

The Synagogue Journal

1856-2006

December 8, 2006

HistoricalJournal@KaneStreet.org

Shabbat Vayishlach

Issue 49

Rabbi Israel Goldfarb

In this issue ...

Rabbi Israel Goldfarb served as the spiritual leader of this congregation for more than a third of its one hundred fifty years. Congregation Baith Israel engaged him to be their Hazzan in the summer of 1905 following their move to the Harrison Street Synagogue. Within a year, they renewed his contract as Hazzan, Rabbi and Principal of the Religious Schools. Rabbi Goldfarb's sensitive leadership guided the congregation through good times and bad: the merger of Congregation Baith Israel and Talmud Torah Anshei Emes, two World Wars, the crash and great Depression and the demographic shift away from the neighborhood.

The future leader was born December 15, 1879 in Sieniewa, Galicia, Poland, in the week following Shabbat Vayishlach. Once again, we turn to Genesis 32:25-33 and contemplate the ambiguous story of Jacob's nocturnal "wrestling match" with the mysterious, divine being. The Rabbis wonder about the identity of this nocturnal opponent: Was he Jacob's conscience? G-d? Jacob's long estranged brother, Esau? A being that signifies the past, present and future enemies of the people Israel? Jacob emerges victorious from this struggle and is renamed Israel, "For you have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome." Jacob was able to persevere in this struggle only because of his two prior maturing decades, sojourning with Laban and building his family, estate, social standing, reputation and ethical sensitivity. From the Torah's standpoint, "winning at life" involves a prolonged commitment to children, spouse, family, faith and the future of one's people.

The name "Israel" was well chosen for Israel Goldfarb. Past issues of The Synagogue Journal document the synagogue during the Goldfarb era. This week we focus more on the man: Synagogue Leader, Religious School Principal, Musician, Professor and Community Leader. The photographs, biographies and writings are intended to convey a sense of his energy and style and the reasons he was so beloved. The congregation honored him at anniversary dinners four times: in 1915, 1940, 1944 and 1956. They placed a plaque in his memory in the Sanctuary lobby. Now, a new generation at Kane Street, striving to learn about his musical legacy, presented a concert and discussion in April 2005, "Israel Goldfarb and His Progeny: The Choral Tradition at Kane Street Synagogue," and symposium in March 2006, "Keeping the Faith in Brooklyn," with musicologists who spoke about the significance of the Goldfarb songsters and the character of his melodies.

During his fifty-four-years with the Congregation, Rabbi Goldfarb worked with seventeen presidents and four shamus'. He officiated at several thousand life cycle events, conferring blessings at Births, B'nai Mitzvah, Confirmations, marriages and funerals. May his memory be a blessing.

It has been a great privilege to work with the Goldfarb family. Many thanks to Joseph Goldfarb, Henry Michelman, Belle Goldfarb Lehrman, Sarah Simon Rubinow and Ned Alterman for materials and guidance. Excerpts from conversations with Joseph and Belle about their father and the synagogue appear in Journal archives: Issue 6 - Sacred Music, Issue 7 - Harrison Street Synagogue, Issue 20 - B'nai Mitzvah, Issue 36 - Children, Issue 37 - Shabbat, Issue 38 Rosh Hashanah, Issue 39 - Yom Kippur, Issue 40 - Sukkot and Simchat Torah, Issue 44 - Jews in America.

Carol Levin, Editor

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Contents ...

Portrait

This photograph from 1916 of Rabbi Goldfarb appeared in the Sixtieth Anniversary journal in addition to the Rabbi's history of the congregation. The publication included thirteen photographs of synagogue leaders.

A Biographical Sketch

A page from the 1940 dinner souvenir book provides the Rabbi's biography.

Your Children's Jewish Education

As Principal of the congregation's Religious Schools, Rabbi Goldfarb admonished Jewish Parents, "For the sake of the future happiness of your children, do your duty. Send them to Hebrew and Sunday School." This ad appeared in the 30th Anniversary Journal, January 30, 1938.

Goldfarb Publications

The Jewish Songster Publishing Company was located at 360 Clinton Street, Brooklyn, the Goldfarb residence. Rabbi Goldfarb's brother, Samuel Eliezer Goldfarb, occupied a floor of the brownstone. Samuel was the Head of the Music Department at the Bureau of Jewish Education and synagogue Choral Director. Thelma Goldfarb, the Goldfarb's eldest daughter, taught music at PS29 and the Sunday School. The company produced a variety of works by Israel, Samuel and Thelma. This article provides a book list and titles of music included in *The Jewish Songster*, *Synagogue Melodies for the High Holy Days* and *Song & Praise for Sabbath Eve*.

Centennial Message - 1956

Rabbi Goldfarb's message for the Centennial Banquet Journal concludes with, "Chazack Ve'ematz! Be strong and of good courage! And may our planting of today reward us with a rich harvest in the years to come!"

Centennial Fundraiser

In this photograph Rabbi Goldfarb, the honoree, poses with Centennial Chairman and synagogue benefactor Herman Belth, President Oscar Hertz and Sisterhood President Miriam Ilson. The Rabbi drew many families who had moved from Downtown Brooklyn to this benefit at the Waldorf Astoria.

In Memoriam

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America included this tribute in memory of Rabbi Goldfarb at Graduation Exercises June 4, 1967. Rabbi Goldfarb graduated from Solomon Schechter's first graduating class at JTS in 1902 and spoke at his memorial service.

Israel Goldfarb, Rabbi, Composer, 'Father of Congregational Singing' is Dead at 87

Credit: The New York Times, February 14, 1967

Rabbi Goldfarb died during a newspaper strike; few people saw this obituary.

<http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=F20F1EFA3A58107B93C6A81789D85F438685F9>

The Journey of a Hebrew Melody: Rabbi Israel Goldfarb's Shalom Aleichem

This article by Rabbi Henry D. Michelman first appeared in *Rayonot*, a publication of Park Avenue Synagogue, New York.