The serious situation which faced Israel during the three weeks of May was brought home to me when I attended the Rabbinical Assembly convention in Washington, D.C. Mr. Harmon, the Israeli Ambassador, spoke to us on Wednesday, June 1, and described the real threat to Israel's survival if it is attacked simultaneously on three fronts by Egypt, Syria and Jordan. He told us that every able person, man and woman, had been mobilized – including school teachers and principals, and he appealed to us to volunteer our services to Israel's educational system to keep hundreds of children off the streets and in the classrooms. I was among those who signed up to leave for Israel on the following Monday. I also called my secretary to send out an urgent letter to the congregation, calling for a special service at the synagogue on Friday evening.

I came home on Thursday, and when I told the family that I would be leaving for Israel on Monday, our son, Michael, then seventeen years old, asked our permission to come along and do whatever he could – like replacing the mailmen who had also been drafted. The prospect of taking a young boy to a war zone, the results of which were uncertain, was frightening, but we could not say no. The atmosphere in the synagogue at the Friday evening service resembled that of *Yom Kippur* night. I related to the congregation what I had heard from Mr. Harmon, and appealed for funds on behalf of *Zahal*/Israel's Defense Forces. People who ordinarily did not respond to the annual United

Jewish Appeal, now responded generously, and on Sunday morning they appeared at my home to redeem their pledges. On Monday morning, June 5, rabbinic and lay leadership of the Metropolitan area congregations were summoned for a special U.J.A. meeting at 12:00 noon in Manhattan.

The tension in the hall could almost be touched. Anxiety and fear could be seen on each face. When pledges for financial assistance began to be made, I saw a woman walking up to the podium with a savings bank-book in her hand and, as she handed it over to the chairman, she said: "I have been saving this up for the past ten years for my old age, but right now *Zahal* needs it more than I". About two o'clock, the Israel Council General in New York stood up for an important statement to the hushed assembly. He announced that Israel had launched a pre-emptive strike against Egypt, and within three hours destroyed the entire Egyptian airforce, but no official release would be made until later that day. Tension in the hall was immediately broken as we realized that the danger to Israel had passed. My trip to Israel was understandably cancelled.

On Wednesday morning, Pearl got up early as usual to see the children off to school, while I slept late after a late meeting at the synagogue the previous evening. At seven o'clock, Pearl burst into the bedroom, shouting: "The Israeli army is at the *Kotel* – Western Wall", and with this she put on the bedroom TV. The children joined us to watch the Israeli Chief Rabbi, Sh'lomo Goren z.l., and the army chief of staff, General Moshe Dayan z.l., march into the *Kotel* Plaza carrying a Torah Scroll and blowing the *Shofar* – Ram's Horn, and hundreds of Israeli soldiers clutching the huge *Kotel* stones and chanting: "*Zeh hayom assa A-donei* – This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be happy on it" (Psalms 118-14).

When the Six Day War ended on the following Sunday, Pearl said to me: "You were planning to go to Israel to fight, why don't we now go there to celebrate the great victory?" Since the children were planning to spend the Summer months at

Camp Ramah – Michael as a Junior Counsellor and Michelle as a camper, Pearl and I took off for Jerusalem three weeks after the war. My nieces and nephews were waiting for their uncle to show them the Old City of Jerusalem – the place where I was born and raised, and which some of them had never seen because the Jewish quarters were under Jordanian rule since 1948 and, contrary to the Cease Fire agreement, the Jordanians had not permitted any Jews to enter the Old City to pray at the Western Wall.

The tour of my old birthplace was a mixture of overflowing joy and outpouring of tears. We joined the throngs of literally hundreds of thousands of Jews who had come to Israel after 1948 and had never seen the *Kotel*, and were now marching to the place for which their ancestors had prayed and yearned for nineteen centuries. We joined them in thanksgiving to the Almighty that the ancient prayer "*Leshana Haba'a Biyerushalayim* – Next Year in Jerusalem", which generations of Jews recited each *Pessach* and *Yom Kippur*, became a reality in our days. On the same tour, we also saw the willful and outrageous desecration of forty-five synangogues – including the two great houses of worship, the Nissan Bak and the Hurva synagogues. When we ascended the *Har Hazeitim* – Mount of Olives cemetery, we saw that the Jordanian government had plowed under thousands of graves in this three-thousand-year old burial ground, to build a highway from Jerusalem to Jericho. They also tore off thousands of tomb stones to be used for the paving of latrines. All these were the works of a monarch who claimed to be an educated British gentleman.

During the following two weeks we toured, "greater" Israel, the parts we could not visit in 1965, like Judea and Samaria - the cradles of ancient Israel from the days of King David in 1000 BCE to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. We also saw the Golan Heights, which the Syrians had used for nineteen years, to shell the cities and *Kibutzim* (agricultural communities) of Upper Gallilee. The

atmosphere was electrifying and contagious. Wherever we went, we heard people singing or humming "*Yerushalayim shel Zahav* – Jerusalem of Gold". Of special significance to me was the reaction of the non-religious people who saw in this turn of events, not only the glorious victory of their "People's Army" but also as a sign or a miracle of the God of Israel, very much like the reaction of their forefathers at the Crossing of the Red Sea.

I felt that there was a golden opportunity for the Israeli rabbinate to turn over a new leaf in its approach to the non-observant segment of the Jewish population, and seek common grounds for cooperation and mutual respect. Unfortunately, the rabbis, who were accustomed to use the Law of the *Knesset* (Israeli Parliament) to force religious conformation on non-religious people, did not understand the art of persuasion to an emotionally charged people, who now believed that they had witnessed God in their personal and national life.

This atmosphere had a deep and lasting influence on Pearl. I could literally see the thoughts of eventual *Aliyah* (emigration) to Israel gradually penentrating her heart and mind – not immediately, as we still needed to be with the children to see them through college and perhaps marriage, but I could definitely see it happening sometime down the line.

Chapter Forty Two

MY WORK IN THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY LAW COMMITTEE

In the 1960s, I became involved in the work of Rabbincial Assembly Committees. My first assignment was as a member of the R.A. and United Synagogue *Kashrut* Commission which was chaired by Rabbi Isaac Klein z.l. In this capacity, I had access to a Responsum – *Teshuva* in which Rabbi Max Arzt permitted the Sisterhood of a Conservative Congregation to have a fish or *parve* luncheon in a non-*Kosher* restuarant. I wrote a Responsum in refutation of his decision. Since I was not a member of the Law Committee, I could not submit my *Teshuva* to the committee, and I sent it instead to Rabbi A., personally. In typical fashion of the gentleman that he was, Rabbi A. called to thank me for my *Teshuva* which he then submitted to the members of Law Committee for their consideration, and the Responsum was included in the Law Commitee Proceedings.

In 1963, I was appointed to the Membership Committee which rules on the eligibility of non-Seminary graduates to the R.A. membership, and in 1965 I was appointed to full membership in the Law Committee.

Shortly thereafter, an inquiry came to the Law Committee asking "whether in our days it might be permitted for a local Rabbi to discontinue the observance of *Yom Tov Sheni Shel Galuyot* – the 'Second Day' of the Festivals which are observed in the Diaspora, but not in Israel?".

The chairman asked me to write a *Teshuva*/Responsum on the subject from the Halachic point of view, and he asked Rabbi Phillip Sigal to do the same from a socio-economic viewpoint.

After a lenghty review of the historic circumstances and Halachic consideration underlying the rabbinic institution of *Yom Tov Sheni*, I came to the conclusion that since those considerations and circumstances no longer prevail, it should now be permitted to discontinue its observance, and the Jews of the Diaspora could be allowed to follow the Israeli Calendar[1]. Rabbi Sigal reached the same conclusion on Socio-Economic consideration, and the Law Committee members suggested that we combine the two *Teshuvot* into one, which we did.

Contrary *Teshuvot* were presented to the Committee by two other members. After prolonged deliberations for over a year, the committee voted by an overwhelming majority to adopt the Ehrlich-Sigal Responsum.

The news concerning the Rabbinical Assembly vote must have reached Israel. Shortly, thereafter, I received a letter from my brother-in-law, Reb Avraham Mordechei Yuzevitz, stating that my association with the R.A. Responsum had caused them embarrassment, and he asked me to disassociate myself from it. I replied that if he could find a learned Rabbi from Israel to refute my conclusions in the *Teshuva* from a Halachic point of view, I would comply with his request, and would withdraw my name. Otherwise, I would assume that legally my conclusions were correct. I never heard from him on this subject again.

A special meeting of the Law Committee was scheduled to discuss the implementation of its decision. Because of the importance of the subject on the agenda, we were privileged with the presence of Profs. Louis Finkelstein z.l. and Abraham J. Heschel z.l.

Prof. Heschel suggested that a sub-committee be appointed for that purpose, to be chaired by me as co-author of the Responsum, and because of my Israeli background with the calendar which we wanted to adopt.

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1. See pages 157-159, above, concerning the second day of *Rosh Hashanah* in Israel.

I told Prof. Heschel that, in writing the Responsum, I never thought that it would be implemented, and nowhere in the *Teshuva* did I advocate its implementation. "In truth", I said, "although the law would permit us to do so with the overwhelming approval of the Law Committee members, in practical terms we cannot even contemplate it, especially in urban centers with a large and mixed Jewish population. Take, for example, my next door neighbors in Great Neck, New York. Could we allow the thousand members of the Conservative Temple Israel to eat *Chametz* – bread on *Acharon Shel Pessach* – Last Day of Pessover, and send their five hundred children to school while the five hundred families of the Orthodox Congregation go to *Schule* for the Pessach Services and the Yizkor Memorial Service? What we do in our Synagogues with Mixed Seating or an Organ on Shabbat is our "private business", and does not affect *Klal Yisrael* – the General Community, but this cannot be said of *Yom Tov Sheni*. Should a Rabbi of an isolated community wish to discontinue the additional day of *Yom Tov* in his congregation, he may now do so within the law, but for the country as a whole, we have no choice but to observe *Yom Tov Sheni* as we have done all these years and centuries." No further action was taken by the Law Committee and, except for a handful of congregations, *Yom Tov Sheni* remained on our religious calendar.

Chapter Forty Three

CONTINUOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS

Side by side with these high points in my rabbinic work and family life, there were manifestations of personal problems and congregational restlessness. Beginning at a rather young age, I was plagued with a series of illnesses which do not normally appear in people until a more mature age.

1. In the middle 1950s, at the age of 33-34, while still in Bristol, Conn., I had several painful experiences which my good friend, Dr. H.H. analyzed as the first indications of a trigeminal neuralgia. A Harftord neurologist confirmed his suspicion and told me that the only proven cure is neuro-surgery which often leaves the patient permanently disfigured. He could not tell me how soon that condition might arrive.

His prognosis came true five years later, in 1962, when I was already in Port Washington. My friend and allergist, Dr. Sidney Zuckerman gained me access to the world's most prominent neuro-surgeon at the time, Prof. Leo Davidoff, who agreed to do the surgery, while emphasizing the risk of permanent facial disfiguration.

Surgery was scheduled for 6:00 AM. Prof. D. came to my room at 5:30 and saw me dressed in *Talit* and *Tefillin* (Prayershawl and Phylacteries). I told him that I was praying for my welfare, and asking God to guide the Prof's hand, to which he responded: "So far, God has not disappointed me". Prof. D. sat with me until I completed the morning service, after which I was wheeled into the operating room. When I awoke five hours later, the Prof. was standing over me, and he told me that God had answered my requests, that I would not have any physical disfiguration, but my right cheek and tongue would be permanently numb.

For several weeks, I was unable to adjust to the numbness, and had difficulty falling asleep. Prof. D. impressed upon me the need to accept this situation mentally. "Just pay it no mind", he said to me, "otherwise, you will become emotionally crippled". I asked him about his fee, and he wanted to know how much I was granted by the insurance company. When I told him that the company had given me one thousand dollars for the surgeon, he said to me: "You and Mrs. Ehrlich went through a difficult time, and you need a good rest. I will accept $500. as payment in full, and you may use the balance for a well deserved vacation. He stood up to shake my hand, and repeated his plea to "pay it no mind", and bid me well. I walked out with the feeling that whoever does not believe in angelic people has not had the privilege of meeting Prof. Davidoff.

2. My friend, Dr. H.H. of Bristol, Conn., once said to me: "Rabbi, you are a pain in the neck! For the most part, you are a well person, but when you get something it is always a doozy". He said it to me on the occasion of my trigeminal neuralgia, but he would have said it again when I awoke one midnight in 1994 with internal pain, which was later analyzed as kidney stones. After several failed attemps to wash them out, the doctor decided to crush them through an invasive procedure. I remember the Jewish Anesthetist humming the tune of *Havah Nagilah* as he was putting me under. Later on, I was told by the nurses that when I was waking up in the recovery-room I repeatedly mumbled: "Who is the Rabbi's Rabbi", and they wanted to know what I meant. I explained to them that in my sub-conscious state, I apparently felt the need for comfort and reassurance, which a Rabbi usually extends to his parishioners; but, as a Rabbi, I wondered who would console and reassure me, who could serve as my Rabbi, or "Who is the Rabbi's Rabbi"?

Unfortunately, that attempt also failed. Among those who came to visit me in the hospital was one of the attorneys who had rearranged my contract with the congregation. I was scheduled to officiate at his daughter's wedding on the

following Sunday, and he wanted to know whether he could still count on me. I promised Mr. M. that I would be there even if I had to crawl. And crawl I did! I prevailed upon my physician, to release me from the hospital for the day. Several large stones washed out soon after the wedding ceremony, and I was able to stay on for the wedding reception.

Our Sages taught that, theologically, one should not expect to receive a reward in this world for the performance of a good deed – *s'char mitzvh b'hei alma leka (Kidushin 39b)*, but in practical terms the Sages realized that occasionally a person may be immediately rewarded for the performance of a good deed – *mitzva uschara b'tzida (Gittin 39b)*. Obviously, on this occasion I benefitted from this exception as I found immediate relief during the wedding, and did not have to return to the hospital.

3. The worst occurrence came upon me in the spring of 1969. I returned from my office on a Friday afternoon and began preparing myself for the Sabbath. Suddenly, I felt a strong jab in my chest with pain gradually spreading to my arms and back. I told Pearl that I was having a heart attack. She immediately began calling physicians from among members of the congregation, but none was available (American doctors often take off on Friday for long weekends), except for the young cardiologist, Dr. Paul Tolins, who had just recently come to town. He told Pearl that he was sending an ambulance, and would meet us at the North Shore Hospital. When we reached the hospital, Dr. T. was already there. The first cardiogram pinpointed the place and severity of the incident, and I was admitted to the I.C.C. unit. I recall one of the elderly members of the congregation entering my room, taking my hand, and saying: "Rabbi, why you? He later told me that I responded with a question: "Why not? Contrary to what some people may think, the Rabbi does have a heart!" Other professional men of the congregation gathered around Pearl in the hospital lobby offering comfort and advice which she sorely needed. Our son, Michael, was in his first year at N.Y.S.U. in Buffalo, and we

decided not to disturb him during the final annual exams – a decision to which he took extreme exception when he came home two weeks later, at the end of the school year.

I was released after three weeks, but was returned to the hospital a week later because of an irregular heart beat. This time, however I was not as confined or restricted as the first time. Michael had been engaged to lead the High Holiday services that Fall at Buffalo University, and he wanted me to record the services for him on tape. The hospital agreed to let me do it in one of the nurses' rooms. Also, the third volume of my *Shiurim* textbooks was in the final stages of preparation for the forthcoming school year (1969-70), and the galleys were brought to me to the hospital for proof-reading. The daughter of my good friend, Mr. G., who was our Torah Reader and chairman of the Ritual Committee, was to celebrate her *Bat Mitzvah*, and I did one of those crazy things which Rabbis are prone to do. I dictated to my secretary an address to the *Bat Mitzvah* for the occasion, and asked Pearl to deliver it from the pulpit. She agreed to do it, and all agreed that she did it well. Here is the place to pay full tribute to her for having been a true Woman of Valor (*Aishet Chayil*) throughout the years, particularly in times of crisis. God granted me the years of life, and Pearl made use of His blessing to keep me alive through all these ailments, and throughout the years since then to this day.

4. When I embarked on my rabbinic career, my father quoted to me a saying which was attributed to the great teacher of ethics (*Mussar*), Rabbi Israel Salanter, that "a Rabbi whose congregants do not wish to oust him, is not a *Rabbi*, but a Rabbi who is ousted by his congregation is probably not a *mench* (a worthy person)." In the mid 1960s, for the first time after twenty years of service in the American rabbinate, I began to notice personal opposition to my continued service in the congregation. It may have had its origin in the issue of playing bingo in the synagogue. It may have been due to the lack of expected growth of membership in the congregation, which some people

attributed to what they considered my unreasonable standards in the realms of the children's education and ritual observance within the congregation, which discouraged new residents from joining Beth Israel, and joining instead the Reform synagogue which experienced more rapid growth. The number of people who voiced these sentiments was rather small, as far as I knew, although there may have been more people who felt likewise, but who were less vociferous. The fact that at the end of five years of service (in 1964) I was granted a contract for five more years (to 1969), was ample proof that the opponents represented a small minority, but not having experienced such murmurings at all until then, it was enough to make me feel rather uncomfortable.

TESTIMONIAL LUNCHEON honoring Rabbi Abraham J. Ehrlich on his Tenth Anniversary as spiritual leader of Temple Beth Israel was held at the Temple on Sunday, November 30. More than 150 congregants and friends attended,

From L. to R.: Rabbi Mordecai Waxman; Rabbi Ehrlich; Mr. Fred Molod, Cong. Pres.; and Mr. Arthur Frankel

Chapter Forty Four

AN OFFER FOR LIFE TENURE

In December 1969, I was informed that the Ritual Committee recommended to the Board of Trustees to grant me life tenure with the congregation at the conclusion of ten years of service, and the motion was approved by a majority of seventeen to four. Should I accept the offer, the motion would have to be approved at a general membership meeting. I asked the Board for permission to attend the general membership meeting to address the assembly on this issue, and my request was duly granted.

I first expressed my appreciation to the Board for their kind offer, and the gratification to know that the overwhelming majority of its members voted to grant me a life-time contract. At the same time, I told the assembly that in principle I do not believe that tenure should be granted to anyone, be he a principal, a teacher, or a Rabbi, because it tends to lower the drive and motivation of the candidate from performing at the highest level. I also told them that sometime down the line – when our children have concluded their education or upon their marriage, Pearl and I may want to go on *Aliyah* (emigrate) to Israel, and it is, therefore, unnecessary for the congregation to get into a lengthy debate on whether or not to approve the motion of the Board. I suggested that the congregation consider instead granting me a ten year contract, with the provision that I would be allowed to terminate the contract at any time – not to accept another position – but solely for the purpose of making *Aliyah*. Congregants who had expected a lengthy and hot encounter at that meeting expressed a sigh of relief, or perhaps disappointment, and my suggestion was unanimously approved.

A committee was appointed to negotiate the terms of the contract. I was not very good at talking about money with *Baalei Battim* (laymen) of the congregation, and usually ended up getting insignificant increments. On this round, a member of the Board, an attorney and personal friend who specialized in contract negotiation, Mr. Martin Scher, offered to do the work for me. The only thing he asked of me was to provide him with a copy of the "Salary Survey" in the forty Conservative congregations of Long Island which was compiled by Rabbi Paul Teicher several months earlier. Mr. M.S. was deeply moved when he learned that although I was above the "medium" in education and years of service, I was at the "bottom" of the salary scale. At the following meeting of the Board, he provided a copy of this survey to each member of the Board, and I was later told that they were all shocked and embarrassed to see black on white how inadequately their Rabbi was being compensated. Worst of all was the fact that the congregation had not made any provisions for the Rabbi's pension after retirement. The Board then voted to practically double my salary, and to make annual payments to the Rabbinical Assembly Retirement Fund in sufficient amounts to compensate for past years.

Chapter Forty Five

TEMPLE PRESIDENT POSES RITUAL CHALLENGE

Among those who did not consider themselves as my fans was a Mr. J.B., the president of the congregation for the past two years. He was appointed for another two-year term, and he decided to challenge my leadership and authority in a most brazen way. When I approached the synagogue on a Sabbath morning on which J.B. was celebrating the *Bar Mitzvah* of his first born son, I saw several buses parked just outside the Temple grounds. When I inquired of an usher for an explanation on the presence of the buses near the Temple, I was shocked to learn that the *Bar Mitzvah* reception following the services would not be held in the Temple social hall as was customarily done, but in a non-kosher club some distance from the Temple, and the buses were there to take the *Bar Mitzvah* guests to the club.

Neither I nor the congregation had any control over a congregant's behavior off the Temple premises, and I had occasionally heard of congregants who had a *Bar Mitzvah* party on a Saturday night or on Sunday in a non-kosher place. But it was generally accepted that the *Seudat Mitzvah* – the ritually required meal immediately following the *Bar Mitzvah* service – had to be kosher, and was usually held at the synagogue. It was also known that the Rabbi would not officiate at a wedding which is held at a non-kosher hall. The departure of Mr. J.B. from the norm was a challenge to the congregation and the Rabbi by none other than the presiding officer of the congregation, and therefore had to be met face on.

When J.B. took his seat on the pulpit next to me, I greeted him as usual, and said nothing of what I had learned about the reception. As I contemplated on my reaction, I recalled a story

about the *Ga'on* of Vilna who once rebuked a person from the pulpit in front of the congregation for an infraction which the person had committed in public. When the *Ga'on* was reminded that according to rabbinic interpretation "the rebuke of the sinner ought to be done in private only", the *Ga'on* responded that the rebuke must correspond to the transgression. If it was committed privately – *b'zin'ah*, then the rebuke is delivered under four eyes, but when the sin is committed publicly – *b'ferhesyah*, so should be the rebuke. I thought of what the consequences might be if I rebuke the president in public, but I was determined to follow the *Ga'on's* example.

I began my remarks to the congregation with a question: "King Solomon said: 'Train up a child in the way he should go; and even when he is old he will not depart from it' *(Proverbs 22:6)* You all know that the major effort of this congregation, in time and resources, is towards the education and training of our children to be knowledgeable and to become practicing Jews. Our students learn History, Laws and Customs of Jewish living, and they even learn how to lead a congregation in prayer in Hebrew, as our *Bar Mitzvah* boy did this morning. Why then do we fail so miserably in our efforts to raise practicing Jews when these children leave the school? The answer to this puzzle, I suggested to the congregation, may be found in a story I once heard about a professional *ganav* (thief) who took his young son with him on a nightly expedition. When they came to a certain home, the *ganav* said to the young boy: 'On the table inside this home lies a box with jewelry. I cannot go through the window grates, but you can; so get inside and take the box which lies on the table'. 'But, Dad', the boy replied. 'It (stands) written in the Torah 'Thou shalt not steal'. To which his Dad replied: 'What stands written you may let stand, but what lies on the table you can take'. This is the story, I said to the congregation; can you now guess what became of that little boy? And I concluded: 'You may bet your life that he became a professional *ganav*, because in his religious school he studied not to steal, but his

father, who had greater influence on him, taught him to do the opposite, and that is the reason for our failure as well. We teach a child the meaning of the dietary laws and how to observe them, but his father schedules the celebration of his *Bar Mitzvah* in a *treifa* (non-kosher) club. We taught the same child the significance of the Sabbath, but his father has buses waiting off the Temple grounds to chauffeur three hundred people on the Sabbath to that *treifa* club. If you want your Rabbi and religious school to succeed in raising religiously oriented and practicing Jews, you will have to cease from contradicting our instructions through your deeds!"

After the service, Mr. J.B. said to me: "Rabbi, I want you to know that I was deeply hurt by your remarks, but I must admit that you have guts!". We never talked to one another about this incident, but Mr. B. continued to serve as president for the following two years, and we worked together in a very formal and respectful way because he and I knew that I was right and that he lost the challenge. More importantly, the entire congregation and his guests realized that he was wrong, and for as long as I was with the congregation no one ever dared do anything like that again. I also knew that Mr. B. would never forget nor forgive me and, if the opportunity presented itself, he would pounce on me, and on a certain evening he thought that he had found a good cause to do so.

Mr. M.G., the son of a very dear personal friend, grew up in our congregation. I officiated at his *Bar Mitzvah* at age 13, and at his graduation at age 16. He also attended a special post graduation class which I instituted and taught. One day, M.G. walked into my Study with a good-looking blonde girl whom he introduced as "L". He told me that they met at college, that they decided to be married, and they want me to officiate at their wedding. The following exchange took place between us:

I. Is L. Jewish?

M. No, she is not.

I. Do your parents know about L. and what you intend to do?

M. Yes.

I. Did you tell them that you are going to see me?

M. No.

I. From all you know about me, did you think that I would officiate at an intermarriage, between a Jewish man and a non-Jewish woman?

M. L. thinks of converting to Judaism.

I. When?

M. In about a year.

I. Why in a year? Why not now? And if not now, why don't you wait a year for the wedding until she is converted?

M. We want to be married before her conversion to prove to her parents that my love for her is unconditional.

I. Would you marry L. if she had not promised that she would convert to Judaism?

M. No.

I. Then your love for her is indeed conditional.

M. Yes, but her parents, who don't know of her promise to be converted, will believe that my love for her is unconditional.

I. And you honestly expected Rabbi Ehrlich to go for this under-handed arrangement between you, and marry you to a non-Jewish girl which is against the Torah?

M. But she promised to convert...

I. Suppose you asked me to help you in breaking into a safe to steal a thousand dollars on the promise that a year later you would restore the stolen money, would you expect me to help you?

M. How can you compare the two situations?

I. M., you are talking to a Rabbi who is committed to uphold the law of the Torah, which forbids stealing and forbids intermarriage. I cannot do one or the other, and I will not do it for you. Your parents would never forgive me if I did do it for you.

M. I always respected you as my Rabbi and as an enlightened person. Now I see that you are as narrow-minded as most Rabbis.

At that point, I got up and thanked M. for placing me among other faithful and narrow-minded Rabbis who insist on obeying the law. I advised him to look for a Jewish girl, or wait for L.'s conversion (without fooling her parents), when I would be happy to officiate and to celebrate the occasion with him and his parents. Until then, I requested that he get out of my Study and stay out until he learned to speak respectfully. They both left. L. did not say a single word throughout this encounter. She was a sweet and gracious young woman, and I felt true compassion for her.

All was quiet and uneventful at a Board meeting two weeks later, until we reached the point of "good and welfare", when Mr. B. asked for permission to bring up a matter in which the Rabbi mistreated a young man of the congregation, the son of a member of the Board. Mr. B. correctly related what transpired in my office with the young Mr. M.G. and then suggested that the Rabbi be censured for his shabby treatment of this nice young man.

I watched Mr. G. (the father) as the president was rambling through the episode, and saw his discomfort in having his son's confrontation with the Rabbi made public, especially that his dear son was about to marry a non-Jewish girl. Before anyone had a chance to respond to the president, Mr. G. asked for the right to speak, and he told the Board that he would forever be grateful to the Rabbi for the way he handled the situation without partiality to our personal friendly relationship, and he

concluded his remarks, saying: "Had the Rabbi acceded to my son's request, I would now be asking the Board to censure the Rabbi for a violation of Jewish law which he is committed to safeguard". But the president was not finished yet. He told the Board that although Mr. G. was satisfied with the rabbi, he himself was most unhappy with the rabbi's behavior at his son's *Bar Mitzvah*, having embarrassed him personally in front of three hundred guests. A member of the Board said to Mr. B.: "Although everyone present at your son's *Bar Mitzvah* knew to whom the Rabbi was referring, he never mentioned your name. If you also felt that he meant you, and the shoe fits, then you wear it."

Members of the Board filed out of the meeting room without saying a word. Mr. B. lost again, but I was not very happy about the episode. I was sorry for young M. for having become entangled in his love affair. I felt sorry for my dear friends, Mr. and Mr. G. for their personal grief and public exposure. And I felt sorry for myself to have a member of my community, a presiding officer, so full of hate and spitefulness. I also knew that several members of the Board were with Mr. B. in his singular pursuit of the Rabbi, but they did not say so publicly because, in this particular case, they realized that he was wrong.

For those who are curious to know what happened to the young couple, let me add that L. and M. were married in a civil ceremony. A year later, L. converted to Judaism, and they were married again Jewishly. L. became more Jewishly observant than M. She was active in the Synagogue Sisterhood, and served as a teacher in the Religious School program. As he matured, M. realized that I was right, for his real problem was not L. and not her parents, but his desire to prove to *his* parents that he can get his way, and I refused to accommodate him. Years later, M. and L. visited us in Jerusalem. I was glad to see the happy ending for them and for the entire G. family who are among our dear friends to this day.

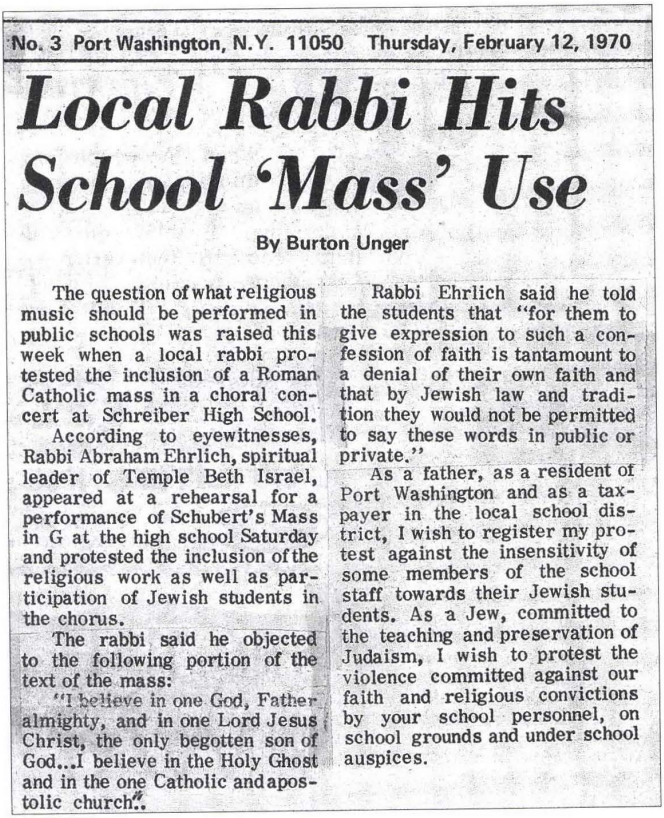
Chapter Forty Six

CONFLICT WITH PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Two incidents which occured in 1970-71 disturbed my tranquility and triggered off fresh thoughts about leaving the congregation sooner than I had anticipated. The first involved my relationship with the non-Jewish community with which I had always been on friendly terms. On *Shabbat* mornings we had a Junior Congregation service for our religious school students where they also learned to conduct services and read the Torah. During the Torah reading in the synagogue, I would go down to the children for a short sermonette on the weekly chapter of the Torah. There was an understanding between the local clergy and the P.W. School Board of Education that the public schools would not schedule any special events on Saturday and Sunday mornings which might interfere with the children's attendance at Church or Synagogue services.

One Saturday morning, when I went down to the children, I found that a goodly number of regular attendees were missing, and I was told that they had gone for a choir rehearsal at the high school auditorium, in preparation for a concert to be held on Sunday afternoon. At the conclusion of the Synagogue service, I walked over to the high school auditorium to see what was happening there. I found our children who were missing from the Junior Congregation service, and Jewish children from nearby communities whose choirs were to participate in the Sunday concert. What shocked me most was the musical selection they were practicing – Schubert's Mass in G., and I heard my Jewish children, chanting a confession of faith in Christ and in the Catholic Church. I pointed out to the musical director that Jewish children were being forced to give expression to a declaration of faith which is contrary to their

own faith, and the director replied: "No one is being forced to do anything. This is our selection for the concert, and whoever does not want to chant it, does not have to participate in the concert".



No. 3 Port Washington, N.Y. 11050 Thursday, February 12, 1970

Local Rabbi Hits School 'Mass' Use

By Burton Unger

The question of what religious music should be performed in public schools was raised this week when a local rabbi protested the inclusion of a Roman Catholic mass in a choral concert at Schreiber High School.

According to eyewitnesses, Rabbi Abraham Ehrlich, spiritual leader of Temple Beth Israel, appeared at a rehearsal for a performance of Schubert's Mass in G at the high school Saturday and protested the inclusion of the religious work as well as participation of Jewish students in the chorus.

The rabbi said he objected to the following portion of the text of the mass:

"I believe in one God, Father almighty, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God...I believe in the Holy Ghost and in the one Catholic and apostolic church".

Rabbi Ehrlich said he told the students that "for them to give expression to such a confession of faith is tantamount to a denial of their own faith and that by Jewish law and tradition they would not be permitted to say these words in public or private."

As a father, as a resident of Port Washington and as a taxpayer in the local school district, I wish to register my protest against the insensitivity of some members of the school staff towards their Jewish students. As a Jew, committed to the teaching and preservation of Judaism, I wish to protest the violence committed against our faith and religious convictions by your school personnel, on school grounds and under school auspices.

I asked the director for permission to speak to my students, and I then told them that they are not permitted to chant this hymn because it is a declaration of faith which is contrary to our faith. I also suggested to them to leave the hall in protest for

having scheduled this rehearsal on a Sabbath morning, contrary to the rules of the School Board. Some children left the hall while others cried and stayed on, but the incident aroused the ire of the music director for having interrupted his rehearsal. He took the case to the School Board and to the local press. I did likewise. As might have been expected, the general community population was divided on the issue. Some blamed the directors for having scheduled the rehearsal on a Sabbath morning contrary to school policy, while others accused me of disrupting a school function. Most encouraging to me was the solid and unanimous backing I received from my congregation in an open letter which our Board addressed to the School Superintendent and the local press.

I was, nonetheless, disturbed by my daughter's reaction. She was a high school senior at the time, and was afraid of having to face her school classmates, and the likely retaliation of the School Board. I tried to comfort her with the assurance that no one would dare take out my actions against her, personally; but she was right. Each year the school board granted two scholastic awards to the highest scoring male and female students. My daughter had the highest female score, and should have been given the award, but that year the school presented both awards to two male

Michelle at H.S. Graduation

students. She took it very hard, and it was a source of great grief to me. I never questioned the correctness of my decision to protest the actions of the music directors, and the acquiescence of the School Board; but I often wondered whether it could have been handled differently.

During the Summer of 1970, Michael and his girl friend of several years standing decided to officially announce their engagement, with a wedding date to be set for the Fall of 1971, following graduation from their respective universities.

Michael Ehrlich Plans Marriage

PORT WASHINGTON — Mr. and Mrs. Murray L. Savel of Maplewood, N.J., have announced the engagement of their daughter, Caroline, to Michael Ehrlich, son of Rabbi and Mrs. Abraham J. Ehrlich of this community.

Miss Savel is a junior sociology major at the University of Bridgeport, where she is vice-president of the Residence Hall Association.

Her fiance is a senior philosophy major at Buffalo State University. His father is rabbi of Temple Beth Israel in Port Washington.

Chapter Forty Seven

GOOD INTENTIONS WITH BAD RESULTS

In the same year, I embarked on an educational adventure which held out great promise, but later became a source of friction in the congregation and community, and of a personal disappointment and grief to me. From the very beginning of my career in Port Washington, I battled the trend within American religious schools, where children drop their religious training upon their becoming *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, and I did so with considerable success in my own school. I felt that having the children in school from ages thirteen to sixteen, when we could inculcate in them Jewish concepts and values, would be more beneficial than having them from age eight to thirteen when at most we can teach them elementary skills. These skills are very important, but, if I have to trade off one for the other, I would readily trade off the five childhood years for the five adolescent years. Since the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* party is what motivates most non-orthodox parents to enroll their children in the religious school, I would even have been willing to postpone the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah "celebration" to age eighteen.*

All these were dreams for the Messianic era. At that time all I could do was to build on a practice already accepted in Reform congregations where Confirmation ceremonies at age sixteen were instituted in place of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* ceremony at age thirteen. Some large Conservative congregations also succeeded in retaining small numbers of their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* children for an additional three years, culminating with a group graduation/celebration rather than a Confirmation service (which carried a Christian connotation). I wanted to do the same in my school, but I had to overcome three obstacles – the willingness of the children to come, the consent of the parents to drive them to school for another three

years, and the readiness of the congregation to pay for the additional staff.

An opportunity arose in 1966 with the graduation of six children of our congregation from the elementary department of the North Shore Hebrew Academy of Great Neck, and were then enrolled in our local Public High School. These children were willing to continue their Hebrew education for 4-6 hours per week in our religious school, their parents were willing to pay the required tuition and to drive them, and I drove a bargain with our education committee; namely, if the congregation would pay the salary of a teacher for two sessions a week, I would volunteer to teach the third session. I told the education committee that the congregation had a moral responsibility towards these families who gave much of their efforts and substance to educate their children to this stage, and who did not have another school to go to since the North Shore Hebrew Academy did not yet have a high school department. When my son was in a similar situation several years earlier, he had to travel three times a week to the Prozdor School of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan. I also told the committee that these children might set the tone and trend for the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* children of the entire congregation, especially those who did well in their religious studies, and who came from more committed homes.

The committee accepted the offer, and my estimation of things to come proved to be correct. Within a few months another 10-12 *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* children expressed their interest in continuing their religious studies for another three years, to age sixteen. We could not place these 10-12 students with those of the N.S.H.A. whose classes were conducted in Hebrew. The education committee, with the approval of the Board, allocated funds for two additional teachers, and three years later we had our first graduation excercise for sixteen students (including my daughter who was among the graduates of the N.S.H.A.) who had acquired the knowledge and skills for a meaningful Jewish life.

Unfortunately, we did not have a follow up group from the N.S.H.A., but the post *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* classes for our own students became the accepted norm for the majority of our children. Our religious school classes averaged 18-25 children of whom 12-15 stayed on for three more years, four hours per week, with a limited curriculum. It then occurred to me that if we had a larger enrollment we could –

a) raise the school hours to six hours per week;

b) have a more varied curriculum from which students would *select* their course of study; and

c) perhaps make the whole program more attractive to all *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* students.

In addition to Beth Israel, Port Washington was home to a larger Reform Temple with a larger school enrollment, and to a smaller Reform group – a break-away from the large Reform Temple. The latter did not have a Rabbi, and was headed by a Mrs. K., a fine educator who had served as Educational Director of the Reform Temple before the break away. The *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* celebration of both Reform groups was elective, for parents and children who opted for it, because their emphasis was on Confirmation/Graduation, and all their students attended religious classes to age 16. And I thought: If we could combine the high school classes for ages 13-16 of these three groups we would average about fifty children in each grade, and we might be able to reach the educational goals I was aiming to achieve.

Before approaching my own congregation, I outlined these ideas to Rabbi R. and Mrs. K. of the Reform groups. To my great surprise both accepted my plans whole-heartedly, and we had no difficulty in agreeing on the guidelines for this combined school. Since the small Reform group did not yet have their own facilities, we decided –

a) That the classes would be held in Beth Israel and Community Synagogue;

b) That the classes held at C.S. would be supervised by their Educational Director and those held at B.I by Mrs. K.;

c) Since the B.I. students had a more comprehensive background in Hebrew and Prayer, classes in these subjects would be separate, while those subjects which are taught in English (history, Customs and Ceremonies, Jewish Values, etc.) they would study together;

d) All boys would wear *Kipot* (skullcaps) in all classes;

e) The school would utilize the services of our respective staff, and students would pay their tuition to their respective congregations.

It was now up to each of us to present this plan to our respective institutions. We had anticipated considerable objections. Conservative Jews may object to Reform teachers who do not observe the Sabbath or the Dietary Laws. Reform ideologues may refuse to place skull caps *(kipot)* on their children's heads. Both groups may fear the blurring of the differences which distinguished their respective congregations. The truth is that all of these points were brought up and heatedly debated. However, these legitimate objections were muted by the fact that both Rabbis and Mrs. K. were the official sponsors of the project, and had worked out the differences among themselves. We went through the regular channels – the education committee, the board of directors and the congregation – and each body in turn gave its consent and approval. The over-riding logic behind it was the fact that these children lived side by side in their Jewish ghettos, and sat next to each other in their public school classrooms. People also mentioned the hope that this school may encourage closer social relations among the Jewish children who lived in a predominantly non-Jewish environment (the Jewish community was only 18% of the general population).

And so it came to pass that in the Fall of 1971 over one hundred children ages 13-16 enrolled in this new educational

program, including all post *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* children of Beth Israel. At first, everybody appeared to be pleased, but as the weeks and months rolled by, I began to see many shortcomings which I had not considered. Rabbi R. had a full time principal, and was not personally involved in the running of the school. Each of us had the right to visit classes which were held on the other's premises, but he never visited any class held at Beth Israel. In contrast, I was acting principal of my school and, although Mrs. K. was supervising the classes held at Beth Israel, I was always there. I also visited the classes held at the Reform Temple, and what I saw I did not like. The disadvantages which came to the fore were all against our interests.

We knew, for example, that the Reform Temple children were far behind our students in Hebrew and prayer, but I now discovered that they were not on a par in other subjects either. The majority were not taking their religious studies seriously, and their behavior in class and in the building, whether in Beth Israel or on their own premises, was intolerable. Absenteeism was rampant. Many refused to don their *Kipot* even in Beth Israel. Most disturbing to me was to observe that our own students began to imitate them in attitude and behavior. Since the curriculum was based on an elective system, many of our students took the easy way out, and dropped out of the Hebrew classes. Mrs. K. did her best in Beth Israel, but she could not control the students of the Reform Temple, who had no allegiance towards her, and neither could I. Mrs. K. agreed with me that this unusual undertaking, although desirable, was technically a mistake. Rabbi R. agreed that there were problems, but still favored the continuation of the program. I could not countenance the situation because I saw that the ten years of progress in my own school was rapidly going down the drain. I told Rabbi R. that I would try to convince my congregation to dismantle the combined school and, to my regret, he took it personally, and he took it hard. The situation caused me great pain and anguish. Rabbi R. and I were worlds apart in

philosophy and religious practice, but I respected him as a colleague and friend, and did not want to clash with him, certainly not in public.

I laid out the problem in a delicate memorandum to my education committee, and urged my people to keep the contents confidential. Unfortunately, a copy of the memorandum was taken out of our meeting room, and its contents reached Rabbi R. and members of the Reform Temple. It created bad feelings among neighbors and friends of both congregations. Coming on the heels of the School Choir incident, members of the Reform Temple pointed to my rigidity, and criticized me for my unbending and uncompromising attitude. Most members of Beth Israel agreed with my analysis, and favored the discontinuation of the program at the end of the school year. A noble experiment turned into a disaster, and left a sour taste and bad feelings among all involved, most of all in me, the orginator and mover of the idea.

Chapter Forty Eight

EARLY RETIREMENT FOR ALIYAH

The convergence of these unhappy events within the last three years – my heart ailment in 1969, the commotion in the general community following my public protest against the action of the School district concerning the choir rehearsal on the Sabbath in 1970, and now the dissention within the Jewish community on the combined school – the last two being the result of my own initiatives, set me thinking about leaving the congregation, and perhaps the rabbinate altogether. There was also a third unrelated problem brewing within me for some time now. After twelve years in a community, a Rabbi becomes aware of personal and intimate family problems which are just waiting to explode in his face. He is aware of adopted children in his congregation and community whose Jewish origin is questionable, and who have not been inducted into the Jewish fold through circumcision and conversion. He knows of women who were divorced in a civil court, and then remarried by Reform Rabbis without the benefit of a *Get* (rabbinic divorce), whose children are *mamzeirim* (bastards) by Jewish Law, and may not marry a Jewish mate, but are part of his own congregation and the Jewish community.

Jewish law says "*ain bodkin l'yuchsin*" – when a Rabbi is invited to officiate at the wedding of a person who is considered in the community to be Jewish, the Rabbi need not research his/her lineage to ascertain their Jewishness or their eligibility to marry within the Jewish fold. But, once the Rabbi is aware of a problem which might render that person ineligible for Jewish marriage, he cannot close his eyes or make believe that the problem is non-existent. I watched such children growing up in my community and dreaded the day when I might be called upon to induct them as *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* on my pulpit, or to

officiate at their marriage to a person who is legally Jewish. Would I have the courage to tell parents that their child who grew up and was educated in my religious school would now have to be properly circumcised and/or converted to Judaism before the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* Sabbath? Would I have the courage to tell a young man that I cannot officiate at his marriage to a Jewish girl because I know that he is a *mamzer*, or that I cannot officiate at his wedding because I know that the girl he has chosen to marry is a *mamzeret*? What else is a Conservative Rabbi who wants to live and work within the law to do under such circumstances except to say "no"; but, would he have the courage?

There is a Yiddish expression "*Got shlogt nisht mit beide hend* – God does not hit you with both hands". Luckily, I had two things going for me. The phenomenal success of the *Shiurim* textbooks provided me an annual income sufficient enough to live on in Israel, and our home, which had doubled in value since its purchase ten years earlier, could be traded in for an apartment in Israel. Financially, I could contemplate leaving the congregation and the American rabbinate, and shift my occupation to writing and publishing while living in Israel. Michael was happily married, and both he and Carol were gainfully employed. Michelle was about to graduate from Brown University and, with some prompting, might agree to come with us. The down side of this thought was the fact that I was now at the height of my earnings, and with an eight-year contract to run its course. Why then should I make such a drastic move which would force me to live the rest of my life on a very limited budget? I also had to face the truth that Michelle was not likely to join us. But then certain unexpected developments tipped the scales in favor of moving.

The story of Jewish enslavement in Egypt begins with the phrase "And there arose a new king who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). And in Beth Israel of Port Washington there was elected a new president who did not know or did not appreciate

what went into the making of the Temple during the previous twelve years of my service as Rabbi and Educational Director. Soon after assuming office, Mr. H. invited himself to my home to inform me that the Board was having difficulty in meeting the Temple budget because of my high wages, especially the automatic annual cost-of-living increase, with a minimum of five (5%) percent, which would drive the congregation into bankcruptcy. He wanted to know whether I would voluntarily give up the C.O.L. clause of my contract. I told him that I would consider the matter and let him know my decision.

I sought the advice of the past president, Mr. M. who was still a member of the Board and a good personal friend. He assured me that no one authorized Mr. H. to approach me on this subject, and he advised me to ignore it. I then shared with Mr. M. my thoughts about *Aliyah* to Israel, and asked him whether I could use Mr. H's request as a bargaining chip on certain financial terms in case I leave the congregation before the expiration of my present contract. As a Zionist who often visited Israel, and as an activist in the U.J.A., Mr. M. well appreciated my yearnings for *Aliyah*, and he asked me what I had in mind. I told him that I would give up the annual C.O.L. in exchange for a promise that the Board would continue its annual payments to the Rabbinical Assembly Pension Fund during the entire ten years of my contract, irrespective of my leaving the congregation on *Aliyah*. He told me that the Board felt very keenly about the Pension Fund payments to compenstate for the first ten years of my service when no payments were made at all, and he had no doubt that the congregation would continue the payments without my asking for it. Thus, Mr. H.'s unauthorized initiative turned into a blessing – adding another brick to the building of a financial portfolio towards a possible move to Israel.

In the Fall of 1971, I began to speak openly with close friends about *Aliyah*. They told me that the new president represented a new generation of younger members who favored

a more liberal attitude towards ritual observance, such as the involvement of women in congregational life, and would therefore like to see a Rabbi who would be more flexible in such matters. "The majority of the congregation would stand with you, and there is no doubt about the validity of your contract," they said to me, "but from now on you may have to fight to maintain your standards. Therefore", they concluded, "if you are serious about *Aliyah*, as you told us two years ago, you could probably reach an understanding with the congregation regarding your pension fund, and even beyond that".

Pearl and I agreed on this move, and I so notified the president. Most of the people with whom I worked for the past twelve years were horrified at the prospect of my leaving, but I pleaded with them not to fight it because I considered it to be in my best interest. The date for my departure was set for August 1972. The Board granted the payments to my pension fund for the remaining seven years of my contract, and the congregation passed a motion for a substantial monetary gift to us, to be paid out over the following five years, to ease our move to Israel.

Soon thereafter, we placed our home on the market. The house was in perfect condition, and was sold within two weeks for almost double the amount we had paid for it eleven years earlier. Closing date was set for August 1972, when we were planning to leave for Israel.

Chapter Forty Nine

A DETOUR AT ADATH JESHURUN

And then, in the Spring of 1972, we began having second thoughts about the wisdom of parting from the children at that time. Michael and Carol occupied an apartment in N.J. which we did not consider desirable for raising a family. Since Carol's parents had paid for their wedding, we felt that we should assist them in acquiring a suitable home, which we could not undertake on a retirement income. Michelle informed us that upon her graduation from Brown University in 1973, she intended to enroll in medical school, and that she had in fact begun to fill out her applications to several prestigious universities. Pearl and I decided that on both accounts we should not leave the United States for several more years, not until both children are well established.

By that time, our home had already been sold, and my position had been forfeited. The big question was: What do I do now? The decision was not simple because, whatever job I take, it would be an interim position for only several years, and congregations are not receptive to such applicants. I told Pearl that I definitely did not want another rabbinic post, but if I could find an attractive educational position I would take it for two-three years. By "attractive", I meant a large school in which I could try out some of my educational theories, and in a congregation led by a Rabbi with whom I could work.

I glanced through the recent Rabbinical Assembly Placement pamphlet, and saw a listing for an "Assistant Rabbi in charge of education" at a large Congregation in Elkins Park Pa., and the person to contact was Rabbi Yaakov G. Rosenberg whom I had known for some years as a traditional and amicable person. He had often approached me at Rabbinical Assembly

conventions to discuss matters of Jewish Law with some deference to me as a member of the Law Committee. I called Rabbi R. to ask for more details, and I told him that I might be interested in the educational aspect of the position, provided I would not have to serve as Associate Rabbi. Rabbi R. was rather surprised because most Rabbis would prefer the prestige and the status accorded to an Associate Rabbi more so than to an educational director, but I explained to him that after twenty five years in my own pulpit I might find it difficult to play second fiddle to a senior Rabbi, and we might run into friction. We will be better off, I told him, if you maintain exclusive leadership of the congregation, and I do the same in the school. I assured him that I would gladly fill in for him on the pulpit on a Sabbath or Holiday whenever invited by him to do so, and would equally seek his advice on school matters, but in principle each of us would have his own domain. Rabbi R. then invited me to meet him on Sunday.

And so I did. After a brief discussion between us, the Rabbi invited the president of the congregation, Mr. Marvin Demchick, and the chairman of the education committee, Dr. Stephen Davidoff, to join us, and they filled me in on the details. Adath Jeshurun had a membership of twelve hundred families – among the largest in the country – with a school enrollment of 750 children – from pre-kindergarten through the tenth grade – with a staff of forty teachers. The synagogue structure occupied a full city block. The upper floor had a Prayer Hall and a Social Hall which, when combined for the High Holy Days, sat over two thousand people. The school occupied the entire lower floor, with twelve classrooms and an administrative wing.

We also talked about school curriculum and philosophy of education. They had heard about my article in the Torch magazine, and wanted to know to what extent I might try to implement those ideas in their school. I told them that I would try to do so when I felt that it has also become *my* school. After some discussion and bargaining, the Rabbi accepted my

suggestion that my title would be "Director of Religious Education", and I accepted the salary offered to me by the president. An hour later, I was driving back to New York with a job in my pocket for a two year engagement to begin on August 1st, just what I wanted in an educational position.

JEWISH EXPONENT

Adath Jeshurun Names Rabbi as Educational Head

Marvin N. Demchick, president of Congregation Adath Jeshurun, Elkins Park, announced the appointment of Rabbi Abraham J. Ehrlich as educational director. He succeeds Yehuda Shabatay.

Rabbi Ehrlich, 48, a native of Israel, was the rabbi and educational director for the past 13 years at Temple Beth Israel, Port Washington, N. Y. His previous assignments were with Keneseth Israel Temple, Wooster, Ohio, and Beth Israel Synagogue, Bristol, Conn.

Rabbi Ehrlich

Rabbi Ehrlich received his BA in philosophy of religion from Wooster College, Ohio and his rabbinical ordination from Hebrew Yeshivah, Jerusalem. He has completed his residency requirements for a D.H.L. from the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Rabbi Ehrlich wrote Shiurim Publications, a series of graded Hebrew textbooks and workbooks for religious schools and Hebrew day schools. He has contributed to Conservative Judaism, Jewish Spectator and Hebrew Hadoar Weekly.

While at his post in Port Washington, Rabbi Ehrlich served as president of the Nassau-Suffolk Region of the Rabbinic Assembly of America (1967-69), served on its membership committee from 1968 to 1970 and was a member of the National Kashrut Commission of the United Synagogue of America. He currently serves on the committee on Jewish law and standards of the Rabbinical Assembly.

Pearl and I travelled to Elkins Park several times that Summer in search of a home. We bought a split-level house very similar to what we had in Port Washington, but whenever we speak of *our home* the reference is always to P.W., where the children went through the school system; where both children celebrated their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*; where we celebrated Michael's engagement; and from where we drove to his

wedding. I remember the day when the movers drove off with our funiture and the three of us – Pearl, Michelle and I were making our way from P.W. to Pa. Suddenly we heard Michelle sobbing hysterically "I want to go home". For many years afterwards, whenever we had an occasion to visit P.W., we drove out of our way to the Essex Court community just to take a look at *our home*, to see whether the new owners were taking good care of it. Our last home in the U.S. was in Pa., but to this day when people ask us what our home was like we show them pictures of our home in P.W. I do not believe that we even have a picture of the Pa. home; probably becuase we knew that it would be temporary.

We moved into our new home on a Friday morning. In the evening we walked to *Schule* for the Late Friday Evening service, and here awaited us the surprise, or should I rather say the *shock* of our lives. Rabbi R. is a traditional man, more traditional than the average Conservative Rabbi. I had not talked with him about his *Schule* and his services because I took it for granted that his *Schule* would be like himself, or like my *Schule* – traditional. The three of us were seated in the pews, among the congregants, waiting for the Rabbi and Cantor to come up to the pulpit. Instead, we heard a mighty organ blasting out the first musical notes, while a mixed choir began the chant of "*Ma Tovu*" (How goodly are your tents, O Jacob), and Cantor Charles Davidson with the Rabbi marching out from behind the *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark), stepping in perfect harmony with the music. The three of us intuitively turned towards each other in shock and amazement, and I remember saying to Pearl "Are you sure that the furniture has been unloaded from the truck"?

Artistically, it was the most beautiful service we ever attended. The Rabbi, Cantor, Organist and Choir worked in perfect harmony to put on a beautiful inspiring service with original music compositions by Cantor Davidson, beautiful melodies rendered by a well rehearsed choir and with full participation of the congregation. From a traditional Jewish

point of view, it was the most radical service we ever attended – consisting of a non-Jewish organist, a mixed male/female choir, with several non-Jews among them, and a *Siddur* (prayerbook) put together by the previous Rabbi of the congregation, so radical that not a single congregation of the country adopted it. If our furniture had not been unloaded from the moving truck we might have considered sending it off to another destination. Rabbi R. is a Pastor of the first magnitude. He loves people, and he understands them and their needs. He must have noticed our bewilderment. Without any remark from us regarding the service, he said to me: "Abe, since you are not functioning here in a rabbinic capacity, you are not obligated to attend the services here, especially on Late Friday Nights when you have to walk to and from *Schule* through dark streets. Please feel free to do as you wish".

And, in freedom, we chose to attend the services regularly because, once the shock wore off, we enjoyed the performance of those who occupied the pulpit, and the beautiful melodies of the congregational singing. Most of all, we were captivated by the friendship of the people, particularly the two dozen families – members of the Board and Education Committee, with whom we developed a social closeness which has lasted to this day, twenty years after our departure from the congregation. Much to the credit of the Rabbi, there was in this congregation a spirit of love and friendship which I have not seen in any congregation, and both Pearl and I were the beneficiaries.

As to my relationship with the Rabbi, usually a very sensitive and touchy subject among Rabbis serving in the same congregation, I could not wish for anything better. I made sure not to infringe on his domain, by refusing to respond to any questions on matters of Law and Ritual. A congregant related to the Board that he once asked me in passing "when *Rosh Chodesh* (first day of the Hebrew month) would be observed?", and I told him "You had better ask the Rabbi". The Rabbi knew that I was not after his job (I wouldn't get it even if I tried), and

he felt at ease to invite me to take his place on the pulpit when he had to be away for personal or professional reasons. In the same way, the Rabbi accorded me complete freedom in running the school without the slightest interference from him.

A few months after my arrival, I suspended from school a troublesome student whose parents had not responded to several notes I had sent them regarding their son's mischievous behavior. The father came to my office to talk about the incident. He was very irritated and angry. "Do you know who I am"?, he demanded to know. "In the few months I have been here I did not get to know who is who", I responded, "but who you are is not the point. The point is that your son is very disruptive in class, and you did not respond to several notes that I had sent you". "Well", he said, "I want you to know that I am the third generation in this congregation". "Well", I responded, "if you do not take your son in hand and teach him how to behave in school, you may be the last generation in this congregation". He stormed out of my office with the dire warning "The Rabbi will take care of you"! I later discovered that this gentleman was indeed a very influential member of the congregation, but the Rabbi told him that he and his son would have to come to terms with the school director, if he wants his son in school, because Rabbi Ehrlich is in charge. The mutual respect between me and the Rabbi developed into a deep and lasting friendship throughout all the years until this day.

Chapter Fifty

THE SHAPING OF A GREAT SCHOOL

On the personal and family levels, the years we spent in Pa. were difficult and trying, but on the professional level the job was challenging and satisfying. The congregation was the oldest in Pa. and one of the largest in the country. The Rabbi and congregation were dedicated to the education of the children, and the potential for excellence was almost unlimited. But through a battery of tests which I administered to students of grades 3-7 during the first six months, I found that the majority of the students failed to achieve even the standards which we had reached in Port Washington. The most striking indication was the inability of its graduates, who wanted to continue in their Jewish Education, to enter the preparatory department of Graetz College, either in the Hebrew or English classes.

The Rabbi refused to accept my findings and conclusions, arguing that no-one can reach such conclusions and judge such an institution in six months, but the chairman of the education committee – a highly professional educator who headed the Board of Education of Greater Philadelphia, accepted my conclusions, and asked me to draw up and submit my recommendation for the reorganization of the school.

The reorganizaton which I suggested was based on ideas which I advocated in the article which I published in the Torch magazine in 1964. The curriculum of the elementary department, ages 8-13, was planned to produce Jewishly literate functioning children with basic skills in Prayer – Reading and *Nusach hatfilah*; Laws and Customs of the Sabbath, Holidays and Festivals with the ability to personally participate in their observance; Torah – the Narrative portions and the *Mitzvot*; and

Jewish History. In Hebrew, all children would master a Religious Vocabulary of about 1000 words based on the *Shiurim* textbooks, supplemented with a course in conversational Hebrew for the more linguistically gifted students. We had about eighty children in each age group who were divided into A-B-C-D sections to facilitate homogeneous grouping for each child according to his/her ability and interest. A child could be in 2-A in Prayer, in 2-B in Laws and Customs, in 2-C in History and in 2-D in Hebrew.

The High School department, ages 13-16, offered 60-70 courses in Prayer, Bible, History, Jewish Living, Ethics, Principles of Faith, Israel etc. Except for certain required courses like the Holocaust, History of Israel, Principles of Faith, and others, students were able to elect their program of study, but regular attendance was mandatory for six hours a week, on Sunday morning and on Tuesday and Thursday evening. The group graduation/confirmation was held on *Shavuot* of the third year after *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

About twenty of the forty teachers were Israelis, and I recommended that most of them be dismissed because they were not licensed teachers; they knew Hebrew, but did not know Judaism; and they did not know the American child or how to deal with him. Most irritating to me was their negative attitude to Jewish observance. It was not uncommon for a student to see his/her teacher in the supermarket on Saturday, the same teacher who discussed with him/her on the previous day the significance of the Sabbath.

The reorganization program called for the engagement of licensed teachers who would be paid at a much higher wage scale than previously offered, and only teachers with a thorough knowledge of Jewish Living, and those who were personally committed to Jewish observance, at least publically – *befarhesyah*. These suggested changes called for a substantial increase in the school budget, almost double the amount; and, because of changes in class schedules, parents would

have to drive their children much more frequently during the week[1].

The plan was nonetheless unanimously approved by the education committee. When we came to the Board, the members wanted to know how long I would be willing to stay with the congregation to see the plan through. Instead of committing myself to a specific number of years, I told them that I would stay on the job until some of our students were admitted to the Hebrew and English departments of Graetz College. On that basis, the Board approved the reorganization plan. The president predicted that, of the 400 hundred families who had children in the religious school, about 100 would probably leave the congregation because of increased school tuition and added demands on them in driving the children to school, and yet the Board was willing to take the chance. The credit must be given to the Rabbi and school chairman who, once they were convinced of the merits of the plan, put their full weight and influence behind it. On my part, I arranged a series of Sunday morning breakfasts to which all parents of registered students were personally invited. I explained to them what we had found concerning their children's achievements, or lack of it, and how the new program would benefit them. As a result of this effort, only five families left the congregation. In recognition of this success, the education committee decided to engage an Assistant School Director to be in charge of administrative matters, and thus allow me to concentrate on curriculum.

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1. Teachers would also be required to attend orientation sessions with the School Director on methodology and the handling of problematic religious subjects with young children. I once heard a teacher explaining to a class of ten-year olds that "*Karet*", a punishment ordained in the Torah for not fasting on *Yom Kippur* or for eating *Chametz* – leavened bread on *Pessach*, means a *"slow torturous death"*. I then imagined the nightmares of a sensitive ten-year old girl after watching her father or mother violating the laws of *Pessach* and *Yom Kippur*.

Chapter Fifty One

LOSING THREE SIBLINGS

These successful achievements on the professional level, were overshadowed by tragic events within our family. In the Spring of 1973, I decided on another visit to Israel as I had not been there since 1968, and I so advised my sisters in Jerusalem. Because of the inclination of my family towards secrecy about unpleasant events, we, in the United States, had no inkling of the demise of my two oldest sisters, Yentil and Rachel, during the Winter of 1973, within six weeks of each other. I assume that due to the history of my heart ailment in 1969, and because of their awareness of my special closeness to these two sisters, they all the more hesitated to inform me of what had transpired. The fact that my sisters never wrote to us personally, and all contacts were through my brothers-in-law, they felt confident that I would have no reason to suspect anything wrong as long as they did not officially inform us. But now, that they knew of my pending arrival in July, they reasoned that it would be better for me to learn about it from afar, than walking into their homes unsuspecting of anything.

Again, going in a round-about way, my youngest brother-in-law, Reb Avraham Eisenbach, called Pearl's brother-in-law, Rabbi Orenstein, to inform Pearl of the double tragedy, and then left it up to her to break the news to me, if, when and how she would deem it appropriate. On Tuesday nights, I used to come home late after the high school classes which lasted until 9:00 P.M. One Tuesday evening, after I had eaten and relaxed, Pearl told me that she had heard disturbing news from Jerusalem, and then told me of Yentil's demise six months ago. After I performed the *K'riah* (cutting the garment), and sat down on the floor to mourn over the death of my beloved sister whom I loved and adored since infancy, Pearl sat

down on the floor next to me to fill in the detail of Yentil's demise in March, and how she had heard about it, and then she whispered: "This is not all, Abe. Your sister Rachel passed away six weeks earlier". I am sure Pearl had consulted with Rabbi R. and my physician on the best way to break the tragic news to me, and perhaps even getting the assurance of the doctor that he would be available if needed. But I was so numbed by this double-barreled shot, that I felt nothing, and could not even shed a single tear.

According to tradition, a person does not have to observe *Shivah* (seven days of mourning) if he hears about the death of a dear one thirty days after its actual occurrence. Therefore, as far as the law was concerned I could have gone to work the following morning, but Rabbi R. called during the evening to extend his condolence, and suggested that I take off a few days until I get back to myself. Emotionally, I felt as though the world had collapsed around me, and I really could not have done anything. We were alone at home. Pearl had met these sisters several times during our frequent visits to Israel since 1965, and had literally fallen in love with them. They had treated her like a sister, and she felt likewise towards them. Now, Pearl understood how I felt at this great loss, and she was a source of comfort to me.

In July I travelled to Israel. From the airport I went straight to Rachel's home where Reb Avraham Mordechai (my brother-in-law) and family were waiting for me. We embraced and cried, as did Rachel's sons and daughters. The whole family was there, but the house felt so empty without Rachel. From there I went to Yentil's house, and the same scene repeated itself, and even more so because Reb Yankel was a much more emotional and less restrained person. That was the proper time for me to sit *Shivah*, but the law does not permit. The hours I spent with my sisters' families were emotionally helpful to me in making peace with reality. Then I went to *Har Hazeitim*, the Mount of Olives cemetery to visit their graves next to my

mother's. Mother died during the War of Liberation, when the Jewish people did not have access to the ancient cemetery on *Har Hazeitim* where my grandparents were buried during the first World War in 1917. Mother was therefore buried in the court-yard of the *Shaarei Zedek* hospital, with the provision *(t'nei)* that her remains would be moved to *Har Hazeitim* if and when it is liberated from the Arabs. And it was done so when the Israeli army conquered the Old City of Jerusalem in the Six Day War of 1967, including the *Har Hazeitim* cemetery. Now mother and daughters were together again – "Even as they were devoted and faithful in life, so in death they were not parted" (from the Sabbath Service).

I walked away from the graves believing that I, too, would not live beyond their age of 60-62, although father did live to age 75, and then I left Jerusalem with the feeling that it might be time to return home to Israel while still alive. However, I did promise the congregation that I would see through the school reorganization program to its ultimate success, and I did have my children to worry about. And so I travelled back to the States that Summer with a feeling that some day I would be back in Israel for good, and perhaps sooner than I thought.

Chapter Fifty Two

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

The second half of 1973 was as bad as the first half. On *Yom Kippur*, September 3rd, we came to *Schule* at 9:00 A.M. and were met in the lobby by the non-Jewish superintendent who informed us that Israel had been attacked by Egypt and Syria two hours earlier, but he did not know any details. I told him that I would like to listen to news broadcasts on the hour. He was well trained to respond to Jewish needs on the Sabbath and Holidays, and he opened the radio in my office, and we immediately knew that the Egyptians succeeded in crossing the Suez Canal. Rabbi R. was already on the pulpit, completely unaware of the rapidly deteriorating situation, but the people who were arriving in the synagogue after that hour knew what was happening, and I thought that they would likely leave the service for the hourly news broadcasts. I went up to the pulpit to inform the Rabbi of the emerging events, and suggested to him that we read to the congregation the hourly news bulletin from the pulpit, and so enable them to remain in their seats throughout the service. Gradually, as the news reports worsened by the hour, *Yom Kippur* turned into *Tisha b'Av* (the day when the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed). Before *N'ilah* (Closing Service of *Yom Kippur*), the Rabbi made an emotional appeal for financial assistance to Israel's Defense Forces, saying: "While the Israeli soldiers are defending the country with their *damim* – blood, the least we can do is to send them our *damim* money". (The Hebrew term *Damim* has the dual meaning of *blood* and *money*). The congregants pledged half a million dollars to the United Jewish Appeal, in addition to the half a million dollars they had pledged to the Israel Bond Drive on the previous evening towards the annual *Kol Nidrei* drive.

The following twelve days felt like a lifetime as we learned of Israel's tremendous losses and of General Dayan's breakdown – fearing the looming destruction of the third Jewish commonwealth. I personally feared for the hundreds of lives in my own family, and there were days I wished I could share their fate with them. It served as another incentive to think of *Aliyah* at the earliest opportunity.

The overriding obstacle to *Aliyah* was still Michelle's unmarried status, and that our moving to Israel would leave her alone in the States, without a home. The ameliorating factor to this situation was that Michelle had been away from home since she was sixteen years old in 1969, and that she was coming home ever less frequently. However, since I was now satisfactorily situated in a desirable position, and *Aliyah* was purely a matter of free choice, I doubt whether we would have taken the plunge were it not for a strange and debilitating occurrance during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend of 1973.

Chapter Fifty Three

SEVERAL PERSONAL JOLTS

I was sitting in *Schule* on Saturday morning with Pearl and Michelle when I suddenly became aware that something was happening to me physically and mentally. I got up, and with some difficulty I walked down to my school office, where I stayed for 15-20 minutes. When the strange feeling subsided, I went back to *Schule*, but I was never again the same person. In those twenty minutes, I lost the capacity to recognize the identity of people, or to remember their names. Michelle had come down to see what happened, but I did not tell her anything, nor did I relate the incident and the unfortunate results to Pearl, because I believed that it was a passing phenomenon which would improve with the passage of time. Instead, the situation was getting progressively worse. I could still easily recall the names of children and congregants from previous congregations, but could not recall the names of my present students, and at times I had difficulty in identifying members and teachers except for those few with whom I maintained daily contact. By January 1974, I realized that I would have to fake it to stay on the job.

As a matter of principle and policy, each semester I personally taught one class of the Confirmation/Graduation class. One evening, when I sat down to grade the papers of a test which I administered that day, I found that I could not connect/identify the names of students on the test papers with their faces in the classroom. I made a seating chart of the students in my class, and as time progressed I could not identify the students by name without checking them on the chart. It then became absolutely clear to me that I could not run a school of 750 students and forty teachers when I could not identify them by name. My learning capacity was not impaired. I still

remember much of what I learned in my youth, and I can still read and memorize articles and books, but I have not recuperated from the limitation which came upon me that Sabbath morning.

I seriously considered revealing the dilemma to the Rabbi and chairman of the education committee, and I was ready to leave my job if requested, but once again I adopted the attitude of "not bothering them as long as they do not say anything", and to labor on unless another turn of events might force me to do otherwise. I stayed with that position for another eighteen months until I fulfilled my promise to the congregation when they approved the school reorganization program. In the past twenty three years, I held several rabbinic and administrative positions on a full or part-time basis, and in each position I had to face the limitations of working with people whom I could not identify. In each place, I managed to memorize the names of 5-6 people with whom I was in frequent contact. As for the others, they either did not notice the fact that I never addressed them by name, or they did not care. I also got into the habit of greeting people who looked familiar, although I was not sure that they knew me, lest I be accused of ignoring them. But, except in one instance when I had no alternative, I refrained from accepting teaching positions which I enjoy the most, because I felt that it would be unfair to the students.

Before the year was over, I received another jolt when Pearl came to my office one Friday morning in November, accompanied by the Rabbi. I immediately knew that something very grave had happened. She told me that she is bearing disturbing news, and insisted that I swallow several pills before she reveals the nature of her tiding. For a moment I thought that it had something to do with Israel, but she whispered "It is Moshe Chayim", and proceeded to tell me that my older brother passed away the previous night, suddenly, from a heart attack. It was a total surprise and shock, because he was only 54 years old, and I had no idea that he was ill. My immediate reaction

was "Pearl, it is time to go home". Three siblings passed away within nine months, all of them from heart attacks at a young age. With my history of a serious heart attack four years earlier at the age of 46, I was sure that I would be next in line, and I really yearned to be back in the cradle where I was born and raised.

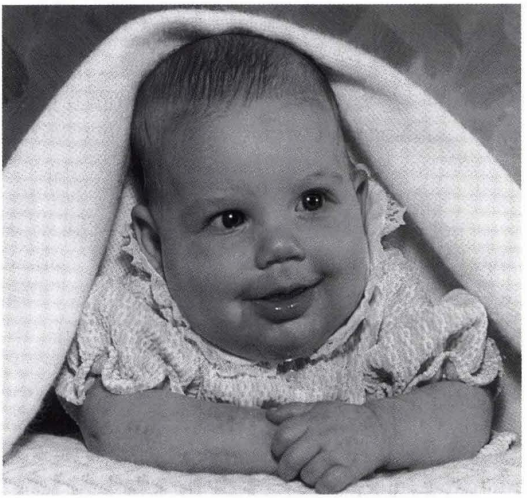
But life has its imperatives. I still had the responsibility of my position with the congregation. More than that was the realization that if I were to go to Jerusalem in this depressed mood, I would be going back to die, and I wanted to live. On Saturday night, Pearl and I accompanied Moshe Chayim's coffin to the JFK airport from where he was flown for burial on the *Har Hamenuchot* cemetery in Jerusalem, next to father. His younger son flew to Jerusalem with the coffin, and I joined my sister-in-law and her other children for *Shivah* (Seven Days of mourning) in their home in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Rabbi R., the Cantor, the chairman of the Education Committee, and a few friends came to express their sympathy, which was an impressive gesture on their part, especially when one considers the distance from Phila. to Brooklyn. The Rabbi had witnessed my reaction when Pearl brought me the distressing news, and he now used the opportunity to impress upon me the wisdom of continuing to work, rather than withdraw. We both were on the same wavelength, and that is exactly what I did at the end of *Shivah*, when I went back to Adath Jeshurun, determined more than ever before to meet the challenge which I had undertaken with the reorganization of the school.

Strange as it may seem, the children of the school were impressed by the changes they experienced. I remember walking into a graduation class of fifteen year olds taught by the Rabbi. The Rabbi asked his students what they thought of Rabbi Ehrlich's reorganization plan, and one of the students replied: "At first I thought that he was crazy to believe it could be done, but I changed my mind; just walk through the corridors and see

what is happening. It used to be a zoo, and now it is a school". The others agreed with him. In this observation, they echoed the sentiments of the Education Committee chairman when he walked into my office one Tuesday evening, and asked why I cancelled school for that evening. Instead of answering him, I invited him to take a walk with me through the school corridor, and as we looked into the six classrooms of the high school department in session, he too remarked: "It is amazing to see what has transpired here within a few short months".

Three happy events took place in our family in 1973-74. In January '73, Michelle was accepted to several first class medical schools, among them Cornell Medical College of New York City where she decided to pursue her medical studies. In May of that year, she graduated from Brown University (the former Pembroke College). And in August of 1974, our son and daughter-in-law made us happy grandparents with the birth of their daughter whom they named "Keren (Kim) Rachel" in memory of my second sister whom Michael met on his first visit to Israel in 1965.



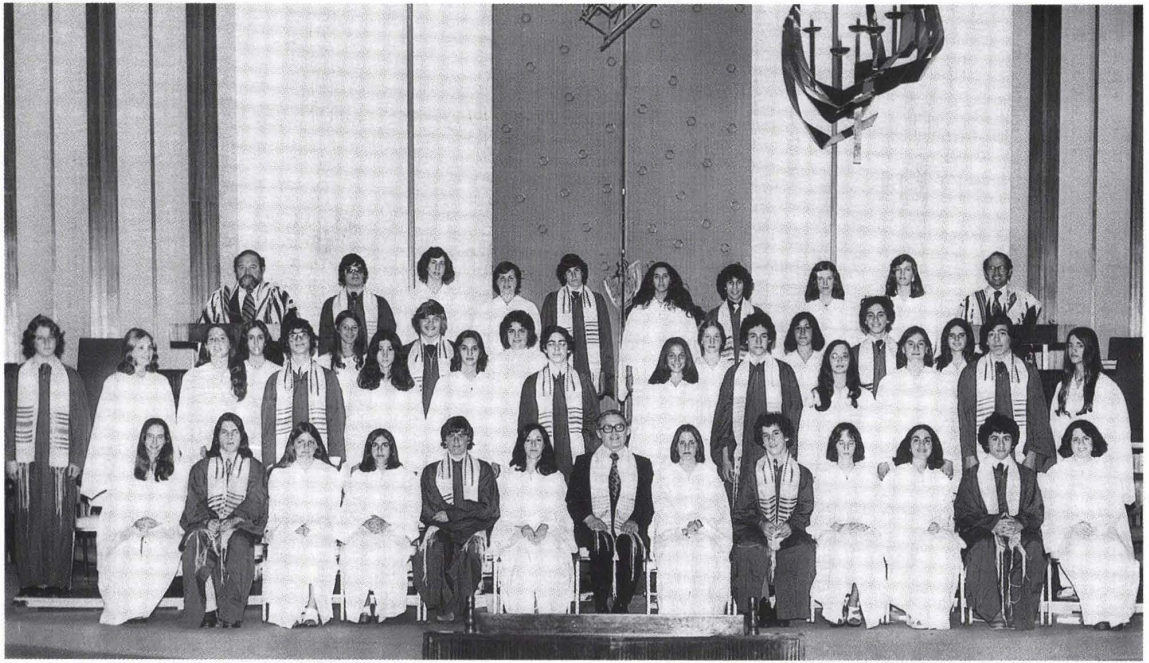
Chapter Fifty Four

WE FINALLY PREPARE FOR ALIYAH

Professionally, my work progressed satisfactorily, and in December the congregation granted me a contract for three more years until August 1977, with the provision that I could leave earlier for *Aliyah* to Israel following the admission of several of our students to Graetz College. That goal was reached sooner than even the optimists among us anticipated.

In the Spring of 1975, nine students of our school passed the admission tests to the college for the school year of 1975-76, three of them to the Hebrew department and the other six to the English department. With these achievements under my belt, I informed the Rabbi and the Education Chairman that I would leave for Israel upon the completion of the current school year, in July of 1975.

Our first concern in this move was for Michelle. She was now properly settled in Cornell Medical College on a partial scholarship, but we had an obligation to assure her financial arrangements during our absence from the country. We went to see her school advisor, and were pleasantly surprised to hear her reaction. When we told her of our decision to move to Israel, she wanted to know why we have come to tell her about this. I explained to her that my salary in Israel would be about one third of what I was getting in the States, and we wanted to know how this would affect our daughter. "We are pleased with Michelle's progress in school", she said to us, "and we want her to stay with us. As for her tuition, if you cannot afford to keep up your payments, we will just have to do a little better. You tell us what you can afford after you leave your U.S. position, and we will take care of the balance". Within a few minutes we reached an understanding on Michelle's tuition which at that



Adath Jeshurun Graduating Class
Rabbi Rosenberg, Upper Left; Cantor Charles Davidson, Upper Right

time came to ten thousand dollars a year; namely, that we would pay one third, Cornell's scholarship would be increased to one third, and the school would guarantee an interest-free loan for the last third to be paid over ten years when Michelle begins to draw a salary.

From there we went to see Michelle. She was not at all surprised to hear the news because we had discussed this matter with her quite frequently in the past. We told her of the arrangement we had made with the school advisor concerning school tuition, and assured her that we would continue covering her current expenses for housing, food and clothing. We told her that we planned to be in the States 2-3 months of each year during the Summer, that at least one of us would respond to her request for our presence in the States whenever she needed us, and that we would provide for her fare to Israel should she want to join us for short or long periods.

The third step was to meet with the *Shali'ach* – Israeli Emmisary in charge of *Aliyah* from the Phila. area. I provided him with all necessary academic and personal papers, and told him that I would like to procure a teaching position in Talmud, in a Teacher's Seminary. After several months of negotiations, the *Shali'ach* handed me a signed contract from the Israeli Department of Education for a teaching position in Talmud at a Teacher's Seminary in Jerusalem (preferably) or in Tel Aviv, with a monthly salary for an M.A. diploma. Pearl and I thought that this salary, together with the income from the *Shiurim* textbooks, and interest income from our savings would be adequate for a decent living standard in Israel. Later on we were to discover that we were not fully aware of the inflationary living costs in Israel, especially as far as apartments were concerned; namely, that the proceeds from the sale of our private home (villa) in Port Washington or Phila. would not buy us a three-room, 60 square meter (about 700 square feet) apartment in Jerusalem, and that we would have to live in a rental.

Pearl and I had talked about the *Shiurim* textbooks, how to handle the distribution of the books to bookstores and schools, which up to that time we were doing ourselves. A prominent bookstore offered to handle the distribution at a 20% commission which would have cut our profit in half. And then our son came to the rescue. Michael supported our move to Israel since it was what we truly wanted to do. As for the books, he said that if we continue to do the advertisement and billing, he would take care of the distribution saying: "It is the least that I can do for you". We were pleasantly surprised and truly impressed by his generosity. Pearl even suggested that we hand over the whole project to him as our gift, but I objected to it for several reasons:

First of all, I did not know whether we could manage in Israel without the income from the books. Secondly, Michelle might resent it. Thirdly, I pointed out that as a foreign resident (a status I was to assume after moving to Israel), the entire profit would be tax free, whereas Michael, with his and Carol's considerable income, would probably lose about 35% to income tax. I also argued that we should not deprive our son of the feeling that he was doing something commendable for his parents as a true expression of love and *Kibud Av v'aim* – Honoring his father and mother. We, therefore, decided to take up his offer with the understanding between Pearl and myself that we would turn over to him as much of the profit as we could afford, at least one half of it, and use the balance for Michelle's support until her graduation, when she would begin to draw a salary. And so we did for the following 4-5 years, at the end of which the profits diminished to the point that it was no longer worth dealing with it, and we closed shop[1].

We then put up our home for sale, and sold it within ten

1. I decided to describe in considerable detail the process or our *Aliyah to Israel*, and of our **absorption in Israel** with the hope that readers of this book who are contemplating Aliyah, might benefit from our experience – the good and the bad, the Lights and the Shadows which we experienced.

days. We were attached to the furniture which was the best in quality and all in perfect condition, but we decided to sell it rather than ship it to Israel because we did not know whether it would fit into the apartment we might eventually purchase or rent. We had each item evaluated by a "home auction company" and placed an ad in the local paper. Within one week we sold seven rooms of furniture to three people. An insurance executive bought the bedroom and den furniture plus the refrigerator for his summer beachfront home. A Protestant Minister bought the livingroom and kitchen furniture, and a middle aged couple bought the dining room, all of them with the understanding that the furniture would remain with us until we were ready to move. Our son took his bedroom furniture, and both children took a variety of small items they wanted to have. We netted over $7,500. from the sale, and saved an equal amount which would have cost us to ship it, the total of $15,000. came just to the amount we paid to furnish our apartment in Jerusalem two years later.

The buyers of the house wanted to take possession at the end of May. Since we were not expected in Jerusalem until September, we gladly accepted the invitation of our dear friends, Renee and Seymour Scherzer, to use their home in Queens, N.Y. for 2-3 months while they spent the summr in upstate New York. On the day after *Shavuot*, the purchasers of the furniture came to pick up their respective acquisitions. The last to arrive was the woman who purchased the dining-room furniture to which Pearl was most attached. She recalled the beautiful *Sedarim* on *Pessach* nights, the most glittering *Rosh Hashanah* dinners, and the many social gatherings we enjoyed around this dining table. As the pieces were disassembled, the lady saw a few tears rolling down Pearl's cheeks, and she tried to comfort her, saying: "Mrs. Ehrlich, I shall take care of it as lovingly as you did all these years."

On the same day, the movers packed and carted away about fifty cartons with household dishes and glassware, art pieces and

books, to be held in storage in their Phila. warehouse for crating and shipment to Israel in August. As the truck moved away, we drove off to New York City filled with wonderful memories of the last three years in a great congregation with friendly people, and we were thankful to God that such a tremendous undertaking went through successfully without a single hitch. We returned to Elkins Park several times during that Summer at the invitations of friends, for a variety of occasions. We did the same for the 4th of July weekend at the invitation of the Kirschbaums who invited us to their home to Break the Fast on the first *Yom Kippur* we came to Elkins Park, and with whom we have maintained a close friendship to this day.

While in Pa., we responded to an advertisement in the Jewish Exponent of Phila. for a rental apartment in Jerusalem's fashionable neighborhood of Talbiyeh, owned by a Phila. resident, and we signed a two year contract beginning on September 1, 1975, at an acceptable rate within our budget.

On the way back to New York on Monday, we drove by the Quaker Moving Company to see whether our goods were properly crated for shipment to Israel. According to the bill of lading, the fifty cartons were placed into three crates, one large and two small. When we asked to see the crates, they were able to locate one small crate, but the other two could not be located. After a lengthy search, we discovered that these two crates, which were identified by number, were addressed to a customer in Brazil. In addition, contrary to our contract which called for completely new crates, the large crate, which contained most of our costly belongings, was old and delapidated to a point that it would not have reached its destination. We spent the next three hours at the warehouse to watch them repack our goods in new crates, and to see them properly addressed to our apartment in Israel. A shiver goes through us whenever we think of what might have happened to our precious belongings had we not stopped off at the warehouse that morning. What Luck! *Baruch haShem.*

Pearl and I were determined to avoid any contact with *Aliyah* Immigrant Centers in Israel. We didn't want to ask any favors or grants from the Israeli government, because we did not consider ourselves as destitute immigrants in need of help. After all, I was coming *home*, and Pearl had been in Israel several times, and she felt there as a native born. We also came as *Olim* from America, not as deprived immigrants from African Melas, and not as the remnants from the European Displaced Persons' Camps. We wanted to do everything the right way, and we had every reason to believe that we would succeed. I had procured a respectable position with a legally binding contract in my pocket, and we had a little money to supplement whatever living wages I was to get for my work. We were also coming to an American furnished apartment in the most desirable neighborhood of Jerusalem – on Mapu street in Talbiyeh. We had heard of unexpected disappointments which professional people had experienced upon arrival in Israel, but this was not going to happen to me – a native born Jerusalemite! But it did.

It started even before we reached Israeli soil. In Israel, the classes in institutions of higher learning like universities and seminaries begin after the Fall holidays, towards the end of September. But, in mid-July, I received a cable from the Ministry of Education in Jerusalem to report to a Mr. Z. on August 5, for assignment to a teaching position in Talmud at the Lifshitz Teachers Seminary in Jerusalem. I contacted the *Aliyah* Emmisary in Phila., and he assured me that arrangements had been made for us for a month's stay at the Kiryat Yovel Absorption Center. It was not what we wanted, and we were now going to stay in a place where we did not want to be, but we really had no choice, as we were not going to jeopardize losing the position promised to me. We hastily packed our belongings, changed our flight tickets to August 1, and arrived in Jerusalem in the middle of the night. By special dispensation from El Al, we were carrying 15-20 valises and boxes (remember, we were to go straight into a furnished apartment),

and at 1:00 AM of August 2, we knocked on the door of the Kiryat Yovel Absorption Center.

The man who opened the door told us that he knew nothing about our arrival, but since it is the middle of the night, and there happens to be an empty room, he would allow us to come in for a few hours sleep. He also advised us not to unpack, because we might not be able to stay there. And he was right! No one in Jerusalem knew of our impending arrival, but the *Menahel*/Supervisor of the Center was sympathetic to our plight, and after a few telephone calls he informed us that we could stay until September 1st. Try as I might to recall our miserable experiences in that 8×8 feet cubicle and the noisy mess hall for our meals, I cannot remember a single detail of the following four weeks at the Center, probably because of a conscious effort over the years to forget all about it.

Chapter Fifty Five

GOVERNMENT RENEGES ON POSITION CONTRACT

On August 5, I went to see Mr. Z., the signatory on my contract with the Ministry of Education in Jerusalem, in his provisional office at Shivtei Yisrael Street. I was received by his secretary to whom I handed over the cable which I had received a month earlier. She seemed embarrassed as she told me that Mr. Z. left the country on August 1, for his Summer vacation, that he was due back on September 1, and that nothing could be done about my job assignment until his return. If I had been hit with a ton of bricks over my head, I could not have been hurt more at that moment as I tried to imagine what Pearl's reaction might be after all we had gone through to get here at his urgent cable. These people just did not care one iota what they were doing to us. But, as the secretary said, "there was nothing to be done until his return", and we now had four weeks on our hands until Mr. Z's return from his Summer vacation.

We spent much of those weeks in the company of my sisters and their respective families who welcomed us with open arms. They insisted that we spend the *Shabbosim* in their homes. Even my brothers-in-law, all of them devoted – *farbrentte* Jerusalem Chassidim, related to Pearl as a sister rather than a sister-in-law, insisting that she sit at the Sabbath table with them. It made an unforgettable impression upon us, and it well compensated for all the troubles and inconveniences of those four weeks.

While we tried to stay clear of the immigrant circles, we depended on the privileges of the *Oleh Chaddash*/New Immigrant to bring in our household furnishings, to purchase a new car free of surcharges and taxes, which amounted to 250% of its retail value, and to eventually purchase a new government

subsidized apartment, without which it was financially out of reach to the average immigrant. This privilege of *Oleh Chaddash* was granted to me by the Israeli *Shali'ach* – Emmisary in Phila. on the basis of my having left Palestine in 1946, prior to the establishment of Israel. Here, too, we ran into an iron wall of small bureaucrats who tried to deny me the status of an *Oleh*, saying: "Such decisions are made in Jerusalem and not in Phila. We stayed here and fought in the wars, while you ran off to the States, and now you come back with the privilege of an *Oleh*! Not if we can stop it!"

But there were also more sympathetic clerks who said: "You deserve everything we can offer to new *Olim*, for having left America to join us in Israel. Most Israelis will probably look at you as *meshuga'im* – crazy people, especially on Mrs. Ehrlich who was born and raised in the States". These people helped us in clearing up all hurdles "before you get tangled up in our offices" as they put it, and handed us the Blue Book – *(Te'udat Oleh)* certifying our status as *Olim*, a paper which was worth thousands of dollars during the next five years of *hityashvut* – settling into the country.

On September 1, I went back to Mr. Z. He was there alright, and he remained seated when I walked in, without a word of apology or explanation for the fiasco on August 5th, and I, now realizing that I was at the complete mercy of a man who did not care what happens to me, did not say anything about it either, as I handed him my papers. He looked over the bundle of documents, confirmed his signature on the contract, and nonchalantly declared: "There is no opening for a Talmudist in a Teachers' Seminary in Jerusalem". "But you signed the contract", I said to him, "and you sent me a cable to come on August 5th for my assignment to the position". "You are right", he responded, "I signed it like I sign all papers which are submitted by the *sh'lichim* – government emmisaries, but there is no job". "I gave up a permanent rabbinic post in the United States", I protested, "and I sold my home and furnitue, and I

rented an apartment here for two years, and now you tell me that there is no job for me". My apparent anger did not faze this man at all. Looking as cool as a cucumber, he said: "You are right again, Rabbi, and we are obligated to pay your standard wages as we promised. You should, therefore, take these documents to a court, and upon the judge's orders, we shall pay you the monthly salary coming to you under your contract with the Ministry of Education, even if we do not find a suitable position for you".

After twenty five years of raising funds for Israel through the United Jewish Appeal, I was now told to take the Israeli government to court to collect personal wages for no work. I gave Mr. Z. copies of my documents, with a telephone number where I might be reached, and said to him: "You are not going to drive us out of the country we love, but I hold you personally responsible for this shameful episode". He could not care less, but said: "You may want to stop off in our offices across the street, and talk to Mr. V. who heads the department of religious education under whose jurisdiction you come". I did as Mr. Z. advised. Mr. V. was somewhat younger than I. He told me that he had studied in the Hebron Yeshiva, and had heard about me. Upon hearing my story, he poured out a few sizzling curses in Hebrew and Yiddish on Mr. Z. for subjecting decent people to such degrading and unmanageable circumstances, only to claim credit for having brought new teachers to Israel, "But the truth of the matter is that there is no job for a man with your education and experience, certainly not in Jerusalem where people like you want to be". He promised to keep me in mind if something decent should come up, and I left with a heavy heart and with the realization that we may have to live on cash for a while, but would not be able to sustain ourselves this way for very long.

If we thought for a moment that only Israelis are capable of such arrogance, we were quickly disabused when we went that same afternoon to see the apartment we had rented from an

American Prof. who was married to the sister of a prominent Jewish American businessman. The Prof. raved about his wife's high housekeeping standards, and told us that their apartment in Israel was their main residence with their best American furnishings. I agreed to rent the apartment sight unseen, while Pearl laughed at my naivete and trustfulness, saying that "People could sell you the Brooklyn Bridge", and what we found at the apartment proved her right. As soon as we opened the door, to use a Yiddish expression, *ist unz gevoren fintster far di oigen* (we blacked out from shock). Dust and dirt everywhere; the upholstery of the living room chairs were torn down to the springs; the window curtains were in shreds; closets full of garbage; the electric range broken, and the refrigerator overflowing with ice, as it had neither been cleaned nor defrosted for weeks.

On the following day I called Mrs. Prof. in Phila., and told her what we had found in her residence, and added that "a poor South Phila. woman would have been ashamed to hand over an apartment in such conditions". She put the blame on three nephews and a niece who had used the place for the previous three weeks. I then told her that a cursory inquiry established that it would cost about two thousand dollars to restore the apartment to living condition, and that I intended to do just that, and deduct that amount from the rent. The lady protested, but I told her that I would take photographs of the place before work begins, and then leave it to a judge to determine our rights, should she decide to take us to court. And so we did, without ever hearing another objection from her or the Professor.

A year later, we discovered that our landlords had friends of equal ethical standards. Since we planned to spend the months of July and August with our children in the States, the Prof. insisted on renting out the apartment for these two months to someone of his choosing, figuring that he would probably get double the amount in the rent for the Summer months. He chose a Jewish doctor, a Kosher and *Shomer Shabbos* (Sabbath

observant) family from Westchester, with a recommendation from their local Rabbi. We had a goodly supply of grocery provisions and paper goods which we had brought with us from the States, and at that time they were considered rare commodities in Israel. Before leaving for the Summer, we stored them away in an upper kitchen cabinet, sealed the doors with tape, and attached a note: "Private property of the Ehrlichs; Please do not touch". Upon our return two months later, we found the seals removed, most provisions gone, and a note attached to the door: "We used up your things as we needed them, but replaced them with Israeli substitutes". The Torah classified the *Orev*/Crow as a non-Kosher bird. The Rabbis debated the *Kashrut* status of the *Zarzir*/Starling, and they came to the conclusion that it is not Kosher, because it is often seen in the company of the crow. The English equivalent of this logic says: "tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who (or what) you are".

Within a few weeks, the apartment was refurbished to suitable living conditions, and our household furnishings were delivered from the Haifa port. Thereafter, we felt quite at home. The location was ideal – in the heart of the Anglo-Saxon community of Jerusalem, and the view of the Judean hills was breathtaking. We joined the membership of Yeshurun, the Central Synagogue of Jerusalem. Although Yeshurun was already in a declining condition, its regular worshippers still included the *P'nei Ha'ir* – upper crust of Jerusalem's modern religious society with its professors, judges, attorneys, and a profusion of learned *Ba'alei Battim* – laymen. We were welcomed in their midst, warmly and with open arms, in the synagogue and outside of it. I was frequently honored to deliver a *D'var Torah* on the Weekly Portion at the Sabbath Eve services, or to address a *Bar Mitzvah* at the Sabbath morning services. I was also among the lecturers at the *Shabbat Minchah*/Afternoon Services during the Summer months. We were gradually integrated into a social setting of friendship and

home visitations. All in all, we felt literally at home in the full sense of the word.

At a Sabbath luncheon in the home of Rabbi Binyamin Kasovsky z.l. I was seated next to the Chief Rabbi Sh'lomo Goren z.l. When we came to the end of *Birchat Hamazon* – Grace After Meals, and chanted the sentence: "*Na'ar Hayitee* – I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen (*Lo ra'i-tee*) the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" *(Psa. 38:25)*, we instinctively turned to each other. This sentence always troubled me, as it does every one else because, in my childhood, I saw daily what the Psalmist claimed that he had never seen; namely, I saw the children of my righteous father often go hungry for bread.

On this occasion, as I was looking at Rabbi Goren, and he at me, a flash went through my mind, and I said to him: "The term "*ra'i-tee*" often refers to the *understanding* or *comprehension* of the mind. In common usage, when a person tries to convey to us an idea, we often respond with "*Anee Ro-eh*" when we want to say "I understand" what you said. The same is also found in biblical usage as in Ecc. 2:13 "*Ve'ra'eetee Anee* – And I saw that wisdom excells folly", which the *Mezudat Zion* renders "*Ra'eetee B'chush Hasechel* – and I understood (saw) with the sense of the intellect".

With this interpretation of "*Ra'eetee*", we can now understand (see) what the Psalmist is saying: "I have been young, and now am old; Yet I did not *undertstand* (saw) the righteous man being forsaken, and his children begging for bread." This is just the opposite of the way we read this sentence up-to-now; the Psalmist *did see* the righteous forsaken; he just *did not understand* why?

Rabbi Goren again turned to me and said: "Rabbi Ehrlich, your interpretation may indeed be the true meaning of the sentence; I just wonder why no one has suggested it during the last three thousand years?".

Chapter Fifty Six

ECSTASY OF THE HOLY DAYS IN JERUSALEM

The full impact of our *home coming* dawned on us with the approach of the High Holy Days, and the *Succot/Simchat Torah* Festivals. The multitudes of people in the streets – both permanent residents and holiday tourists, the overflowing synagogues (before the Rechavia neighborhood was turned into a business community), and the presence of the Chief Rabbi, the Prime Minister and the President of the country in Yeshurun Synagogue, more than compensated for the trials and tribulations we experienced during the previous few weeks. The highlights of *Rosh Hashanah* for us was the honor bestowed upon us by the congregation to accompany Mr. Navon, the third President of Israel, from the synagogue to his official residence. When we reached his home, the President invited us to come in for *Kiddush.*

During the *Asseret Yemei Teshuvah* (ten Days of Repentance between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*), we frequented the ultra religious neighborhhod of *Mea Shearim* and the *Shuk* (market) of *Machneh Yehudah* with their exotic atmosphere, and were thrilled to watch the thousands of people performing the *Kaparot* (forgiveness) ritual with live chickens in the open markets. At noon on *Erev Yom Kippur*, I sat down on our apartment porch overlooking the Judean Hills in the distance, and the junction of Keren Hayesod-Jabotinsky-King David streets below us. As I observed one of the heaviest traffic junctions of the city gradually emptying out in observance of the approaching Holy Day, I could literally feel the *Shechina*/Presence of God descending on the city. The feeling was so overpowering that I could no longer watch it from above. Instead, I went downstairs, and made a complete circle of the

normally crowded streets of Mapu – King David – Sh'lom Ziyon – Rechov Yaffo – Ben Yehudah – King George – Keren Hayesod and back home to Mapu, but now almost completely empty, as people were hurrying home for the *Seudah Hamafseket* – the Last Meal before the Fast. When I came home, I felt the urge to express my feelings to someone, and I sat down at the typewriter for a five page letter to my good friend, Rabbi Mordecai Waxman, in Great Neck, New York, closing with the note "If you ever want to feel and see the *Shechinah*, join me on my porch next *Erev Yom Kippur*".

Our brother-in-law, Reb Avraham Mordechei Yuzevitz, invited us to join him and members of his family (my sister, Rachel, died in 1973) for the Festive Meal on the *Succot* Holiday which is observed five days after *Yom Kippur*. Knowing from experience how late Reb Avraham Mordechei would return from *Schule* that evening, we decided to usher in the Festival with the evening service at the *Kotel* – Western Wall. On the way back, we walked through the *Batei Ungarim* neighborhood where Reb Avraham Mordechei lived. Each apartment, usually occupied by a large family, had a large *Succah* in front of its entrance, and was elaborately decorated with the traditional *Succah* symbols and bright paper decorations – the products of China, or handmade by the children of the family, in competition with their neighborhood friends, to see whose *Succah* would be judged to be the most beautiful. Nowhere in the Jewish world is *Succot* more enthusiastically celebrated than in Israel. When the people noticed our curiosity as we were trying to peep into the Booths, they came out to invite us in, with children vying with one another who would attract the American-looking guests. It was for us one of the most enjoyable experiences.

My nieces and nephews from the Yuzevitz household were only five to ten years younger than I. They knew and remembered their grandfather, my father, Rabbi Nachum, especially in his final years which he spent in their midst. They admired and enjoyed the *Zemirot*, the Hymns he chanted at the

table during the Sabbath and Festival meals, and they had learned them well enough to sing them on their own. My presençe in their *Succah* on this first night of the *Succot* Festival, was a golden opportunity for them, and they took full advantage of me, urging me to sing time and again those beautiful melodies of the *Ushpizin* and *Ata Vechartanu*, which they had heard only once or twice á year but, had nostalgic memories of them. I sang them each year in my own *Succah*. My wife and children know them well. It was a memorable evening as we brought *Zeide* (grandfather) back to life, and caused his spirit to hover over us.

Shortly after the holidays, I received a telephone call from the principal of the Liphshitz Teachers' Seminary of Jerusalem. He told me that the Seminary needed a teacher in Talmud and Jewish Thought, but he did not have the funds to pay his salary. He heard about me from Mr. V. of the Religious Department in the Ministry of Education. The Ministry is willing to pay my salary for that year, and the Seminary will gladly welcome me on its staff if I agree not to hold them responsible for what might happen afterwards. I accepted the temporary assignment. Towards the end of the school year, I was invited to the principal's office. He told me that the students enjoyed the courses I was teaching because the "mode and style was different than what they ever had before". He added that, regrettably, the Education Ministry would not guarantee my salary beyond this year, and I had better look for something else. He, nonetheless, promised to keep me in mind for himself, and pass on a *good word* to others, if the opportunity presented itself. I did not regret this development. The student body was *unlike* what I ever had before, and I was relieved when the school year came to an end.

Chapter Fifty Seven

PASSOVER SEDARIM IN ARMY CAMPS

In March 1976, I was asked by the Israeli Military Rabbinate whether I would be willing to conduct the Passover *Seder* in an Army Camp. I told them that this was my first year in Israel and with my family since 1946, and that Mrs. Ehrlich was looking forward to this experience, but we would be willing to leave Jerusalem for *Pesach* if we could be in a major Army Camp of 500-600 men, rather than in a small army post of 20-30 people. They called back a few days later to inform us that we were assigned to the *Jiflick* base in the Jordan Valley which meets my requirement. And it did.

Erev Yom Tov we were picked up by an army captain who was quite surprised to see Pearl, an American woman, willing to rough the Holiday away from home. On the way, he briefed us on the lodging accommodations, and what we might expect at the *Seder*. He seemed eager to please us, and took his time getting to the base as he stopped at several places to show us the topography of the valley, the history of the 1967 battles in the region, and the *Andartot* – Memorials which were put up for the fallen men.

We were put up for the night in the girls' quarters which looked more like home than the men's barracks. The soldierettes were also impressed by Pearl's appearance, and they made a special effort to make her comfortable by giving up the nicest room for our sake. We spent the balance of the day in their company, and in working with them to prepare and decorate the hall for the *Seder*.

After the evening service with the *Datiyim* – religious soldiers, we proceeded to the hall to welcome the men and women arriving in groups of ten, each group headed by an

officer who would be responsible for their behavior. These young boys and girls – just children to us, looked very impressive in their spic and span uniforms, and quickly filled up the tables pre-assigned to each group. The truth is that after the briefing we received from the captain, we expected just about the worst, but in view of our experience with public *Sedarim*, this was one of the best. The behavior of these young soldiers, an assembly of 500 people from the four corners of the earth, was impeccable, and their participation in the service, each *Aideh* – community chanting the melodies of their home origins, was aesthetically moving and religiously inspiring. The captain thought that the presence of a foreign Rabbi (they did not know where I was born) and an American *Rabbanit* had something to do with their extraordinary behavior throughout the three hour *Seder*. Whatever the reason, Pearl and I were sure that we would be back. And we were!

For the following *Seder* of 1977, we were assigned to a Tank Brigade of 600 men and women in Refidim, not far from the Suez Canal. I was told to expect 400 people at the *Seder*, because 200 would be sent home for the Holiday; but when I arrived there, I discovered that no one was sent home because the base was on Emergency Alert, and several hundred parents were instead flown into the base to be with their children. The regular mess hall could not accomodate the 800 people now expected at the *Seder*. We therefore emptied out the huge *Sadna*, where the tanks were serviced, and covered the floor with white sand brought in from the desert, and the roof was covered with white netting. The hall, now sparkling like the Hilton Hotel, was set with eighty tables, white linen and flowers on each table, and a high dais for the VIPs. On the way from the Synagogue to the *Seder*, I was told by Jackie, the Brigade Commander: "Rabbi, this is your show! I will be sitting next to you like other guests, but please do not call on me for anything, certainly not for disciplinary purposes."

I addressed the assembly before the *Seder*, saying: "In the Torah this night is called "*Leil Shimurim* – a Watchful Night unto the Lord for bringing us out of Egypt." In similar language, we say that this is a Watchful Night for *Zahal*/Israel's Defense Forces to make it possible for us here, and for our people in Sinai and in Israel itself, to celebrate this night in freedom and safety." I told the 600 soldiers that they represent the best of Israel, and we expect them to measure up to the occasion.

And I must say that all of them, without exception, did measure up to the occasion. In the course of the *Seder, the local Segen Dat*/Religious Seargent, who represented the military chaplains, said to me: "Jackie *mishtagei'a* – the Captain is going crazy; he did not believe that you could pull off this *Seder* in this fashion". It was a memorable evening for all concerned.

During the day, Jackie asked me to spend an hour of the evening with the elite officers of the brigade, many of whom were university graduates, and with some of their parents. "We will invite about 100 people, and any of the rank and file who wish to join. Pick any subject you want – speak to them for 40 minutes and leave 20 minutes for questions and answers". We started at 8:00 P.M. Since I was not specially prepared, I spoke to them for forty minutes on "Orthodox and Conservative Judaism: Where They Differ?", and then allowed them to ask questions. These young people were eager to learn as much as possible; they just could not get enough. At 12 midnight, Jackie got up and said: "*Rabbotei*, the tanks have to roll at 6:00 A.M. It is time to call it a night." At that time, one of the officers stood up and said: "Rabbi, I want to thank you in the name of all who are present here, especially in the name of the officers. I want you to know that *le'olam lo nislach* – we shall never forgive our parents for having deprived us of the beautiful heritage which you opened up for us tonight". Mrs. Ehrlich and I shed tears whenever we recall that moment. We went to an army base for *Pessach* one more year, in 1978, in the dusty sand dunes south of Beer Sheva.

When *Pessach* of 1979 came around, we thought that we ought to seek other experiences for the Holiday, and I accepted the invitation of the Moriah Hotel, at the Dead Sea, which offered us seven days of accommodation for the entire *Pessach* in exchange for conducting the *Seder* for five hundred hotel guests. Ordinarily, whether in the U.S. or Israel, about half of the guests come in groups, or in extended families, and conduct their *Seder* by themselves, while the Rabbi conducts the *Seder* for those who come alone or in couples, and for those who do not know how to go through the ritual on their own.

I suggested to the hotel manager that we do away with this procedure, and try to conduct one *Seder* for the entire assembly, in unison. The manager accepted my suggestion, providing I convince the guests to agree. I accepted the challenge, and asked the maitre-d'hotel to remove the *Matzot* from the tables, except the table at the dais occupied by the Rabbi, to prevent others from conducting the *Seder* for themselves. When the guests were seated at the assigned tables and asked the waiters for *Matzot*, I informed them that the *Matzot* were removed by the manager with the aim of conducting one uniform *Seder* for the entire assembly. And lo-and-behold, no one objected, and for the first time in twelve years, since the building of the Moriah, only one *Seder* was conducted by the Rabbi, with the full participation of the various groups from 15 different countries and tongues. The commentaries and explanations were given in Hebrew, English and Yiddish. Everyone enjoyed the new arrangement, and we did the same in the following years as long as I was with them.

Chapter Fifty Eight

POSITION OFFERINGS IN FRANKFURT AND GOTEBORG

A large number of guests at the hotel were from Frankfurt, Germany. They were impressed by the way I conducted the *Seder*, as well as the religious services in the Hotel Synagogue. During the week, I was approached by a delegation with an offer to take the Rabbinic position of Frankfurt which was then vacant. I told them that I could not contemplate leaving Jerusalem for Frankfurt. Apparently they had great difficulty finding a suitable candidate for the position, and they refused to give up on me. They made the same offer again and again in the following two years. Finally, the leader of the group pleaded with me, saying: "We will probably waste our money, but you have nothing to lose. Come to us for two weeks at our expense, and then you will decide – yes or no."

And so we did. We were housed in a respectable hotel and were provided with three *Kosher* meals a day. I visited various institutions and organizations of the community. I met with the children of the Yiddish School, and with the leaders of youth groups, I preached on the first Sabbath in the great modern Synagogue, and on the second Sabbath at the Chassidic *Schule* of *Machzikei Hadass*. At the end of two weeks, I was invited to a Community Board Meeting to share with them my impressions.

I told them that I had delayed coming to Frankfurt because I could not imagine a Rabbi leaving Jerusalem to live in Germany, and that conviction became stronger at the end of my first week here, but I have since then changed my mind, and under certain conditions I may consider coming here for a few years. They appeared anxious to know *why*, and I explained that

I had seen the hundreds of children in your school who learn nothing and know nothing of *Yidishkeit*. I met with representatives of your young people who begged me to come because, they said "We need a Rabbi with whom we can talk". For their sake and for the sake of the young children, I would come for several years providing I was granted a free hand to do what I deemed was necessary. A board member asked me what I meant by a "free hand", and what I would do?. I told him that "Most of you are remnants of Galician and Hungarian Jewish communities. Whatever your personal observance of Judaism may be, you have memories of a *Cheder* and of a Jewish home. Your children have neither, and their chances of remaining Jewish while living in Frankfurt are almost zero. My main challenge would be, on the one hand, to raise the level of Jewish religious education of your young children, and on the other hand, to convince your grown young men and women to leave Germany, and move to Israel, the sooner the better. If you want a *Rabbiner* just as a *front* for the *Goyim* – non Jews, I am not for you; but if you want a real Rabbi, not so much for yourselves as for your children, then we can talk about it." And with this I left the meeting.

The Executive Director called me later in the evening to inform me that, with a majority of two, the board decided that they do not want a Rabbi who would work against the interest of the community which to them means to keep the young people in Frankfurt. He also asked me to come up to his office the following morning. When I came in, he thanked me on behalf of the Board, and assured me that the hotel charges would be covered by the Community, but handed me a check "to cover any expenses you may incur should you want to stay on for a few days, perhaps to tour the surroundings of Frankfurt on your own." At first it sounded like a logical thing to do, but we decided to go home. The happiest person about the outcome of this adventure was Pearl who was against the visit to Frankfurt to begin with, and then confided to me that every time she heard

the train pull out of the Banhoff (the hotel was opposite the Central Train Stations) she could not help but think of the Jewish transports to Auschwitz. "For God's sake, how could these Polish/Hungarian Jews live in Germany?"

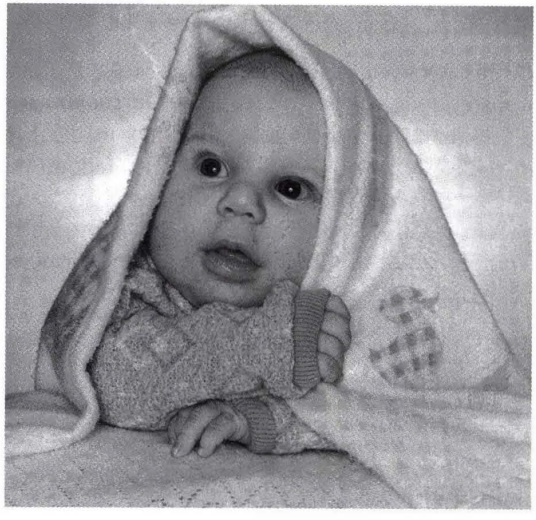
Another offer came in August 1981, when I was invited to serve as guest Rabbi for the High Holy Days at the Morsaiska Forsamblingen Congregation of Goteborg, Sweden, through the recommendation of Rabbi Teddy Friedman z.l., who had served there in the same capacity the year before. Goteborg is the second largest city of Sweden, and the Jewish community of 600-700 families dates back to 1780. Pearl and I were there for twelve days during which time we were wined and dined by the leaders of the congregation who maintain Kosher homes. On one such occasion, I was told that the dinner guests present were empowered by the Board of Trustees to offer me a 2-3 year contract as full time rabbi of the congregation, with very favorable financial arrangements. I was truly impressed with the aristocratic people I got to know, and with the beautiful service conducted by cantor and choir on Rosh Hashanah, and I was ready to plunge into it for a few years, but Pearl would have none of it, and she convinced me to see it her way.

With this experience in Goteborg, I broke the taboo which I had imposed upon myself not to leave Jerusalem for the sake of job placements for the High Holy Days in the U.S. During the next three years of 1982-84, I officiated at the H.H.D. Overflow Services at Temple B'nai Shalom of Rockville Center, L.I. New York with Rabbi Barry Dov Schwartz, and in 1985 I was in Temple Israel of Great Neck, L.I. New York with Rabbi Mordecai Waxman.

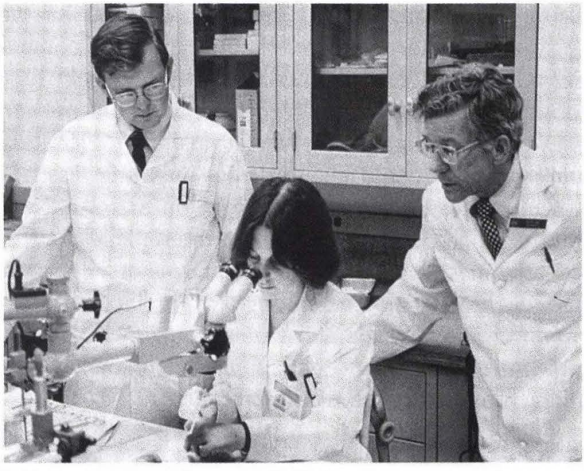
Chapter Fifty Nine

A LITTLE NACHAS

The summer months of 1976 were spent in the States as we had planned, and found out that our daughter-in-law expected a second child. We returned to Israel at the end of August in case another work assignment should come up. After *Yom Kippur*, Pearl went back to the States to await the birth of the grandchild. On *Hoshanah Rabba* (last day of *Succot*), our son Michael called to wish me *Mazal Tov* on the birth of my grandson, and to invite me to the *Brit*/Circumcision. I very much wanted to return to the States for the event. How could I not go to see my first grandson, and how could I not be at his *Brit*, but the fact was that I could not afford it, now that I was without a job. I surely could not leave for an extended period and perhaps miss an opportunity for a job offering. As heartbreaking as it was for me not to go, I stayed home.



Soon after *Succot*, while Pearl was still in the States, I had a call from the Talmud department of Bar Ilan University. They were looking for someone to prepare "units of study" for high school students on specific *sugyot* (subjects) of the Talmud, and the principal of the Lifschitz Seminary in Jerusalem suggested that they call me. When I told them that I might be interested, I was asked to prepare a sample unit, and was afterwards engaged for the balance of that school year on a salary equal to what I got at the Lifshitz Seminary during the previous year.



Left to right: Dr. Thomas E. Duffy, associate professor of biochemistry in neurology, CUMC, Michelle Ehrlich, 4th year student, and Dr. Fred Plum, '47, Anne Parrish Titzell Professor of Neurology, CUMC, neurologist-in-chief, NYH.

Our daughter, Michelle, was scheduled to graduate from Cornell Medical College of New York in May 1978, with an MD in Pediatric Neurology. K.L.M. Dutch Airlines had an attractive offer for passengers from Israel to the U.S. We, therefore, flew to Amsterdam for a ten-day tour of the Netherlands in a private car provided by K.L.M. We visited the Anne Frank House, the famous Portuguese Synagogue, the

Canals, and a Concentration Camp near Brussels. The month of May is also the high tulip season in Holland, and we drove through the length and breadth of the country – covering miles of breath-taking tulip fields, and the beautiful villages of the Cheese Region, etc.

Then we flew to New York to attend the graduation ceremonies, and to assist our daughter in setting up a home near the Presbyterian Medical Center where she would do her Internship in Pediatrics. It was an exciting milestone in watching a young daughter reach such scholarly achievements.

During that second year in Israel, we decided that we were there to stay no matter what, and that the time had come to look for a permanent residence even without the prospect for a long term job engagement. We realized that we could not afford to purchase a decent apartment in a desireable location, and psychologically we could not settle for anything less. A small, sixty square meter (700 feet) apartment on Sokolov Street was available for $65,000., about ten thousand dollars more than we received for our seven room, 200 square meter villa in Pa. We, therefore, decided to look for a long term rental for three to five years minimum. We made a list of ten features we considered desireable in an apartment, and would then rent any flat that would have eight or seven of these features.

On a Friday norning in March 1977, we saw an Ad in the Jerusalem Post, reading: "A five room apt. on Sokolov Street, long term rental." I immediately called up, and made an appointment for 1:00 PM that same day. We met there an elderly gentleman, a bearded Chassid of the Gerer Rebbe. The apartment had been used as an insurance office, and was in terrible condition. It needed considerable investment to make it liveable, but it had great potential. I told the gentleman that we would be willing to renovate the apartment at our expense, provided we could have it for five years at a reasonable price. We apparently made a good impression on him. He told us that the place belonged to a widow living in Munich, Germany, and

he was certain that she would accept any terms that he arrived at with people he trusts to preserve the premises which was at that time worth about $300,000. He promised to talk with the owner that same day.

He called us on Sunday to inform us that we could have the apartment on a three year lease at $300. a month, payable in Israeli Pounds, at the rate of two Pounds per dollar. He added that although the owner refused to give us a five year lease, he was sure that we could stay on as long as we may want because she had no intentions of coming to live in Jerusalem. We figured that, in an inflationary economy, the six hundred Pounds per month, unattached to any index or the dollar, may soon be reduced to $200. per month, and perhaps even less, so that even if we invested $6,000. in renovations it would still be a bargain over three to five years, and we signed a contract for three years. At the end of three years, we were actually paying only $150. a month in the exchange rate of four Pounds per dollar.

Although our lease at Mapu was valid until July 1977, we took the apartment at Sokolov in March to give ourselves the three months to renovate it before moving in. We then acquired disposable furniture, while scouring throughout the length and breadth of the country in search of the type of furniture we were accustomed to in the States. When we discovered that nothing of that standard was as yet available in Israel, we decided to go for custom-made furniture which might take time and money to produce. We located a number of Christian-Arab cabinet makers in Beth Lehem who were willing to undertake the challenge of producing American/European style pieces, which their parents used to make decades ago, based on pictures we had from our homes or drawn from magazines. We started with a library, then the bedroom, and finally with the living room and dining room. After two years of painstaking labor by several wood and upholstery experts – during which time we travelled to Beth Lehem 2-3 times a week to oversee their work – we furnished a home which was truly unique in fashion and quality, and of which we are proud to this day.

Chapter Sixty

A NEW WORKING EXPERIENCE AT THE W.Z.O.

In the Spring of 1978, I saw an advertisement in the Jerusalem Post that the Organization Department of the World Zionist Organization was looking for a person to head the British/Canadian desk with the qualifications that I felt I could meet. Since I was never an organization man, I sought the assistance of a rabbinic colleague and close friend, Rabbi T.F. who represented the Conversative movement on the W.Z.O. Executive to arrange an interview for me with Mrs. Faye Schenk, head of the Organization Department. Mrs. Schenk was a gracious woman, a past president of United States Hadassah and, at our first meeting, we found a common language and interest. She agreed to propose my candidacy for the position on the basis of full employment, with a substantial salary and a favorable retirement plan at age 65, after only ten years of work. It would be a considerable come-down from the status of a rabbinic position in the U.S., but much more preferable and financially more lucrative than a teaching post at a Teacher's Seminary. It also offered the opportunity for travel abroad to England, Canada and the (English speaking) Scandinavian countries. Therefore, I gladly accepted the position.

An unexpected benefit from this position was Mrs. Schenk's intervention with Mr. David Levy, Minister of Housing in the Israeli government, to allocate us an apartment as *Olim Chadashim* (New Immigrants) just a few months before the expiration of our rights. We were then allowed to purchase a two-room, 65 square meter apartment in East Talpiyot for about fifty (50%) percent of its real value on the open market. It was not a home that we might move into, as it was too small for our needs and too distant from the center of the city where we

wanted to live, but when we sold it two years later for almost double the amount we had paid for it, we had enough for a 50% down payment on a new four room, 113 square meter apartment in Maalot Dafnah.

We bought the apartment on the fourth floor of an eight floor high riser, just when the building was beginning to go up, and we were, therefore, able to lay out the interior design to suit our needs, and in accordance with our furniture for each room. We took possession of the apartment in January 1980, but for the next ten years we continued to live on Sokolov Street which was closer to my working place in the Jewish Agency complex, and closer to Yeshurun Synagogue, the synagogue we loved. Our apartment in Maalot Dafnah is equally desireable, and was easily rented out for the following ten years, until we decided to move into it in Janaury 1990.

After we purchased our home for us while we are in this world, we began to look for a suitable place for the hereafter. The *Har Hamenuchot* cemetery where father is buried no longer had available plots for sale anywhere near father's grave. We then went to the *Kolel Polin* – Ashkenazi Cemetery on *Har Hazeitim* – Mount of Olives – where my mother and two sisters are buried, and they, too, told us that there was no space, but I really did not believe them. Rather, I thought that they did not consider me Chassidic enough for that ultra Chassidic section.

We, therefore, purchased two plots on the upper level of the *Har Hazeitim*, in a section which contains the *Kever Achim* – the common grave for the fallen people who defended the Old City of Jerusalem in Israel's War of Liberation in 1948, among them my young nephew, Yisrael Barzesky z.l., son of my oldest sister. Our very next door neighbor on the same plot is one of the commanders in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943.

At the same time, Pearl and I donated to Yeshurun Synagogue a central Memorial Board in memory of our parents. The Memorial Board was designed and manufactured by a

prominent Jerusalem artist of synagogue furnishings. It contains three hundred Yahrzeit Plaques, in the center of which are inscribed the names of sixteen members of Zahal/Israel Defense Forces, sons of Yeshurun members, who fell in defense of the country. In the same section are four large tablets with the names of our parents, and six spaces have been reserved for us and our children – "*acharei me'ah v'esrim* – after one hundred and twenty," God Willing.

I occupied the position of the British Canadian Desk until 1984 when Mrs. Schenk asked me to assume the chairmanship of the *Mif'al Chaverut* – a world wide Zionist Membership Campaign, in preparation for the Zionist Congress which was scheduled for the end of the year. Colleagues and friends advised me against this move because, they said, "it was a politicized and controversial assignment which may turn for you into a grave yard," but I could not turn down the appeal of this gracious lady who insisted that I was the most suitable person of the department for this job. I shared with her the sentiments of my colleagues and friends regarding the assignment; but, while not denying the possible pitfalls, she promised that she would be with me in any adverse encounter that might develop.

So, I took on the new assignment, which I considered an intellectual and administrative challenge, and forfeited the position of the British-Canadian Desk to which I could not return under any circumstances, since it was assigned to someone else. Unfortunately, when I needed Mrs. Schenk to redeem her pledge, she was no longer among the living.

The problems which I encountered were not political, but personal on the part of the adminstative supervisor of the Organization Dept. A major part of my work was to bring the message of Zionist ideology to prospective new members. I composed the material and wrote the pamphlets in Hebrew and English, which were also translated into Spanish and German by the respective heads of those units, and then forwarded them to the Zionist Organizations throughout the world, to be used in their local Membership Campaigns. All of these pamphlets were printed over my personal signature as "Chairman of the *Mif'al Chaverut* – Membership Campaign, Organization Dept., World Zionist Organization, Jerusalem". The departmental supervisor requested that I remove my personal name, as though the material was written by the Departmental Staff. I refused to comply with this request, and Mrs. Schenk stood with me.

Mr. L. then embarked on a vendetta of excluding me from departmental deliberations and activities. Every person on the staff became aware of his belligerency, but no one dared to speak out on my behalf. Another bone of contention was how to use the several million dollars which the W.Z.O. Executive had allocated for the Membership Campaign of which I was in charge. Our goal was to attract another half million members throughout the world. My suggestion was that the money be distributed on a *merit* basis; namely, the more members a local council enrolls, the more money it gets to continue its good work. The supervisor thought otherwise. Mrs. Schenk was now ailing, and the supervisor was running the show in collaboration with the managers (*Menahalim*) of the other W.Z.O. departments. The bulk of *my* Campaign money went to their

favorite Councils and People, and they used the funds as they saw fit. The Membership Campaign did not reach its goal, and I refused to sign a report which the supervisor wrote to the W.Z.O. Executive extolling the success of the Membership Campaign, a report which I considered overly exaggerated. I also refused to sign an incorrect accounting of the millions of dollars which were spent on the project.

At this point I knew that my work in the Organizations Dept. with the supervisor had come to an end. My last contribution to this job was in my participation in the funeral service, and in the dedication of the *Matzevah*/Monument for Mrs. Schenk, of blessed memory. I just did not know exactly how to get out of this bind in a nice way, without hurting myself financially.

I went to see Mr. Y.A., the administrator of the Jewish Agency Workers' Council, who seemed to know what was happening, and appeared eager to help. He told me that the Education Department of the Jewish Agency would be glad to have my services. "You should have been there to begin with instead of the Organization Department." At that time, the Education Department did not have the slot (*Teken*) for another position, but Mr. A. was willing to guarantee my wages and the monthly payments to my pension fund for the following two years until I would be ready for retirement.

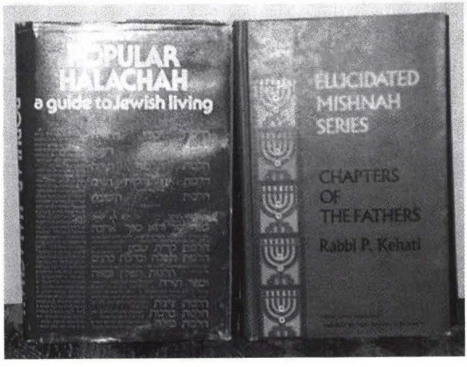
I gladly accepted his offer, and began to work for the Education Department while still occupying the office, space and secretarial service on the premises of the Organization Department. During the next two years, I translated into English two Hebrew textbooks which the office for Religious Education needed for their religious High Schools in English speaking countries; namely –

1. The Mishnaic tractate of "*Pirkei Avot* – Chapters of the Fathers" with the commentary of Rabbi Pinhas Kehati, and

2. The first volume of "*Halachah La'am* – A Guide to Jewish Living" by Rabbi Jacob Berman, which we published under the name of "Popular Halachah".

At the same time I wrote a short textbook in Hebrew on "The History of the Biblical Period" for the department of General Jewish Education of the W.Z.O. in the diaspora. All three textbooks were published by the W.Z.O.

These were two enjoyable years – doing the kind of work I loved, and which I did for most of my life. To this day, I have great satisfaction in knowing that thousands of children receive part of their religious training in educational material to which I made my humble contribution.



Chapter Sixty One

BACK TO RABBINIC WORK AT O.P.J.C.

In January 1986, it appeared to me that, I was entering into full retirement, and had to make arrangements for a regular monthy income to cover normal living expenses. My first decision was to take early retirement at age 62 from the United States Social Security, a wise choice for anyone who is not having any *earning* income. Since there is no early retirement in Israel, I also decided to begin drawing on my rabbinic retirement fund to which I and my congregation contributed since 1969. These two items necessitated my going to the U.S. for several weeks to process the paper work correctly and expeditiously. My dear friends, Rhoda and (Rabbi) Donald Frieman, of Brooklyn, N.Y. agreed to be my hosts. Two years earlier, Donald was the Rabbi of the Ocean Parkway Jewish Center, and on one *Shabbat* he invited me to give the *D'var Torah* on the weekly chapter. During my present visit, I was approached by the chairman of the Ritual Committee who told me that the current Rabbi might leave the congregation within the next few months. Would I be interested in taking his place? I told him of my retirement status vis-a-vis Social Security, but with proper financial arrangements I might be interested. We discussed the extent of my likely commitment to the congregation, whether it would be a full time or part time position, and the salary which the congregaton might offer. When my mission to New York to take care of my personal financial arrangements was accomplished, I flew back home to Israel, quite sure that I would not hear again from the O.P.J.C.

When I came home, I shared with Pearl my experience at the O.P.J.C., and told her that my positive response to their inquiry about my willingness to take on the rabbinic position was meant to correct a tactical mistake we had made when we

moved to Israel in 1975. We knew, at that time, that we would be coming to the States for several months each year, but we did not make any arrangements where to stay. Real estate was inexpensive at that time, and we could have purchased a one bedroom apartment for about thirty thousands dollars or less, and we had the money to do it, but we did not, and we have been *na v'nad* (homeless wanderers) whenever we came to New York. The position with O.P.J.C. would give us a chance to correct that mistake. A one bedroom flat would now cost double that of 1975, but a 2-3 year stint at O.P.J.C. might enable us to save up enough for that purpose. "I really do not expect to hear from them", I said to her, "but in case they do call, I suggest that we accept the offer".

Pearl was not eager to become a *Rebbetzin* (Rabbi's wife) again, but saw the practical reason for it, and agreed to do it.

And lo-and-behold, just a month later, in mid-March, I received a telephone call from the O.P.J.C. President, Mr. R.W., with the invitation of the Board of Directors to assume the rabbinic post of the congregation for a period of two years, until September 1988, with a special request that I try to arrive for the *Pessach* Holiday, just five weeks later. He promised to send a check for our flight tickets to the States, and I promised to come for *Pessach*, providing I could rent out our home in Jerusalem, and the Center can find an apartment for us in Brooklyn.

As the Jewish expression would have it, "this was a match made in heaven", and with Divine Providence everything went like clockwork. Soon after the call from Brooklyn, I called a real estate agency which dealt with rentals, and made an appointment to come in within the hour. On my way, I stopped off at a gas station and, while pumping the gas, a young man approached me to ask whether the car is for sale. I gave him my address and suggested that he come up two hours later. Then I drove to the real estate agency to sign the necessary forms for the engagement of their services. The lady assured me that there

was great demand for furnished apartments in our desireable neighborhood, and that I would probably hear from her shortly.

Two hours later, the young man who inquired about my car at the gas station came up to my home. I explained to him that, although I am ready to sell the car right now, I have to keep it for at least a month, possibly longer, and I told him the minimum amount I would accept for the car. He answered that the amount I want is considerably higher than the book value, but he already examined the car downstairs and found it in A-1 condition, and would therefore buy it for the amount I requested. He handed me five hundred dollars and said: "Just call me a day before you are ready to hand over the car". I could hardly believe what I heard and saw, but the young man's word was as good as his new dollar bills. When I called him four weeks later to pick up his car, he came up within the hour, paid the balance in US dollars, took me to the registration office to sign over the car to him, and then drove me home.

Two or three days later, the real estate agent knocked on our door, and came in with a clean and good looking Chassidic young man. He told us that he had a wife and six children, but was in the process of divorce, and wanted to rent the apartment for his personal use. He was duly impressed by what he saw, and agreed to rent the apartment for two and a half years for the monthly rent we asked, and on the same conditions we stipulated to the gentleman who bought the car.

All we now had to wait for, was to hear from the congregation concerning a suitable apartment nearby the Center, and that too was not late in coming. About two weeks after their initial offer, we were informed that an apartment had been located only three blocks from the Center, but a decision had to be made within forty-eight hours whether or not we want to rent it. Pearl called her sister to take a look at it, and when she called back that the apartment is acceptable, we agreed to rent it on a two year lease. Our standby friends, the Friemans, once again agreed to take us in for 2-3 days, until we pick up the barest

essentials to open up a home, and we then notified the congregation that we would join them for *Pessach.*

We arrived in Brooklyn two weeks before *Yom Tov*, and we were warmly welcomed by the congregation at a special *Kiddush* reception following the Sabbath morning services.

On the first two nights of *Pessach*, I conducted Community *Sedarim* with over 150 people in attendance, and during the Holiday and *yizkor* – Memorial Services I met most of the Center members, and many non-members who came in for *Yizkor.* On the High Holy Days of 5747-1986, the beautiful synagogue was full to capacity with 12-1300 worshippers, many of them of Russian origin who lived in the neighborhood. I then prevailed upon the Board of Directors to offer these people free membership privileges – hoping that we might eventually draw them into the synagogue; but, except for the High Holy Days and *Yizkor* on *Pessach, Succot* and *Shavuot*, these people had no interest in a *Schule.*

The congregation was unlike any of the congregations I had served before. For over twenty five years, I worked with young American-born and highly educated professional people; now I faced a congregation of elderly East European people, most of whom had only a *Cheder* (religious) education, and had been either small storekeepers or manual laborers. Teaching and preaching to this assembly was an entirely new ball game, and had to be done on a different level than what I was accustomed to.

There were also several advantages. These people had a greater familiarity with the *Siddur* (Prayerbook) and the *Chumash* (Torah), and the Rabbi could quote from either one of these texts with some assurance that many of the congregants would know what he was referring to. Most of these people understood, and many even spoke Yiddish, and it was advantageous for the Rabbi to make use of it as these people would become literally alive at the sound of familiar phrases of

their mother tongue. At the same time, the Rabbi could not ignore the fact that among the regular and steady worshippers were also a significant number of American-born and American educated professional people, who expected and deserved to be treated on their intellectual level.

The great surprise to me was in the way the members of this congregation took to the adult education program, as though they had never experienced anything like this before. The entire membership consisted of slightly over two hundred individuals, and over one hundred of them attended a *Shabbat Hagadol* lecture on the "Historic Development of the *Haggadah*". The same level of attendance was sustained the next seven weeks, between *Pessach* and *Shavuot*, at Sabbath afternoon classes on *Pirkei Avot* (Chapters/Ethics of the Fathers), and at Tuesday evening lectures on "The Structure of the Bible". A faithful following of sixty to seventy pepole attended the Adult Education program during the next two years on Sabbath afternoon in "Torah with Commentaries" in the Fall season, and *Pirkei Avot* in the Spring season, and the Tuesday evening lectures on "Jewish History" from November through May of each year.

Except for a few who just didn't like Rabbis, the kind that may be found in every congregation, the members of O.P.J.C. were respectful and cooperative. They appreciated the religious services and the educational programs offered to them, and they were generous in expressing these sentiments. To my utter delight, Pearl also felt very comfortable in their midst, as she had a following of her own among the ladies of the Sisterhood. Soon after the High Holy Days of 1987, the congregation offered to extend my contract for two more years, with a substantial increase in salary, and four additional weeks of vacation during the Winter and Summer months. We gladly accepted the offer, and then purchased an apartment in a prestigious building on Ocean Parkway in which we lived for the following three years while serving the congregation. Since

my retirement in 1990, we stay there four/five months of each year, when we come to the States to visit our children. In October of 1987, about thirty members of the congregation and friends enthusiastically responded to my suggestion for a congregational pilgrimage to Israel, as part of our Adult Education program. Many of them had never been to Israel before. They learned much during the two weeks in which we toured the country from Eilat in the South to Metula in the North, and it further cemented their bond with the Rabbi.

The extended Summer vacation granted to us by the congregation enabled us to see God's beautiful world, partially by our own initiative and planning, and partially through sheer luck. In the Summer of 1987, we toured by private car through the Rocky Mountains, the National Parks of Bryce, Zion, Teton and Yellowstone, and Salt Lake City; then we flew to Los Angeles and drove on Route #1 to San Francisco, before flying home. In the Summer of 1988, we vacationed in the Canadian Rockies by private car, and followed up with a twelve day round trip cruise to Alaska. This was a pleasurable vacation which we had not experienced before, but it was also very costly, and we thought that it would remain a one-time adventure, until opportunity came knocking at our door just one year later.

On our vacation through Canada, we came to appreciate the way Orthodox Rabbis and congregants are willing and ready to accommodate the needs of the religious traveller in his observance of the Sabbath and dietary laws. When I found out that my itinerary would bring me to Calgary on a Friday afternoon, where I would stay for the Sabbath, I called the Calgary Rabbi before setting out on our journey, to inquire about the availability of a motel within walking distance from his synagogue, and to ask where I might be able to purchase Kosher provisions for the Sabbath. Instead of giving me the information, the Rabbi gave me his home phone number, and urged me to call him when I reach town.

When I called him on Friday afternoon, he told me that his "hospitality Committee" would not let us spend the Sabbath in a motel, or eat cold delicatessen for Sabbath meals. Instead, he gave me the name and address of a congregant who lived within walking distance of the synagogue, and was expecting us as his guests for the entire Sabbath, until Sunday morning. When he detected some hesitation in my voice about accepting this unexpected offer, he said: "I would have invited both of you to my own home for the Sabbath, but we are moving to Israel, and my family is already there, so that I will spend the Sabbath with you at the same home".

During the Sabbath evening meal, our host invited me to lead in one of the *Zemirot*/Hymns. When I began to chant a melody which I had learned from my father-in-law, it turned out that our host originated from the same Polish-Galacian town from where my in-laws had come. It was a delightful and memorable Sabbath for all of us. Saturday night, after the *Havdalah* Benedictions, our hosts handed us a package of Kosher provisions for our journey to Seattle, where we were to board the ship to Alaska on the following Sunday.

Sunday morning I went to *Schule* for the morning service. The Rabbi asked me where in Seattle I intended to stay the following Sabbath. Upon hearing that I did not have any definite place, he called his rabbinic friend in Seattle, I heard him describe our mutual Sabbath experience, and then added: "Rabbi and Mrs. Ehrlich will be in Seattle next Sabbath; can you take care of them?" And the Seattle Rabbi did. Once again, we spent a wonderful Sabbath three thousands miles away from home in the company of gracious and hospitable people who made us feel part of their family. Indeed, the descendents of Father Abraham learned well the practice of *Hachnasat Orchim* – Welcoming the Wayfarer, so beautifully described in the opening chapters of Genesis.

Chapter Sixty Two

CHAPLAINCY ON CUNARD CRUISE SHIPS

For the Summer of 1989, we scheduled a three week tour of the British Isles and Ireland, and booked a bargain "two-for-one" Trans-Atlantic Crossing aboard Queen Elizabeth II, which at that time still had a Kosher restaurant, and a synagogue on the premises. Saturday morning we went to the synagogue for the Sabbath Services, and found about thirty people waiting for someone capable of leading the service. When no one volunteered for the job, I introduced myself to the assemblage, and asked their permission to lead them in the service, and in reading the Torah. In the afternoon, I was approached by the Cruise Director who told me that he heard from passengers of what happened in the synagogue that morning, and how delighted they were with my service. He then asked me whether I would be interested in coming aboard the ship as a Chaplain. When I answered in the affirmative, he offered to submit my name to the Cunard Cruise Line for an assignment.

In the Fall, I received a call from the Cunard Social Service office with an offer for a Cruise Assignment during the Winter season. I told them that I was still committed to my congregation until June 1990, but would be on retirement thereafter, and would then gladly accept their invitation, and I gave them my address and phone number in Jerusalem. At that time, I also notified the congregation of my intention to retire at the end of my current contract, in June 1990.

In July 1990, the Cunard office called me in Jerusalem and asked me to serve as Chaplain for the High Holy Days and the *Succot* Festival aboard the Cunard Princess on its twenty-eight day voyage to twelve ports in the Mediterranean and Black Sea.

We accepted the assignment, and several days before *Rosh Hashanah* we flew to Athens to board the ship. It was the kind of experience usually reserved for the very rich, and here it was literally thrown into our laps for almost nothing. Even from a purely Jewish perspective, it was exhilirating from beginning to end, as we stopped off in Islands, Countries and Cities steeped with Jewish history. *Shabbat Shuvah* (between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*) we *davened* (prayed) in the historic and beautiful synagogue of the Venice Ghetto. *Yom Kippur* Day, we spent in the imposing synagogue of Alexandria. When the elderly *Chazzan* (cantor), who had come from Israel, could not carry on for the entire day, I was invited to the pulpit to assist him in chanting parts of the service and in reading the Torah. After the *N'ilah*/Closing service, we were invited by the Israeli Counsel General of Alexandria to break the fast in his home. The *Arba Minim* (Four Species) which we used for *Succot*, came from four different countries: The *Etrog*/Citron I purchased in Israel before the journey; the *Lulav*/Palm Branch I picked up in Alexandria; the *Haddasim*/Myrtle Twigs were given to me by the *Bet Din* (religious Court) in Istanbul; and the *Aravot*/Willow Twigs I picked off a willow tree in Odessa. Never before did I have and never again will I have such an interesting and unique set of *Arba Minim.*

Aboard the ship, we were treated royally by the officers and the staff, and our presence was appreciated even by non-Jewish passengers who sought our companionship, and welcomed any and all opportunities to engage us socially. The Jewish passengers were thrilled to have their own Rabbi aboard ship, and glady participated in the religious services whenever they could, that is when the ship was at sea, and they did not have anything else to do. However, when the ship was in port, the pleasures of the land excursions was of greater attraction to them than the religious service, and I was left on the ship without a *Minyan* (quorum) for the service, This was, therefore, the last

time I took a cruise assignment specifically for a Holy Day, but I did not give up on cruising whenever invited to do so.

The company was apparently happy with my service, for in November of that same year (1990) I was assigned as Rabbi and Lecturer for a one-hundred-and-eleven-day Pacific and Orient Odyssey, to visit over fifty countries and islands – including Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Malasyia, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Etc. Etc.

Jan. 1991 on the Way to the Three-Month Pacific and Orient Odyssey

For the Winter of 1991-92, I was assigned to a three-month "Round the World" cruise aboard QEII which I gladly accepted, but could not carry it through, due to a heart attack which I suffered just five days before my departure, and which led to quadruple bypass surgery in January 1992. But when a Rabbi, who had a similar assignment aboard the Sagafjord, took ill towards the end of his cruise, I was asked to replace him for the last two weeks in April, from San Francisco to Miami through the Panama Canal. Other assignments included short cruises to the Caribbean Islands and a long thirty-six day cruise to South America in the Winter of 1993. All in all, from July 1990 through March 1993, we were aboard various Cunard Vessels for over three hundred days, visiting much of God's beautiful world, and these pleasures came to us by performing a single *Mitzvah* in leading a congregation in prayer on a Sabbath morning on the QEII. It is an illustration of what our sages called "*Mitzvah Uscharah B'tzidah* – the (occasional) instantaneous Divine reward for the performance of a Good Deed."

By mid-1993, we felt that we had enough of this coming and going, and wanted to settle down to a normal and quiet retirement schedule. Another factor was my deteriorating physical condition, and the fear of getting caught with a medical emergency on a distant island without proper medical facilities or physicians. This fear became more accute after two incidents of TIAs from which I came out unscathed, thank God, but we were left with a heightened sense of apprehension of what might happen, especially when doctors told us that these frequent minor incidents are often harbingers of more severe attacks that might follow.

I was then faced with the problem which most retirees have; namely, what to do with my time? I then recalled the urgings of several colleagues who knew my background, and had often said that I had a unique story to tell which should be preseved for posterity within my family, and perhaps for wider distribution.

In 1993-94, I began to delve into memories and recollections, and accumulated several hundred pages of notes. To keep intellectually alive, I embarked on a daily study of the *Midrashim* and *Ain Yaakov* (the non-legal portions of the Talmud) with the aim of collecting curious *Aggadot* (legends and sayings) to be translated and analyzed for their historical and ethical value. In the course of 1994-1995, I collected over three hundred *Aggadot* from the *Midrashim* on the first three Books of the Torah, and the first three *Sedarim* (Orders) of the Talmud.

But, before I settled down to serious writing on these projects, I was asked by a congregaton not far from my Brooklyn residence to fill in for their deceased Rabbi who had served them for over half a century. In March of 1995, I told the president of the congregation that I would not give up my annual stay of five-six months in Israel, nor would I move from our Brooklyn residence during the six months of the year that we spend in the States. But, I would gladly adjust my schedule to serve the congregation from *Rosh Hashanah* through *Chanukah* (September-December), and from *Pessach* through *Shavuot* (April-May). During these six (Hebrew) months, I could be with the congregation on all Jewish Holidays and Festivals, and on twelve alternate *Shabbotot*, to preach at the Sabbath morning service, to teach a class on the weekly chapter of the Torah in the afternoon of the same Sabbaths, and a class in Jewish History on the subsequent Tuesday evenings. During these six months, I would also be on call to congregants to serve their personal religious needs. The only request I had, was that the congregation rent an apartment within walking distance from the synagogue, where Pearl and I could stay on these Holidays and Saturdays.

I left for Israel shortly thereafter, sure that nothing would come of this meeting, because no congregation would accede to such terms. To my utter surprise, in August of 1995, the president called to tell me that they had rented an apartment near

the *Schule*, and that they wanted me to come for the High Holy Days. He also told me what the congregation could afford to pay, and the amount was acceptable to me. Pearl reluctantly agreed to the proposition of taking ready-to-eat provisions to the apartment twenty times a year (eight Holidays and twelve *Shabbosim*). Aside from this inconvenience, we found in Beth El Jewish Center of Flatbush, a congregational constituency which surpassed all expectations – a group of nice *Baalei Battim* (laymen) who were eager to listen to sermons in English and Yiddish, and to attend Adult Education classes regularly on Saturday afternoons and Tuesday evenings. They came in rain and snow, and they constantly expressed their gratitude for what they received.

In the beginning of 1997, I went through two major surgical procedures. On January 7, I was operated on the right Carotid Artery, and on March 3, I had a Total Knee Replacement on my right foot. Thanks to God Who gave me life; to the physicians and surgeons for their great skill, and to my wife and children, for their ceaseless devotion, I came through these life threatening ordeals. But in the course of a very difficult and prolonged recuperation, I came to the conclusion that my working days were now over for good.

My last service to the congregation was on *Shavuot* 5757 – June 1997.

Professionally, this unexpected and final experience was the frosting on a rabbinic career filled with Lights and Shadows, and always with a sense of fulfillment in the service of God and His People.

Chapter Sixty Three

BLESSED FRIENDS AND FRIENDSHIP

In every community where we lived and worked, there were congregational Presidents, Trustees and Board members, Physicians and Attorneys, and nice *Ba'alei Battim* (laymen) who enriched our lives in many special ways. Each of them deserves at least a page in this biography, and many deserve a whole chapter, which would double the size of the book; but this biography would be incomplete if they were not mentioned at all, since they were, in a real sense, an integral part of us and we of them.

In Bristol, Conn. there were Dr. Harry Hershman – a general physician, and Dr. Arnold Becker – a pediatrician, who looked after our well-being and that of our children. Both were among the most popular and busy physicians in town, but they always had time for us – day and night, on weekends and holidays. Harry and Beverly Hershman were at the helm of leadership in the congregation, and a friendship which began on the first day of our arrival in Bristol has lasted between us for the last forty five years.

From 1950 to 1959 I suffered from an alergic reaction which had literally immobilized me during the spring months of each year. Neither doctors nor clinics could offer any relief until I came to Port Washington, N.Y. Dr. Sidney Zuckerman, an allergy specialist, witnessed my suffering on the pulpit at a Sabbath service in the spring of 1960, and invited me to his home for the following Sunday. Within three weeks he took control of the situation, and for the following thirteen years I saw either him or Irene – his wife and nurse – at least once each week, and three or four times a week during the spring season. These "two angels," as Pearl used to call them, sent me their

"home made" extracts for the three years I was in Elkins Park, Pa. and for several years in Jerusalem. Their personal friendship with us has been genuine and sincere to this day.

Fred and Irene Molod moved to nearby Manhasset in 1950, and came to my Study to register their daughter in my religious school. When they told me that the girl had attended the Crown Heights Yeshiva, I suggested that they must not deprive their daughter of a full Jewish education as the price of their move to Manhasset. I told them of the North Shore Hebrew Academy in nearby Great Neck which my children attended, and it did not take long to convince them to do the right thing for this daughter and the younger children. A bond of close friendship was formed between us on that occasion. Years later, Fred became President of the congregation, and both of them were active in the UJA. For the past forty years, their home was always open to us and our's to them – in Manhasset, Port Washington and Israel.

And there were Lenore and Arthur Holland, two educated and intelligent young people, both active in the Temple and Sisterhood Boards, and in the Building Committee. Lenore is a gifted artist. In the 1960s, she volunteered to design and illustrate the *Shiurim* Textbooks, and thus made an invaluable contribution to the success story of that enterprise. Our dining-room is adorned with Lenore's original painting of ritual objects. A close friendship existed between us for many years.

Evelyn and Arthur Frankel were among the pillars of the congregation. On a personal level, they were abiding friends whose love and respect knew no limits. After moving to Israel in 1975, we used to come to New York for July and August of each year. For the subsequent summers of 1976 and 1977, Evelyn made us part of her family – sharing with us her home and meals, and Arthur gave us his car which he used daily to communicate between his home and the train station. As related above, their children called us "Aunt" and "Uncle", but Arthur and Evelyn were even more than family.

There were at least another ten couples in Port Washington who were part of our extended family during the thirteen years of our sojourn there, like Judy and Dr. Marvin Bayles; Lee and Irving Gall – our Torah Reader and Chairman of the Ritual Committee; Alice and Dr. Martin Green z.l. who were among our steady companions to the Yiddish Theater; Arline Kempner and her late husband, Dr. Ivan Kempner z.l.; Rita and Arnold Klein; Harriet and Ben Klein; Blossom Abrams and her late husband, Al Levine z.l. – Our *Baal Shacharit* on the High Holy Days; Miriam and Elias Pilzer; Joyce and Martin Scher; Roslyn and Lawrence Seftel; and Alysia and Stephen Wolnek.

These people afforded us a circle of sociability and friendship which most Rabbis unfortunately do not have and miss in their lives. Many of these people keep in touch frequently to this day, and we with them – be it a telephone call, dining together, or an invitation to a Simcha.

In nearby Great Neck there were Rabbi Mordecai and Rebbetzin Prof. Ruth Waxman whose acquaintance we made upon our arrival in Port Washington through our children who are of the same ages and studied together at the N.S.H.A., and whose friendship we have enjoyed for forty years. We learned together and travelled together, their home was always open to us and our's to them. Ruth read the first half of this manuscript and encouraged me to finish it. She unfortunately passed away

before I completed the book, but the memory of her warm friendship stays with us and always will be. z.l.

A side benfit was the friendship we shared with Rabbi Waxman's parents – Professor Meir Waxman z.l., whose books I studied as a Chassidic youth in Jerusalem, and Rebbetzin Sarah z.l. We were drawn together through a rabbinic *Chavruta*/Fellowship in the study of Talmud which I had organized in Rabbi Waxman's Study, and the Professor would come in from Manhattan to study with us *Midrash* and Philosophy. Eventually, it developed into a social friendship as the three families celebrated together in our alternate homes the American Civil Holidays and the Jewish festivals (on which we could travel), like *Chanukah* and *Purim.*

Rebbetzin Sarah once said to me: "Rabbi Ehrlich, the best advice I can give you is to Write, Write and Publish". When I agreed with her, and said: "It is the only thing that a Rabbi can leave to posterity", she replied: "That is not what I had in mind; I rather meant to say that it is the only way for a Rabbi to make a dollar." When this wise and practical grand lady passed away, I was working in Elkins Park, Pa., but Rabbi Waxman bestowed upon me the great honor of inviting me to come to Great Neck to officiate at her funeral, z.l.

During the brief three years at Adath Jeshurun in Elkins Park, Pa., I worked with a host of beautiful people whose companionship Pearl and I enjoyed while we were there, and whose friendship we have maintained with many to this day. Of special significance was the Friday Night Fellowship which I organized with 6-8 couples, with the blessing of Rabbi Rosenberg. Meeting in our alternate (Kosher) homes, our program each week began with the Sabbath Evening Service, followed by a traditional Sabbath meal, and continued with a *Torah* session which often lasted to the midnight hour. Several of these couples were at the helm of leadership in the congregation, and the others were attracted to the program

because of "a certain feeling of authenticity which pervaded our *Shabbat* meetings", so they said.

Of the literally dozens of people I worked with in this mammoth congregation, there comes to mind now – twenty five years removed, the names of Charlotte and Ruby Bernstein; Dolly and Dr. Mike Forman z.l.; Dr. Marvin Gershenfeld; Marion and Bill Karsif; Lynn and Dr. Al Wagman; Bea and Dr. Larry Weiss; Susan and Arnold Snyder.

Francine and Dr. Elliot Kane gave us the keys to their home for the month of August 1972, before we could move into the home we had purchased, and at a time when they barely knew us. During the following three years we worked together on the Adult Education Committee.

Phyllis Kirschbaum walked over to us during the *Neilah* service on the first *Yom Kippur* we were at Adath Jeshurun, and invited us to "Break the Fast" with her family and a few friends. Phyllis and Chick are dedicated to the synagogue and Jewish Living. Since that evening in their home, our close and sincere friendship went on uninterrupted through good and unfortunately some bad times.

Mervin Hartman was president of the congregation during my second year there. In a way, he and I are almost complete opposites, but something "took" between us during that year, and it is holding to this day. Mervin and Harriette were among our close friends while still at A.J. Since my retirement in Israel eight years ago, we enjoy their company in Jerusalem several months of each summer as our neighbors in an apartment they purchased next to us.

The daughters of these families, students of my Confirmation class at A.J., used to come to our home on *Shabbat* afternoon for *Oneg Shabbat* and a study session on a Jewish topic. They continued to do so after we moved to Israel when they had come here for a year at the Hebrew University or to a *Kibbutz*. They considered us as their "parents away from

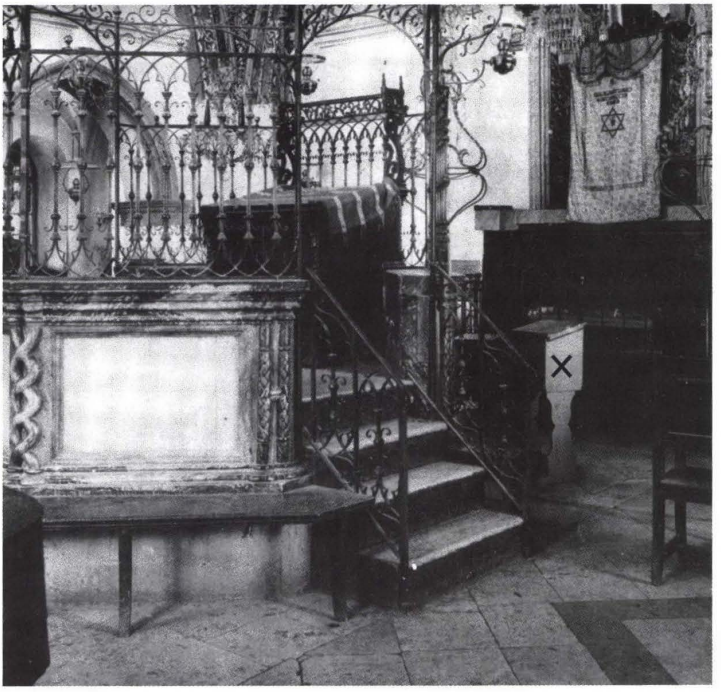
home" and our home as their's. Mervin occasionally comes up for a study session in *Mishnah*, and his grand-daughter, Ayelet, comes up for a lesson in *Torah*, even as her mother used to do in Elkins Park twenty five years earlier. What greater pleasure can a Rabbi expect than studying *Torah* with three generations?

One of the problems we had to contend with when contemplating *Aliyah* to Israel in 1975, was that of medical attention. For almost thirty years we were privileged with the personal medical care from physicians in the congregation who were also close friends. Now, we were going to a different medical system at a time when I was troubled by continuous health problems, and without a personal physician to whom I could turn in an emergency.

Following my delivery of a *Torah* Discourse at the Sabbath evening service in the Central Yeshurun Synagogue of Jerusalem, a gentleman came over to express his appreciation. He introduced himself as Mervyn Gotsman from South Africa, and asked whether I would be interested in preparing his eleven year old son for his *Bar Mitzvah*. I told him that I am not a *Bar Mitzvah* teacher but, if his son really wants to learn, I would gladly have him come to our home on Saturday afternoon to study Torah, in the course of which he would also learn what he needs to know for his *Bar Mitzvah*. Craig started coming every Saturday afternoon. He was an able and eager student, willing to stay on at each session for as long as I would have him. A few months later he was joined by his younger brother, then by two of his sisters, and their mother, Aileen, also came up occasionally. They just took up where the Elkins Park girls had left off. Pearl was also happy to have them, and for several years, long after Craig's *Bar Mitzvah*, they made our *Shabbosim*. Pearl developed a close friendship with Aileen who became our dear friend. Professor Gotsman was Head of the Cardiology Department at Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem, and

he paved the way for our easy access to proper medical care in Israel.

In the daily morning service we pray: "*Utneinu Hayom Uvchol Yom* – Grant us today and every day Grace and Kindness in Your Sight and in the sight of all men." When we consider the forty years of rabbinic service, we thank God for having blessed us abundantly with so many dear friends and with their warm friendship.



The interior of Nissan Bak Synagogue, × *where my father had his seat*[1].

1. This picture and on page 52 are through the courtesy of Mr. Ely Schiller of Ariel Publication.

CONCLUSION

The Ehrlich family now numbers about two hundred households and about eight hundred souls (*kein ayin hara*) in five generations of children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and *ihr ihr ihr einiklach* – the descendants of Rabbi Nachum and Chaya Esther Ehrlich who were married in 1906, in the Old City of Jerusalem.

On the 15th of *Tevet* 5758, just before this book went to Press, Pearl and I celebrated *our* Fiftieth (50th) Wedding Anniversary. Instead of an Anniversary Reception, we sent out gifts to fifty households of my parent's children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

We also invited them to join us in a Prayer of Thanksgiving to God for the Beneficience He has bestowed upon us, and in a Prayer of Petition for many more years of Life, Good Health and much *Nachas*.

And on the first day of *Rosh Chodesh* Elul, a Sabbath day, corresponding to the 22nd day of August, 1998, we celebrated *my* seventy fifth birthday, a milestone I never expected to reach. I thanked Pearl for her love and steadfastness throughout the years, and I repeated to her what I had written above, saying: "God blessed me with abundant years of life, and you kept me alive in accordance with His Will."

On that *Shabbat* we worshipped in a Jerusalem synagogue which is dedicated to the memory of Israel's underground forces, the *Irgun* and *Lechi* of the pre-State years. I was honored with *Maftir*, and in the *Haftarah* I chanted the prophecy of Isaiah: "*Simchu et Yerushalayim* – Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her all ye that love her... That ye may drink deeply with delight of the abundance of her glory."

After the *Aliyah*, I recited the following prayer which I wrote for the occasion:

מודה אני לפניך, ה' אלקי ואלקי אבותי, על כל החסד אשר עשית עמדי מעודי ועד היום הזה. ברוב טובך הגעתי היום ליום הולדתי השבעים וחמש, עם רעייתי, ילדַי, ונכדַי שיחיו.

"I give thanks unto You, Lord my God and God of my fathers, for the kindness You have bestowed upon me throughout the years. Because of Your Goodness, I have reached today my Seventy Fifth Birthday in the midst of my beloved wife, children and grandchildren".

אנא ה', כי אני עבדך. עמוד נא לימיני וסמכני, וזכני לחיים טובים, ארוכים ושלום, עם בני משפחתי וכל עמך בית ישראל — לראות בבנין ארץ ישראל וירושלים עיר קדשך, בשלום ובשלווה כל הימים סלה: אמן ואמן.

"I beseech You, Lord, for I am indeed Your servant: Continue to be with me and support me, Grant me a long life in good health, with my family and the people of Israel, that we may be privileged to witness the rebuilding of Eretz Yisrael and Jerusalem, Your Holy City, in peace and tranquility, now and forever more; Amen".

ברוך אתה ה', אלקינו מלך העולם, שהחינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

"Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast kept me alive, sustained me, and enabled me to reach this happy occasion".