

Memories of Shearith Israel

By: Moses L. Schwab

As I sit here at the desk of my father, Rav Shimon Schwab, זכר צדיק לברכה, with my Mother, שתיחיה לאורך ימים טובים, at my side, my mind wanders back over many decades, to the beautiful memories of Congregation Shearith Israel, the Shul in which I grew up.

Let me say that our family has the deepest feelings of gratitude - ה-כרת הטוב - to the congregation, its officers, and members, for having been the messengers of הקב"ה to save our lives from the impending disaster which was developing in Germany during the middle thirties.

Had it not been for men like Nathan Adler, Leon Strauss, Samuel Rauneker, and Myer Strauss, זכרונם לברכה, the members of the Board of Directors of Shearith Israel in 1936, I would not be addressing you now. Whenever I think of this, I can only say "Thank God for Shearith Israel, ברוך הטוב והמטיב."

It took a great deal of courage on the part of these men to offer the vacant Rabbinical position of their Shul to the 27 year old German speaking Rabbi Simon Schwab, of Ichenhausen, Germany, who's English left a lot to be desired. The congregation undertook a great responsibility in bringing this young Rabbi to Baltimore with his pregnant wife and their three small children and establishing them in a new home in a strange land. And for this act of courage, and humanity, our family will be eternally grateful to Congregation Shearith Israel of Baltimore.

During the summer of 1936, with Nazi anti-semitism growing daily in Germany, my father, who was then the "Betzirksrabbiner", or District Rabbi, of Ichenhausen, Bavaria, Germany, was especially targeted by the local Hitler- Youth thugs for persecution, and he knew that he must leave Germany as soon as possible at the peril of his life. During the early part of the summer of 1936, my father met with Rabbi Leo Jung, ר"צ, of New York, in Zurich, Switzerland, and asked his help in obtaining a rabbinical position in America.

Rabbi Jung told my father that he had read his book, *Heimkehr ins Judentum*, which was published the year before, and that based on the views expressed in this book, there would be only one suitable rabbinical position for him in America, that of Shearith Israel in Baltimore, which position happened to be vacant since the passing of Rabbi Dr. Schepsel Schaffer, who died in 1933. Rabbi Jung advised my father to contact his friend Mr. Nathan Adler, who was one of the most influential leaders of the congregation, and who happened to be a distant relative of my father, to apply for the position.

To make a long story short, arrangements were made for my father to come to Baltimore as a candidate for the rabbinical position on אב תרש"ז August 29, 1936. Rabbi Schwab spoke in Shul - in a labored English- on Shabbos morning, and in the afternoon he

gave Shiurim in Yiddish for the Balei Battim. Then, on the following Sunday evening, he again addressed the congregation in English. Afterwards, Rabbi Schwab was told that the congregation would have a meeting to decide on his candidacy between Rosh Hashono and Yom Kippur, and my father returned to Ichenhasuen to await the outcome.

On the fourth of Tishrei, September 24, 1936, my father received a telegram, with the words: "Unanimously Elected", with the signature, "Rauneker". My father's English was so rudimentary that, while he knew what "Elected" meant, he did not understand the meaning of "Unanimously", thinking it had a negative connotation as in "Un", meaning "not". It was only after he consulted his well-thumbed English-German dictionary, that he made the Brocho "ברוך הטוב והמטיב".

To further condense a long story - filled with Nissim - our family arrived in New York on עשרה בטבת, December 24, 1936. About 10 days later we moved into the house at 3808 Glen Avenue, which the congregation had rented for us. My mother, שתחיה, was overwhelmed when she found a fully stocked pantry and refrigerator which all had been arranged by the Ladies Auxiliary of Shearith Israel.

Those first few weeks in Baltimore were filled with my parents' orientation in a new and peaceful world. My father's days and nights were filled with his new duties as rabbi of an English-speaking congregation, and my mother's with caring for the children and meetings with the ladies of the congregation. Father spent a great deal of time preparing his Shabbos morning sermons in his newly adopted language- English. I can remember clearly my father telling us children "we are in America now, and the language spoken in our house from now on will be English.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to Miss Grace Blondheim, נ"ע, a friend of Nathan Adler, who volunteered to help my father with his English speeches, which he read off word by word in those early days. However, within a year, my father became quite fluent in English, and he slowly, but surely, no longer had to rely on a written English text to deliver his sermons. He would humorously reminisce about the time his written speech was blown away by a gust of wind from an open window, and he was forced to continue without the benefit of a written text. He then realized that he had mastered the English language. To further improve his English, my father would listen carefully to President Roosevelt's speeches on the radio, to pick up the nuances of well-spoken English pronunciation.

Almost immediately upon his arrival in Baltimore, my father befriended Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, זצ"ל, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Ner Israel. He soon became a regular, albeit unpaid, Magid Shiur there. On Fridays, he would give a special Chumash Shiur for the whole Yeshiva. My father's close association with Rabbi Ruderman - and his very capable Menahel Rabbi Herman Neuberger, שיב"ל, lasted for the rest of my father's life- even long after he had left Baltimore in 1958.

It is a well known fact that Congregation Shearith Israel resulted from the breakup in the late 19th Century of the "Green Street Shul" in downtown Baltimore, into two distinct Congregations. The more liberal group formed the Chizuk Emunah Congregation, which was known as the "Friedenwald Shul", because it was led by Dr. Aaron Friedenwald, and

the other , more traditional group , formed Shearith Israel Congregation, which became known as the "Strauss Shul, " because of the influence of the Strauss- Adler families. The home of Shearith Israel Congregation for many years was on McCulloh Street, near North Avenue.

In the early twenties, the North Avenue neighborhood had begun to change, and several affluent members of Shearith Israel moved "uptown" and settled in the upper Park Heights area of Northwest Baltimore. To accommodate these members , whose numbers were growing, a " suburban branch" of Shearith Israel was built and completed in 1926. Before the Shul building was completed, Shearith Israel used rented quarters for daily and Shabbos Tefillos in several places, among them , a private house on Glen Avenue, near the present Shul building.

I was told by Mr. Sidney Adler, a son of the late Nathan Adler, that the cost of the entire building, including the land, was approximately \$85,000. While this was a considerable sum at that time, it was very modest in comparison with a more elaborate Synagogue building which had been built near Druid Hill Park around that time for \$300,000.

An appeal was made at the McCulloh Street Shul to raise funds for the new building. Among the large donors were Myer Strauss \$5,000; Ephraim Macht \$5,000; Nahan Adler \$1,000. Several others also donated \$1,000 each, and there were many smaller sums as well. A mortgage loan was obtained from the Eutaw Savings Bank through Nathan Adler's connections. The bank manager said he had never before loaned money to build a synagogue, but made an exception for Shearith Israel because he was impressed with the simplicity and frugality of the plans for the structure of the Glen Avenue synagogue building, and of the responsible leadership of its officers.

At the urging of Nathan Adler, the new building on Glen Avenue contained two major improvements over the McCulloh Street building. First, there was the matter of the women's gallery enclosure , known in German as a "Gitter". In McCulloh Street, there was a simple railing along the edge of the gallery, and this had become a bone of contention with many of the members, who considered it inadequate. Mr. Adler sent a relative to Frankfurt am Main to photograph the " Gitter" of the ladies gallery in the famed "Friedberger Anlage", Synagogue of the Hirsch-Breuer Congregation K'Hal Adath Jeshurun to use a model for the ladies' gallery of the new "suburban synagogue" building of Shearith Israel.

The result was that the ladies' gallery trellised enclosure of the Glen Avenue Shul building - which has remained unchanged since then - is almost an exact replica of the Frankfurt ladies' gallery trellised enclosure - Gitter - which had the approval of Rabbi Salamon Breuer, successor of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.

The second improvement on which Mr. Adler insisted was to place the Bima- Almemar in the middle of the Shul, instead of the front , where it had been in the McCulloh Street building.

Of course, the Glen Avenue Shul contained a modern Mikvah facility for women, as did

the McCulloh Street building. However, Mr. Adler had the portion of the plans which contained the Mikvah deleted from the official publicity notices of the future Shul building for fear of criticism that it was unnecessary. However, by including a new, modern, Mikvah facility in the "suburban branch" building, Nathan Adler encouraged regular Mikvah attendance by the women of the neighborhood. Interestingly, when the McCulloh Street building was finally liquidated in 1958, some of the money went to fund the new Rogers Avenue Mikvah.

The two main speakers at the dedication ceremony of the new Glen Avenue Shul building were Rabbi Isaiah Levy, (the father of Rabbi Joshua Levy, who would later be a youth director in the Shul) who spoke in a beautiful, British - accented English, and Rabbi Dr. Philip Hillel Klein of the Ohev Tzedek Congregation in New York, who spoke in German. It is interesting to note that both of these distinguished rabbis were descendants of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, whose Jewish Weltanschauung was really at the core of the charter of Shearith Israel.

So when Rabbi Schwab came to Shearith Israel, he found a very traditional Shul, governed, by dedicated officers, who maintained a strictly Orthodox Shul, with familiar time-hallowed German Minhagim and Tefillos. The famed "Roedelheim" Siddurim and Machzorim were the official texts for the Tefillos of the congregation, and the "Shulchan Oruch", was, constitutionally, to be the final arbiter in all questions of Jewish law and practice.

However, all of this was only a beautiful veneer which covered a major problem which had been seething within Shearith Israel - at both branches - for many years before my father came. We will explain as we proceed.

By his rabbinical agreement with Shearith Israel, Rabbi Schwab was also the official rabbi of the McCulloh Street "mother" Shul. Once a month, on Shabbos mornings, the young Rav would walk from his home on Glen Avenue to McCulloh Street for about one and a half hours, to attend the Shabbos services and to deliver the sermon in the morning and Shiurim in the afternoon. During these Shabbosim, he would be the guest for Shabbos lunch at the home of Mrs. Gussie Strauss, widow of Manes Strauss, the former president of the McCulloh Street Shul until his death in 1930. We remember referring to her as "Aunt Gussie". (During later years, when "Aunt Gussie" had already moved to the Park Heights area, my sister and brothers, and I, would compete for the privilege of delivering "Shlach Monos" - by bike- to her on Purim, which she would reward handsomely by the gift of a "leaf", our secret code for a one dollar bill.)

The somewhat impractical arrangement of serving both Shuls went on for several years, but was then discontinued when most of the old-time members who were left moved close to the Glen Avenue Shul. Although, there were other rabbis who officiated at McCulloh Street afterwards, Rabbi Schwab was still the official Rav of both Congregations until he left Baltimore in 1958.

The major problem which was thrust upon Rabbi Schwab, almost immediately upon his arrival, was as follows. Shearith Israel had - and probably still has - an old, but then

unwritten, statute which limited voting membership only to those who were "Shomer Shabbos". All others, while being welcome in the Shul, could only be "seat-holders", with no voting privileges. The majority of the congregants were very unhappy about this because they wanted more of a voice in the functioning of the synagogue, which they considered too rigid in its German-style, Hirschian, Orthodoxy. This group was in favor not only of liberalizing the "Shabbos statute," but also to allow the Shul to sponsor social events which featured mixed dancing. Despite the requests of many of the Shul's congregants to liberalize the Shul, Nathan Adler and Leon Strauss, and other like-minded officers tenaciously insisted on enforcing the Shomer Shabbos rule, thus, effectively blocking any dissenters from changing the Shul's special character as a model of uncompromising Torah-true Orthodoxy.

The result of this was that, at the time of Rabbi Schwab's arrival at Shearith Israel, there were only about 8 - 12 voting members out of a congregation of about 150 people! Many of the others were "Orthodox" by synagogue affiliation only, but not in practice- especially with regard to Shemiras Shabbos, which was practiced on different levels of observance by different people. Some "kept Shabbos", but their businesses were open on Shabbos. Others fully kept Shabbos but their wives were not too particular in their observance. I was told by someone who remembers that as a young boy while standing outside on the portico of the Shul on Shabbos afternoons between Mincha and Maariv, he and his friends would observe the wives of some of the congregants - who were at Sholosh Seudos downstairs - alighting from street cars on Park Heights Avenue, carrying shopping bags filled with groceries!

Almost immediately upon his arrival in Shearith Israel, this old, festering problem was placed squarely in Rabbi Schwab's lap for a Halachic resolution. Despite great pressure - especially from the "Brotherhood", a group within the congregation which provided a substantial part of the funds for the budget of the congregation - and threats of secession by a majority of the congregants, Rabbi Schwab, after consulting with many rabbis and lay leaders in and out of Baltimore made the Halachic ruling, in 1938, to enforce the old Shemiras Shabbos membership condition of the congregation.

He was encouraged in his ruling by the board of the Shul, and many leading rabbis in America, including Rabbi Dov Aryeh Levinthal of Philadelphia, and by an official position paper of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of America (Agudas Horabonim). Furthermore, the great Gaon Rav Elchonon Wasserman זצ"ל - ה' יקום זמרו, who spent a Shabbos in our house on Glen Avenue, and attended the Shul, greatly encouraged my father in this decision.

Despite Rabbi Schwab's best efforts to explain his ruling to the dissenters, and warmly welcoming them to all activities of the Congregation - including the then existing Congregational Hebrew School - the great majority of the more liberal minded congregants seceded from Shearith Israel and formed their own congregation - Beth Jacob - in a building only one block away.

While Shearith Israel was left religiously intact, only a small number of congregants - beside its 8-12 members - remained faithful to the mother Shul. New arrivals to the neighborhood added somewhat to the congregation, but the many German refugees, who

later made up a strong , strictly observant, group within the Shul , had not yet arrived. They would arrive only later, during 1939-1940- 1941, and some came after the war, together with many others.

Notwithstanding the position of his opponents- and their newly formed congregation, Rabbi Schwab kept good relations with them, and especially with their first Rabbi, Bernard Lander. (Rabbi Dr. Bernard Lander is presently head of Touro College and Lander College in New York.) The young Rabbi Lander, as yet unmarried, was a regular guest at our Shabbos table; I can still hear my father advising him on his dealings with his congregants, and discussing his sermons. My father was a prime example of "תלמידי חכמים מרבים שלום בעולם", and this gained him a great deal of respect among his opponents in Baltimore.

My mother fondly remembers the women of the congregation who were especially helpful to her at the beginning. There was Sara Macht, wife of Dr. David Macht, who immediately befriended her , and asked to be called " Aunt Sara". This lovely "Aunt Sara" was one of the few women in town who wore a "Sheitel" at that time. A host of other names come to mind: there were Mrs. Julia Friedenwald Strauss, wife of Myer Strauss, Mrs. Bertha Max, Mrs. Clara Kohn, matriarch of Hochschild- Kohn's department store. I am sure there were many others, but these women come to mind.

Some other names which I fondly remember from the early days of my youth at Shearith Israel were: Of course there was Myer Strauss, the Chazzon , whose beautiful rendition of Lecho Dodi on Friday nights was brought by my father to Washington Heights, where it is still in regular use. (They call it the "Baltimore Lecho Dodi"); There was Louis(Louie) Miller, Baal Koreh , and part-time Chazzon. To this day, I copy his version of Krias Hamegilla on Purim . Simon Miller, the builder, who saw to it that the Shul's Succah was built every year; his son Jules, and his father, whose name escapes me, who lived to a very ripe old age, despite the fact that he was a heavy cigarette smoker- which he "rolled " himself - and who never wore an overcoat even in the coldest days and nights of winter.

There was Phil Gundesheimer, a quiet Tzaddik of a man, who was meticulous in his observance of Mitzvos. It was known that he would totally exhaust himself at Bedikas Chometz , which would take him the better part of the night.

Of course there were the "Frume Cohns", who formerly had their own Minayn near the McCulloh Street Shul, until most of the family moved to Park Heights and joined Shearith Israel. Of these, I knew Henry P., Alvin, Aber, and their families, who were meticulous in their observance of Dinim and Minhagim. Henry P. Cohen, and his wife, Charlotte, ח"ו, were especially close to my parents. It is a well known fact that Henry together with my father and Nathan Adler were the founders of the Baltimore Bais Yaakov School for Girls, and Henry headed it for many years.

There were the stalwarts of the Shul, Leon Strauss and Nathan Adler and their families. I well remember Benjy Adler, and Richard Strauss. Nathan Adler's older son , Sidney, moved to New York at an early age, but he would come to Baltimore for Yomim Tovim . Sidney Adler provided me with many of the details in this essay.

There was the elderly Schochet Cohen, the Kohein, (we children called him " Rebbe Cohen"), who would lead the " Duchenen" with his familiar tune, "Aiy Yai, Yai ", etc. , in the "Litviche" style. On Simchas Torah, my father would call him up for an Hakofeh by the title " Kohein Godol".

There were the Rivkins, Lehmanns, Flehingers, Rubinsteins, Lassons, Marks, Lapidus, Zerivitz, Mirvis', Gasners, Zelig Cohens, Taragins, and Siegels, whom I remember fondly. I especially remember that the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Siegel on Glen Avenue was always open and available for "Orchim" and poor people of every kind.

By the way, our friend, "Pitzzy" Siegel, their son, has been very instrumental in the dissemination of Rav Schwab's Torah tapes, and has sponsored the forthcoming Sefer, *Rav Schwab on Tefilla- Insights to Prayer*, being published by Artscroll, which is expected to be in the bookstores in January, 2001.

Carolyn Strauss Rubinstein, רח"ל, who just passed away recently - who was the second wife of my Uncle Herbert Froehlich, may he be well - conducted a pre- school group for youngsters at the property of her parents' home on Ford's Lane. My sister Judy and I were kindergartners of "Miss Strauss", in this group. We learned much of our early English language from her.

There was Mr. Mordechai Lichtenstein and his family. Rev. Lichtenstein became the Kashrus Supervisor of the Vaad Hakashrus of Baltimore, which was headed by my father. He was a capable and faithful "Mashgiach", with a very friendly demeanor, who discharged his duties with excellence. My father would often remark about Rev. Lichtenstein's careful supervision, and how successful he was in his work.

There was the Tzaddik, Mr. Ephraim, proprietor of the "Pikesville 5 and 10 cents Store", and his son Mendel, who would walk from their home in Pikesville to attend Shabbos morning services at Shearith Israel. They were frequent guests at our Shabbos lunch table. Mendel would act as the volunteer Shammos of the Shul helping with Kiddush and Havdolah wine, etc. before the advent of a regular paid Shammos in Shearith Israel. In later years, when Mr. Ephraim was too weak to walk from Pikesville, he would spend the entire Shabbos at our home. Before eating each course, he would say "*Lekovod Shabbos*".

The unofficial Shammos arrangement, with the help of Mendel, and other young men, went on for many years until the congregation engaged Mr. Moshe Herman as the official Shammos of the Glen Avenue Shul. Mr. Herman discharged his duties with great dignity, and Mrs. Herman attended the Mikvah. The Shammos after Mr. Herman was Mr. Albert Leiter, who had come from Butenweisen, Germany (near Ichenhausen where my father was Rav), and he, too, discharged his duties with great honor.

Of course no one who lived through the period of my childhood could ever forget Mr. Samuel H. Rauneker, a member of the board, a dignified man, who was fondly called "President" by his fellow congregants, although it is not clear whether he really ever was officially the President of the Glen Avenue Shearith Israel Congregation. But he certainly "ran the Davening" very firmly and punctually, pocket watch in hand, in the function of a Gabbai Rishon. He designated the Baalei Tefilla; would make all the announcements in

his stentorian voice; and distributed all of the Aliyos and other honors during the services. Upon his death in 1946, his son, Sol Rauneker, was elected to the same position as his father, and he held it until he moved to Cincinnati in 1958.

Mr. Sam Rauneker sent a letter to my father in Ichenausen, after he had been elected rabbi of Shearith Israel, with advice on how to dress and trim his beard "in the American or English style," to make a good impression on all the congregants when he assumes his duties as the official rabbi of the congregation.

My father, with the help of many good hearted members and congregants of the Shul, worked very hard during 1937- 1941 to obtain "Affidavits" to bring many people who were fleeing Hitler's Nazi Germany to America- and particularly to Baltimore. The advent of these "refugees" from Germany, greatly enriched the population of the Shul, and they were a great asset to the Congregation, and felt very comfortable and welcome in "Rabbi Schwab's Shul", which had the familiar German Minhag to which they were accustomed. Our house was a center of encouragement and welcome for these penniless people. My father and mother helped many of them with housing and employment, in the face of the Great Depression which still affected America at that time. Mr. and Mrs. Myer Strauss were especially helpful in freely giving "Affidavits" to their desperate brethren in Germany to enable them to come to America. And there were many others, who also helped greatly in this undertaking.

Of the German "refugees" (as they were called) who came during the years 1937-1941, I fondly remember the families Gradman, Hirschberg, Bamberger, Flamm, Leiter, Steinharter, Bondi, Hess, Neuberger, Steinhart, Bravman, Weinberg, Drefuss, Bodenheimer, Hirschler, Weger, Birnbaum, Kaufmann, Loebenberg, Katzenstein, Vorchheimer, Loeb, Schloss, Schlossberg, Baer, Gutman, Schuster, and many more whose names escape me now. Many of these people voluntarily gave of their talents to enrich the congregation. Mr. Flamm was teacher, Baal Tefilla, and Baal Koreh; Mr. Gradman was Baal Tokeiah on Yomim Noraim; Mr. Myer regularly acted as the Mincha Chazzon on Shabbos afternoons. And, of course, Mr. Albert Leiter, in later years, became the Shammos.

I fondly remember " Papa" Weinberg (I believe his name was Leopold Weinberg) who organized and led a makeshift choir, especially for Rosh Hashono and Yom Kippur, to sing a special rendition of the last "Halelukah" of Pesukei D'Zimrah, which is the final chapter of Tehillim. This Niggun was so melodious and beautiful that I remember it well to this day.

On a personal note, we children were taught by my father to have the greatest respect for a Beis Hakneses and to conduct ourselves with great dignity while in Shul. When I was about five or six years old, I must have become a little impatient in Shul, and began moving and walking around. My father immediately looked at me sternly and ordered me to my seat- directly in front of him. Observing this scene, one of the congregants approached my father and said, "Rabbi, here in America we are not that strict with our children." Whereupon my father retorted: " You will have to leave the education of my children completely up to me." Needless to say, that was the end of anyone's interference with our education.

Although most of these people lived close enough to the Shul to attend regularly, others lived farther away so that they could only come occasionally. But all of them became members and congregants of " Rabbi Schwab's Shul" , where they felt very much "at home".

By 1941, these many "newcomers" and others , who moved into the neighborhood swelled the rolls of the population of Shearith Israel to more than compensate for the loss of congregants at the time of the secession in 1938.

There were also many other German immigrants who moved to Baltimore during those years, but were not necessarily all of the highest standard of Orthodox practice. These people formed a German Jewish social welfare society , which was then known as the "Chevra". They helped each other out, and even held High Holiday Services of their own in rented quarters in the North Avenue part of town.

My father encouraged many of his German congregants to become active in the "Chevra", for the purpose of forming a strictly Orthodox Chevra Kadisha for men and women in strict accordance with the Dinim and Minhagim of the Shulchan Oruch. Such a Chevra Kadisha was sorely missing in Baltimore at that time. The Chevra Kadisha was formed, and its sacred duties were carried out by its members in accordance with written guidelines which my father meticulously wrote out for them in a booklet called "Zedah Laderech".

The Chevra Kadisha maintained a loose alliance with Shearith Israel, and many of its meetings were held in the "vestry rooms" of the congregation. Rabbi Schwab was held in great esteem even by those members who were not on the highest level of Orthodox practice, and he was the unofficial Rav of the "Chevra" organization until he left Baltimore in 1958. In fact, Rabbi Schwab suggested the name "Chevra Ahavas Chessed" which, to the best of my knowledge, is still carried by the organization to this day.

I remember the early Simchas Torah celebrations at Shearith Israel. First of all, there were no evening Hakofos on Simchas Torah until Rabbi Schwab initiated this Minhag in Shul, and this was not too happily accepted by the old guard. It was a beautiful sight to watch my father dancing with the Sefer Torah on Simchas Torah, night, as well as day. He would dance gracefully, including doing full 360 degree twirls, with a big smile on his face. This was especially entertaining for the children, who could see their rabbi "loosening up" to show his happiness with the Torah.

Leon Rivkin, the Hebrew School principal, would organize the children, distribute flags to them, and supervise their participation in the Simchas Torah Hakofos processions around the Shul. I also remember how Jerry Senker would lead the children in their chant of "Meeeee", imitating the bleating of sheep, as he would call out " Tzon Kodoshim" between Hakofos.

An unofficial Simchas Torah "Hashkomo" Minyan was organized by the Gradman-Hirschberg families together with a small group of the Germans. This was followed by a delicious "Kaffe und Kuchen Kiddush breakfast at the Gradman house. I was very proud

to have been asked to join this group shortly after my Bar Mizvah, because they needed me for Minyan. This group was purposely kept small not to interfere with the main Minyan, and the Hashkomo davening was timed to end shortly before 8:30 AM, when the main davening would begin. One year, a minor crisis erupted when the Hashkomo Minyan took a few minutes longer, and Mr. Rauneker - who was not in favor of the Hashkomo - walked in and was quite upset. He said: "Why are you interfering with the "Ohring" (old German for Davening) of our Shul; I am running this, not you !"

Needless, to say, a cool, calm and wise Rabbi Schwab soothed things over, as he had done on so many other occasions. I remember fondly when the Congregation engaged the services of Chazzon David Baum in 1953. Not only was Chazzon Baum an excellent Chazzon, but he was also a Talmid Chochom, and he would conduct some of the weekday Shiurim of the congregation.

I proudly remember some of the Gedolei Yisroel who graced our home and Shul in those early years. As mentioned earlier, Rav Elchonon Wasserman spent a Shabbos in our house and davened in the Shul. Arriving home from Shul on Friday evening, my father wanted to honor him by giving him his seat at the head of the table. Reb Elchonon would have nothing of it, nevertheless, my father insisted, until a compromise was reached whereby my mother set up two places side - by- side, at the head of the table. My father fondly remembered seeing Reb Elchonon peacefully asleep in his room during the night, with his two hands folded under the side of his head - he had left his door open - and compared his look of total trust and Bitochon in Hakodosh Boruch Hu, to that of my infant brother Myer, who was also peacefully asleep nearby with full trust that all of his needs would be taken care of by his parents. This is a vivid lesson in Bitochon.

Then there was the charismatic Ponivsher Rav, Rav Avraham Kahaneman, who attracted large audiences, both in our house, and in Shul, when he spoke on several occasions. He was a master story teller, especially about his recollections of the Chofetz Chaim.

There was Reb Chatzkel Pertchovitz, an emissary of the yeshivos in Yerushalayim, who would usually come in the summer. I remember him crying bitterly while saying one of the "Tzion" Kinnos on Tisha B'Av. The practice in the Shul at that time, in accordance with the German Minhag, was to divide the saying of the Tisha B'Av Kinnos among the members of the Congregation. Some members had specific Kinnos which they said every year.

There was the Mirrer Rosh Hayeshiva, Horav Eliezer Yehudah Finkel, from whom my father received Semicha. This great Gaon and Tzadik spent a week in our house. He always Davened Shacharis " K'Vosikin", in which the Shmoneh Esrei is said exactly at the moment of sunrise. In conformity with this timing, he Davened Schacharis privately in his room in our house. Otherwise, he Davened with us in Shul.

There was the brother of the Chazon Ish, Rav Shmaryohu Karelitz, who was a big Tzaddik. Of course, the famous Rav Avraham Kalmanowitz, fiery leader of Vaad Hatzalah, and later Rosh Hayeshiva of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn, was in our house and in Shul many times during the war years. I remember Mr. Nelson Lasson being

especially close and helpful to Rav Kalmanowitz in his efforts on behalf of Vaad Hatzoloh.

At the request of Rav Kalmanowitz, my father organized an appeal in Shul on behalf of Vaad Hatzoloh, in which he publicly auctioned off his own personal Sefer Torah, which he had brought from Germany, for the benefit of the cause. I remember that it was sold for \$2000, which was quite a large amount of money in 1944.

One of Baltimore's "Favorite Jewish Sons" was Rabbi Mordechai Gifter of the Telzer Yeshiva. He was a guest in our house on many occasions, and spoke in Shul many times. I remember having quite a spirited discussion with him at one Shabbos lunch concerning the topic of "Torah im Derech Eretz". My father kept wisely silent and smiled at my sophomoric efforts in attempting to argue this great philosophical issue with one of the great Torah leaders of the day. (I was about 15 years old at the time.)

Then there was the famous Agudah leader and thinker, Dr. Yitzchok Breuer, who was our guest on Pessach. My father quotes one of his insightful thoughts on the Hagadah in the forthcoming Sefer , *Insights to Prayer* .

There were many, many , more Torah and lay leaders who graced our home and Shul. These people , their greatness, and the thoughts which they expressed, contributed greatly to our education and growth in the home of my parents.

Before concluding, I will just briefly review the matter of the "Hebrew School" of Shearith Israel. The congregation had maintained a Hebrew afternoon and Sunday school for the children of its congregants, and others, for many years, long before my father came. I remember the principal, Mr. Leon Rivkin, who was also the "Bar Mitzvah " teacher for many of the boys. I fondly remember the Purim and Channukah parties and plays which the Hebrew School sponsored, which we children enjoyed very much.

Although the school had been an institution within the congregation for many years, my father did not encourage its attendance, preferring to see the boys in the all day Talmudical Academy, rather than relegating their Jewish studies to a few hours a week which, due to time constraints , could focus only on the bare essentials of Jewish education, and the majority of time was spent in public schools. Since Baltimore was fortunate in possessing one of the few Hebrew Day Schools for boys in America at that time, father encouraged people to send their sons there.

However, there were families within the congregation who were uncomfortable with TA's policy of teaching the Limudei Kodesh in Yiddish , which most of the boys did not understand. One family took their son out when he came home and said that his Rebbe had taught him that " Sus is a Ferd. " Asked by the father what is a "Ferd", the son replied, " A Sus". These families sent their children to public schools , and provided them with private tutors for their Limudei Kodesh, and/or sent them to the Hebrew school.

Needless to say, Talmudical Academy - which I ,and and my brothers, attended from kindergarten through High School - is now one of the finest Hebrew Day Schools in America.

As for the girls, as was previously mentioned, father and a few dedicated Baalei Battim organized the Bais Yaakov School for Girls, and greatly encouraged its attendance. My sister Judy was always one grade ahead of Bais Yaakov, so she had to attend public school, and had private tutors for her Jewish studies. I remember that one of these was Ina Hirschberg, daughter of Mr. Hermann Hirschberg, one of the stalwarts of the Congregation.

Incidentally, I, too, benefited from the Hirschberg family. Moshe Hirschberg, ז"ל, later to become my long time learning Chavrusah in Brooklyn, taught me my Bar Mitzvah Leining (Parshas Eikev, 1945).

With TA growing and Bais Yaakov developing, the Hebrew School closed completely about 1945. During the years of its operation, Mr. Leon Rivkin, followed later by Rabbi Joshua Levy, who were the principals of the Hebrew School, guided the school in a very vital function within the Congregation.

Although the Minhagim and procedures of the Shul were very important to my father, he was not against changes - if those changes served to enhance Torah and Mitzvos observance within the Shul. An example was the "Sunday Morning Breakfast Minyan". This was an innovation which many considered to be copied from the "Modern Orthodox" Shuls in town. However, my father encouraged its formation and utilized it as an opportunity, not only to increase Tefila Betzibbur on Sunday mornings, but also to give Torah talks on the issues of the day, or of the time of the year, in the relaxed atmosphere during breakfast and cigars in the "vestry rooms" downstairs.

One short memory before closing. On the first Shabbos after I got married, in May, 1956, I came to Shul with my brand new wife, Miriam. In the "Yeshivishe" style, I put my Tallis over my head - despite the fact that in those days, in Shearith Israel, in accordance with the German custom, the men wore hats instead of placing their Taleisim over their head. My father looked at me and said, look around you, do you see anyone here with his Tallis over his head? Why do you want to be different, and appear as if you think you are better than the "Baalei Battim"? Needless to say, I got the point, and put on my hat. Despite my father's Yeshiva education, and his great Torah knowledge, he was extremely sensitive to the feelings of his Balei Baatim and to their long held Minhagim. He recognized the circumstances in which innovations were - and were not - important to the special character of his Shul, and for the development of Yiddishkeit within it. His objectives were always "L'Shem Shomayim", and that is why he succeeded.

My wife and I moved away from Baltimore in May, 1957, a year before my father and mother left for New York. Over these years, I have come back to Baltimore many times - often accompanied by my wife and children - and I always make it my business to visit the beautiful Shul of my youth, sit in my old seat - in the front row opposite the Rabbi's chair, where I sat, together with my brothers Joseph, Myer, and Jakie, - and let my mind wander back to the days of yore, and the happy days of my youth, of which Shearith Israel played such an important part.

Moses L Schwab, Brooklyn, NY 12/10/2000