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TITLE TRADITIONALISM, AMERICANIZATION, AND ASSIMILATION: THE STRUGGLES
OF SABADO MORAN, 1851-1897

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Traditionalism, Americanization, and Assimilation:
The Struggles of Sabato Morais, 1851-1897

by
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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

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Digest

The latter half of the nineteenth century was a period critical in the process of Jewish Americanization as well as in the growth and development of Reform Judaism. It was during this time that Dr. Sabato Morais ascended the pulpit at Mikveh Israel congregation in Philadelphia. How is it that Mikveh Israel, a traditional congregation, was able to withstand the pressures of the time period and resist the growing tendency toward Reform?

This thesis investigates the development of the rabbi as leader in the American synagogue, and specifically examines the rabbinate of Sabato Morais. His years at Mikveh Israel, 1851-1897, were fraught with changes both internal and external to Jewish life in America. The Reform Movement made tremendous inroads and gained influence during those years, aided by waves of immigration; moreover, life in America presented a series of religious, economic, and social challenges to the newly arrived. The influx of East European Jews exacerbated the tensions. Morais and his predecessor, Isaac Leeser, led the fight to waylay Reform, and they issued a call to return to a more traditional way of life.

The opening chapter offers a brief overview of the early years of congregational life at Mikveh Israel. Within a short time after their formal organization in 1782, the congregation found itself struggling for financial survival, a struggle that would be repeated several times during

Morais' tenure there. The first chapter also examines the contributions of Isaac Leeser to the Americanization process of the congregation.

The next chapters address Morais' initial period of adjustment to his role in the congregation. He was not a complacent man, and he chafed under the restrictions that the adjunta attempted to impose on his sermon content and frequency. He spoke out against the Mortara case in 1858, and against slavery during the Civil War years. In both instances he clashed with the adjunta. He continually pushed the boundaries of his position at the congregation. Eventually the adjunta began to appreciate Morais' efforts, and they supported him in his efforts to maintain traditionalism at Mikveh Israel.

Morais' proudest achievement was the establishment of The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in 1886. Throughout the course of his forty-six years with Mikveh Israel congregation, he had argued unceasingly against the introduction of reforms. During the 1880's and 1890's especially, however, he realized that in order to ensure his congregation's future, he would have to allow some changes to be made.

In addition, this thesis examines the changes introduced at Mikveh Israel congregation in relation to the other significant Philadelphia congregations, Rodeph Shalom and Keneseth Israel. Mikveh Israel was defined in part by the actions of these other institutions. Morais judiciously

introduced changes based upon what he saw successfully implemented in the Reform congregations. The main stipulation Morais made for his own congregation was that their activities had to uphold the practices and beliefs of traditional Judaism.

Morais drew his motivation from the desire to ensure the future of traditionalism in American Judaism. Mikveh Israel congregation remained traditional due largely to his diligence, but a combination of rabbinic and lay leadership defined the course of the congregation's history.

DEDICATION

to my Grandparents

Bernard Jacob and Lillian Sher Alpers ,

and

Reuben Levi and Ethel Miriam Lurie

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Introduction

The relationship between rabbi and laity has helped define the course of American Jewish history. The issue of congregational leadership became increasingly important during the nineteenth century as American Judaism was buffeted by the rise of reform, the influx of immigrants, and the attraction of assimilation. In the midst of these pressures, Dr. Sabato Morais arrived at Mikveh Israel congregation in Philadelphia, where he served from 1851-1897. During those years, he established himself as a strong leader in the congregation and in the broader Jewish community. The process he went through to gain the respect and admiration of the Mikveh Israel adjuncta was long and, in the beginning, somewhat controversial.

Kahal Kadosh Mikveh Israel was formally established in Philadelphia in 1782 after over forty years of informally organized worship. Prior to Morais' arrival in 1851, the congregation had employed a series of hazanim to facilitate their worship. Those men were sometimes aided and sometimes hindered by the lay leadership and its demands. Sabato Morais was hired as the hazan even though he was an ordained rabbi. The adjuncta at Mikveh Israel insisted upon exercising absolute control over their hazan, but Morais refused to acquiesce to all of their demands.

As one of the oldest congregations in America, Mikveh Israel was thoroughly Americanized by the time of Morais'

arrival. Almost immediately, he found himself in the midst of pressures to reform the worship service and the liturgy as well as the ritual practices of traditional Judaism. The adjuncta identified the congregation as traditional, but Morais criticized both the leaders and the members for taking unacceptable liberties in their religious observances. His tenure with the congregation was highlighted by the conflicts and tensions over reforms.

Morais remained steadfast in his traditionalism despite the fluctuating nature of American Judaism. He played a critical role in the renaissance of traditional Judaism in America, and gained national repute as a preacher and teacher. The Jewish Theological Seminary grew out of his dedication and commitment to provide America with traditional rabbis.

In order to fully appreciate the contributions made by Sabato Morais, it is necessary to examine his role in the congregation and in the broader community. What changes did the congregation want, and was he willing to implement or introduce them into the worship service? How were the general tendencies to reform dealt with by Morais and by the congregation? How did his relationship with the laity change over the years as a result of the choices he made?

Morais and Mikveh Israel congregation did not exist in an historical vacuum, so this thesis examines their relationship and their historical development generally in

the context of broader American Jewish history and particularly in response to Philadelphia's Jewish activity.

Chapter 1: 1740-1850

Mikveh Israel, The Early Years

Although there are records of Jews living in and around the Philadelphia area during the seventeenth century, it was not until the eighteenth century that a foundation for any communal infrastructure was laid. In 1740, Nathan Levy was granted permission to purchase land for a family burial plot following the death of one of his children. Subsequently, the land served as a cemetery for the entire Philadelphia Jewish community.¹ Prior to that death, there had not been any call for organized or institutionally formalized Jewish religious activity in Philadelphia. Whatever worship there was took place in private homes, frequently under "minimum minyan standards."²

It should be stressed that although this group of Jews joined together for worship, and were probably augmented on special occasions and high holidays by their co-religionists from Lancaster and travellers and solitary Jews from other towns nearby, they did not establish a congregation until some decades later. The early Philadelphia minyan had no name, no rules or constitution, and no officers or clerical leader."³

¹Eli Faber, A Time For Planting: The First Migration, 1654-1820 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 39.

²Edwin Wolf 2nd and Maxwell Whiteman, The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957) 41, and Faber, 39.

³Wolf and Whiteman, 32.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Philadelphia Jewish population had increased enough through immigration, marriages, and births that talk began in 1761 about constructing a synagogue.⁴ For the High Holy Day services of that same year, the Philadelphia community received a Sefer Torah on indefinite loan from Congregation Shearith Israel in New York.⁵ "The elements of an organized community began to appear during the 1760s, when the emerging congregation employed a caretaker, acquired additional land for the cemetery, and maintained a fund for those in need. In 1771 worship finally began in rented quarters."⁶ The early construction involved building the organization itself, because a congregation required the commitment of its members before thoughts of constructing an actual edifice could be entertained.

Throughout this early period in Philadelphia's Jewish history and before there was any formal community organization to draw individuals in for worship and fellowship, there were already distinct signs among the city's Jews that the political and religious freedom of the American lifestyle had been rapidly internalized. Whereas in their countries of origin, the Jews were frequently isolated in socially separate circles from the rest of the population, they were free to move about in America. This freedom

⁴Ibid., 41.

⁵Ibid., 41-42.

⁶Faber, 40.

affected their entire sense of self and of belonging, and they began to express themselves as American Jews, working in the general society and relegating religion to special occasions.

In the traditional community an all-pervasive pattern of Jewish thought, action, outlook, and association had been punctuated by occasional excursions into the general society primarily in pursuit of economic ends. In the newly developing American-Jewish mode, a distinctively American style of thought, action, outlook, and association was punctuated by occasional excursions to the synagogue for the performance of increasingly attenuated ceremonial functions.⁷

During the period of time encompassing the American Revolution, this was the developing pattern of life for Jews living in Philadelphia. There were still restrictions on their participation in the body politic, because at that time "Jews could not participate in the political life of the province, nor were they allowed to hold office, for the Christian test oath still had to be sworn to."⁸ These restrictions were eventually lifted after consistent and tenacious efforts on the part of American Jewish religious and lay leaders alike.

For Philadelphia's Jews, the American Revolution represented the catalyst that led to the formalization and establishment of Mikveh Israel as an organized body and

⁷Leon A. Jick, The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870 (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 1976) 7.

⁸Wolf and Whiteman, 77.

congregation. When the British occupied New York, many of that city's Jews fled to Philadelphia, bringing with them ritual objects. Among those who fled New York was Gershom Mendes Seixas, the hazan of Shearith Israel. He arrived in Philadelphia in June, 1780, and provided the city with religious leadership. In addition, Philadelphia's Jewish population swelled from the influx of Jewish refugees from all of the occupied colonies. After limping along for a century, Philadelphia's Jews were now in a position to benefit from the wisdom and experience of the many of America's most prominent Jewish citizens:⁹ "...[I]t was the experienced laymen from the other states who stimulated the reorganization of the congregation and the construction of the first synagogue building."¹⁰

On March 17, 1782, a memorandum was signed by five of America's leading Jewish citizens, including Hayman Levy and Jonas Phillips of New York, and Barnard Gratz, Benjamin Seixas, and Simon Nathan of Philadelphia.¹¹ In this memorandum these men named themselves the adjunta, or board of managers of "a Congregation to be known and distinguished by the name of Mikve Israel in the City of Philadelphia." The adjunta immediately authorized the purchase of a lot on Sterling Alley, a location within sight of the congregation's rented home on Cherry Alley.¹²

⁹Wolf and Whiteman, 114-115.

¹⁰Ibid., 114.

¹¹Ibid., 51, 62-63, 92-93.

¹²Ibid., 115.

Based upon their previous experience with the administrative aspects of Shearith Israel, the leaders from New York convened a meeting to formalize the creation of the organization known as Mikveh Israel. This meeting was held on March 24, 1782, and presided over by Isaac Moses. At the meeting it was pointed out that "...the congregation had no established rules; their officers had no legal powers; and their determinations were not binding on the members."¹³ To rectify this situation, a resolution was offered that those present at the meeting agree "'That in order to promote our Holy Religion, and Establish a Proper Congregation in this City, 'they form themselves into a congregation, and bind themselves 'One to the other that we will assist if required, to form a Constitution, & rules for the good Government of the Congregation, and strictly abide by the same.' "¹⁴

The formalities dispensed with, the men once again turned their attention to the issue of securing a synagogue building. Their plans to build on the Sterling Alley site, however, immediately ran into difficulty.¹⁵ The piece of land the nascent congregation had purchased "adjoined that of the Reformed German Congregation and, when notice of the Jews' plans came to its attention, objection was raised by the German church on the ground that a synagogue next door would

¹³Ibid., 115.

¹⁴Minute Book of Mikveh Israel, March 24, 1782, quoted in Wolf and Whiteman, 115.

¹⁵Wolf and Whiteman, 115-117.

"disturb" them."¹⁶ Obviously there were elements of American society that were not completely reconciled to Jewish equality.

All attempts by the congregation to communicate with the German church went unacknowledged. While that situation remained at a stalemate, the congregation was offered another site around the corner from the original one. The necessary funds, £300, were raised by auctioning off the cornerstones and the doorposts, and on June 19, 1782, the cornerstones were laid for the first synagogue in Philadelphia. A few months later, on September 13, 1782, the synagogue was dedicated with a solemn service that included prayers for the government of the United States of America.¹⁷

Shortly after the synagogue was dedicated, however, the congregation faced its first crisis. When the Revolutionary War ended in 1783, the British evacuated the cities they had occupied, and the Jews who had come to Philadelphia as refugees were free to return to their homes. Throughout the first few years of Mikveh Israel's existence, its membership roster dwindled as most of the men who had influenced its creation and financially supported the congregation returned to New York, Charleston, and Savannah. Hazan Gershom Mendes Seixas was recalled to his post at Shearith Israel in New York, and Mikveh Israel found itself short of funds and

¹⁶Minute Book of Mikveh Israel, April 25, 1782, in Wolf and Whiteman, 117.

¹⁷Wolf and Whiteman, 117-118.

leadership. Over the course of the next decade, Mikveh Israel struggled to overcome these deficits, flirting with bankruptcy on more than one occasion as it attempted to recognize and meet the needs of the Jewish population in Philadelphia.¹⁸

In the area of leadership, there were several men who stepped forward to fill the void left by Hazan Seixas' departure, the most notable of whom was Manuel Josephson. Josephson was reportedly fluent in both English and Hebrew, and he possessed a number of rabbinic texts, therefore he was accorded the respect of a leader by the community. Moreover, he owned the only shofar in Philadelphia. He offered to serve as a resource to the fledgling American Jewish community as well as a conduit through which questions might be sent to Europe for a rabbinic ruling. In 1785 the Mikveh Israel congregation elected Josephson parnas, a position he held for five years. His reputation was far-reaching enough that the congregation in Newport, Rhode Island addressed a series of questions to him regarding ritual issues. Josephson's response indicated "...the first expression of an American mode of service, based upon age-old laws, traditions and interpretations, but adapted to circumstances."¹⁹ Josephson was strict in his observance, and his influence undoubtedly played a significant role in the continued existence of the congregation.

¹⁸Ibid., 121-139.

¹⁹Ibid., 131-133.

The congregation endured hardship throughout the 1780s, but the records for those years are incomplete, as though it was too painful for the adjunta to immortalize the financial strife in their minute book, and so there is an unexplained gap in the minutes between September 4, 1785 and June 28, 1789.²⁰ Despite these problems, the congregation did not lose sight of its responsibilities to the greater Jewish community.

One of the ways a Jewish community expressed itself as such was through the giving of charity. The Jews of Philadelphia were no different, and despite their financial woes, they were determined to offer what assistance they could to the stranger and the needy among them.

There always had been tzedaka...which used freewill offerings for the relief of the poor; but in 1783 the need was felt for a specialized branch of the fund. As a result the Ezrath Orechim, or Society for Destitute Strangers--the first Philadelphia Jewish charitable organization, and the earliest one in America whose records have survived--was created....²¹

In addition to their efforts to help other Jews in need, the members of the congregation began to make their own demands for services. Following Gershom Mendes Seixas' return to New York, Mikveh Israel hired the gentleman who had filled Seixas' post during his years in Philadelphia. The

²⁰Ibid., 142-143.

²¹Ibid., 136.

congregation seized the opportunity to do so because they needed the skills Jacob Raphael Cohen had to offer. He was a mohel as well as a hazan and he was willing to teach their children.²² In order to satisfy the members and as a draw for new members, in 1786 Mikveh Israel added a mikveh and a small school building to the already existing synagogal structure.²³ The increased financial burden incurred by the new construction completely drained the congregation's already meager treasury. Moreover, in 1788, Hazan Cohen was paid on a quarterly basis from the subscriptions and membership fees, and those funds had to be raised in advance in order to guarantee his continued services, so the congregation had no reserves to which they could turn.²⁴

The measures taken by Mikveh Israel to ameliorate their financial situation indicated their self-identification as American Jews. As Americans, they possessed the same rights as their neighbors; the rights stipulated in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. In order to continue the life of the congregation and to save it from bankruptcy, the hazan and members of the adjunta and the congregation at large called upon the leading citizens of Philadelphia. These visits were made in order to ask for help from these non-Jewish men, and the representatives of Mikveh Israel carried with them a letter attesting to the

²²Ibid., 124.

²³Ibid., 141.

²⁴Ibid., 124, 142.

same. The letter described the historical course the congregation had taken to that point, indicating the hardship incurred when the end of the war caused the withdrawal of the majority of their financial support as the war refugees returned to their homes. The letter asserted the synagogue would have to be sold to pay off the loan that was well overdue, unless the gentlemen whom they were "earnestly soliciting" could offer some assistance, thereby relieving the congregation's financial burden. As an added incentive to would-be donors, it was noted that "The subscription paper, will be enrolled, in the Archives of their Congregation, that their Posterity may know, & gratefully remember the liberal Supporters of their religious Society."²⁵ Among those Philadelphians who heeded the call for help was Benjamin Franklin, whose signature and donation of £5 headed the list which was indeed preserved.

This crisis demonstrated that the experience with the German Reformed Church was not an indication of every Philadelphian's attitude toward the Jewish congregation. But while the money raised provided approximately half of the total required, it was not enough to satisfy the outstanding debts. In 1790 Mikveh Israel petitioned the legislature for permission to hold a lottery to pay off its debt. Permission

²⁵Manuscript of Subscription List, April 30, 1788, Mikveh Israel Archives, in Wolf and Whiteman, 143.

was granted, and by the fall of that year, Mikveh Israel had escaped its financial burden.²⁶

During Rosh Hashanah services, 1792, a resolution was read to inform all the Jews in attendance of decisions which had been made by the adjunta of Mikveh Israel. As before, the greatest concerns of the congregation were financial in nature, and so the adjunta made a decision with regard to Jews who received the benefit of the congregation's services without making any sort of free-will offering. Those individuals

shall be deemed as not belonging to our society either in public or private nor shall they be noticed in any concerns peculiar to the Rites and Ceremonies thereof on any occasion whatever; and in case of Death of themselves or any of their family residing with their dwelling--they shall not be entitled to the aid or attendance usual on such occasions from any Person belonging to the congregation.²⁷

This resolution does not specify whether or not such individuals could be buried in the congregation's cemetery, but the prevailing sentiment of helping other Jews in need most likely precluded the need for membership in the event of a death. If the early practices of the adjunta were consistent with those during the years 1851-1880, a sliding fee scale was used whenever a request was made to bury a non-

²⁶Wolf and Whiteman, 144-145.

²⁷Minute Book of Mikveh Israel, September 3, 1792, quoted in Wolf and Whiteman, 224.

member in the Mikveh Israel cemetery.²⁸ This was a practice that was unregulated by any by-laws, and the arbitrariness that resulted from the adjunta's decision led many of Philadelphia's Jews away from the synagogue, the Sabbath, and each other. Intermarriage rates increased, and even the threat of expulsion from the congregation could not curb the practice.²⁹

The closing years of the eighteenth century brought change to the Philadelphia Jewish community. There had not been a Sephardic majority in Mikveh Israel since its earliest days, yet they followed the Sephardic rite that had been initially used by Nathan Levy and formalized by Gershom Mendes Seixas. The 1790's saw numerous European immigrants arriving in Philadelphia, nearly all of them from Germany, Poland, and Holland. After a few years of trying to fit in with the Spanish-Portuguese rite, some of them came together in 1795 to form an Ashkenazic minyan that in 1802 was formally organized into Rodeph Shalom.³⁰

...there appear to have been few if any conflicts arising out of the shift of the preponderance of Jewry in America from those of Sephardic origin to those of Germanic origin. The Central European Jews seem to have joined the Sephardic congregations, to have been fully accepted, and to have accepted the

²⁸Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, American Jewish Archives (AJA), 1851-1880.

²⁹Wolf and Whiteman, 224.

³⁰Ibid., 225, and Edward Davis, The History of Rodeph Shalom Congregation, Philadelphia, 1802-1926 (Philadelphia: Edward Stern & Co., Inc., 1926) 12.

liturgical practices of the Sephardic group. At some time, as the German Jews began to outnumber their Sephardic co-religionists, changes occurred, but these changes appear to have occurred as an evolution rather than as a resolution of conflict.³¹

Such was apparently the case with the foundation of Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia. It was a natural outgrowth of the desire of these immigrants to pray in accordance with the German, Ashkenazi minhag. In a sanctuary of their own, they could worship using a familiar prayerbook and familiar melodies.

The formalization of Rodeph Shalom as a congregation did not detract overmuch from Mikveh Israel. Mikveh Israel was already a congregation composed largely of Ashkenazic families, and there seems to have been cooperation between the two groups in terms of Mikveh Israel sharing the services of its mohel and shochet.³² Moreover, a fair percentage of men held membership in both synagogues in order to support the two minhagim. Because of the willingness to share resources between the two congregations, which demonstrated the sense of traditionalism in both, there is little to indicate that the founding of Rodeph Shalom was for any other reason than minhag.

The next twenty years brought little formal change to the Philadelphia Jewish community. It continued to grow,

³¹Manheim S. Shapiro, "The Social Tradition of the American Jew," Traditions of the American Jew, ed. Stanley M. Wagner (Denver: Center for Judaic Studies, University of Denver. New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1977) 34.

³²Wolf and Whiteman, 227.

however, to the extent that by 1822, Mikveh Israel had outgrown its first building and was in the process of raising funds to build a new, larger structure. The decision was made to demolish the existing synagogue and rebuild on the same site. In September of 1822 the cornerstone of the new synagogue building for Mikveh Israel was laid. The plans for the building followed an Egyptian motif, and it took two years to complete, during which time the congregation worshipped in the home of the part-time hazan, Jacob Bensadon.

When it was completed in the autumn of 1824, plans were made for a formal, dignified installation service for Abraham Isaac Keys, the new minister, to be combined with the dedication service for the new building. A mixed choir was trained to sing at the occasion, the first time such an event had occurred at Mikveh Israel. Because the services were celebratory in nature, that is, they did not include traditional liturgy and worship, it was not inappropriate for the choir to perform. The fact that the choir was mixed indicates that the congregational leaders and the planners of the festivities may have seen a mixed choir at a similar celebration, perhaps related to one of the Philadelphia churches. The mere fact that a mixed choir performed is significant in that it represents a complete departure from traditional ways, which included the separation of men and women in the synagogue and the muting of female voices in worship. As Jewish immigrants made the adjustment to life in

America, the women sacrificed just as much as the men had in leaving everything that was familiar in favor of the promise of wealth and freedom. Perhaps the mixed choir was in recognition of the efforts made by the women to maintain Jewish traditions under the difficult circumstances of colonial America.

The hazan whose arrival had excited the community, Abraham Israel Keys, died in October, 1828, after just four years with Mikveh Israel. Within a year, the congregation had found a new hazan. Isaac Leiser was appointed to the position in time for Rosh Hashanah, 1829.³³ Leiser was a strong proponent of traditionalism, but he was amenable to changes that he perceived not to violate the Mosaic law. It was this philosophy that led him, over his congregation's objections, to begin preaching in English in 1831. This was but one of the significant contributions he made to American Judaism.³⁴

Isaac Leiser influenced American Jewish development from the 1830's through the 1860's. It was Leiser who published the first nationally distributed and read Jewish periodical, The Occident. Aided by the cooperation of his community, he worked tirelessly to develop and promote Jewish education for every level, from the Hebrew Sunday School Society to the

³³Ibid., 372.

³⁴Malcolm H. Stern, "National Leaders of Their Time: Philadelphia's Reform Rabbis," Jewish Life in Philadelphia 1830-1940, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia: ISHI Publications, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1983) 179.

first American Jewish seminary, Maimonides College. He was the first to present a plan designed to unite all the American Jewish congregations into one national body, and his philanthropic and social justice-oriented activities helped develop such organizations as the Hebrew Education Society, the Jewish Hospital in Philadelphia, and the first Jewish Publication Society of America. Isaac Leeser remained outstanding as the dynamic and magnetic pole around which American Judaism revolved for thirty years. His leadership capabilities and his vision as well as his determination brought his community together and molded Mikveh Israel into the leading American congregation of the first half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, his absolute refusal to compromise on issues of reforming ritual practices to better fit the American lifestyle enabled Mikveh Israel to maintain its reputation and its minhag of the Spanish-Portuguese rite.³⁵ In 1850 Leeser resigned under pressure from the adjunta as minister/hazan at Mikveh Israel. His successor was Sabato Morais, a man who was to guide the congregation for almost fifty years.

Following its tenuous beginnings, Mikveh Israel quickly established a precedent of having a hazan serve the congregation under the authority of the parnas and the adjunta. The immediate desire for strong leaders who possessed religious knowledge and ritual expertise led the

³⁵Wolf and Whiteman, 372-373.

congregation to hire men who could guide them in worship and mediate their conflicts.

In the mid-nineteenth century, at a time when American Judaism was facing attrition due to assimilation and the lure of secular society, both Isaac Leeser and Sabato Morais established themselves as strong, visionary leaders. Their dedication to traditional Judaism ensured the congregation's survival, and their contributions to the broader Jewish community raised the standing of the congregation on a national level to one of great respect.

Leeser, however, was unable to operate within the constraints of his contract, and his unwillingness to conform to the standards set by the parnas and the adjunta led to his resignation. Morais fulfilled his contractual obligations, and over the years his position of leadership developed into one of national proportions. Sabato Morais was the champion of traditional Judaism in America. During his years at Mikveh Israel he fought continuously against complete assimilation. He strove to educate his congregants and instill in them a sense of pride and participation in, and commitment to their Judaism. When he died he left behind the legacy of a complete community rabbi. He had set the standard for future rabbis to meet, and the work he began continues at the Jewish Theological Seminary and in the numerous charitable organizations he founded or inspired. Morais built on the foundations that had been laid for him by Isaac Leeser, moving back and forth between congregation and

community as he taught his congregants to live in the complementary worlds of traditional Judaism and American society.

Chapter 2: 1851-1865

Morais and Mikveh Israel: The Struggle for Leadership

Isaac Leeser's resignation did not come as a complete surprise to the congregation. Over the course of his twenty-one years of service to Mikveh Israel, Leeser had angered the adjunta on more than one occasion by writing editorials and articles in his journal, The Occident, which were considered inaccurate or inappropriate by the members of the board of the congregation. He apparently had been involved in a long running battle with the adjunta over what his duties and rights entailed. Following his resignation, he wrote an article in The Occident that related some of his complaints. He quoted the terms of his contract from 1841, in which he was retained to "...officiate as Hazan or reader..." for a period of ten years. Although he signed the contract, Leeser chafed under its limitations. In the article, which was the same one in which he announced the election of Sabato Morais as his successor, Leeser offered his opinion regarding the aforementioned contract. He made the point that "...the person who signs it has no claim to be called the minister of the congregation; ...no right to teach, exhort, or admonish the people; he is merely to read the service...marry and bury only by order of Parnass or Adjunta, and obey all lawful orders of the Parnass...."¹ Clearly, Leeser believed there

¹Isaac Leeser, "The Election of Hazan at Philadelphia," The Occident Vol. IX (1851): 108

was a problem with the leadership of the congregation because he was not considered a part of the leadership team. He felt that the minister of the congregation should exercise no small amount of control over his own actions and duties. "I do insist that a man worthy to be minister...of any body of people does himself an injustice by voluntarily assuming an obligation which exposes him to arbitrary rule."² It was not proper that the individual responsible for leading the congregation in prayer be subject to the whims of men less educated Jewishly than he. Leeser continued to argue with the board, even after his resignation. He was passionate in his contention that it was beneath the dignity of a Jewish minister to be forced to sign a paper controlling his actions and activities.³

Leeser had resigned his position under a cloud of controversy, yet there remained a number of board members who still desired his services as hazan. Consequently, the election of a new hazan was extended to six ballots before Sabato Morais received a sufficient number of votes to be declared elected.⁴ It is noteworthy that the wording of Morais' contract was virtually identical to that which Leeser had signed with one significant exception: "...that he will follow no business in addition to his calling but that of

²Ibid., 109.

³Ibid., 106-107.

⁴Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia PA--
 Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, (AJA), April 13, 1851.

Teacher or Lecturer...."⁵ Leiser's arguments with the adjunta had resulted in a change, for the congregation's dissatisfaction with the far-flung activities he had engaged in found expression in this attempt to limit the sphere of their next minister to the congregation. Sabato Morais was to spend the rest of his life testing those limits and expanding them.

Sabato Morais was born in Leghorn, Italy on April 13, 1823. As a youth in Italy he enjoyed the benefits of a complete education in subjects both secular and religious. He attended the University of Pisa and received private ordination as a rabbi in 1845. His sense of patriotism was inherited from his father, who was imprisoned for his political views and support of republicanism in Italy. Morais' fervent belief in a republican system of government as well as unity in government was to be a source of conflict with the adjunta of Mikveh Israel.

Morais came to America by way of England, where he served as Master of Hebrew in the Orphans' School connected with the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue, Sha'ar HaShamayim, in London. It was during his time in London that he mastered the English language, and when he learned of the open position at Mikveh Israel, he was persuaded to apply.⁶

⁵Ibid., April 16, 1851.

⁶Max S. Nussenbaum, "Champion of Orthodox Judaism: A Biography of the Reverend Sabato Morais, LL. D." (New York: D.H.L., Yeshiva University, 1964), 5-11.

One of Morais' primary concerns upon his arrival in America and his introduction to the congregation was the prevailing tendency of the congregants to assimilate into the general society, and in the process lose their religious identity and devotion. On Shabbat Teshuvah of his first year in Philadelphia, he lashed out against such behavior in a sermon that was circulated nationally when it was published in Leeser's The Occident:

Every day we hear his [God's] ...name profanely mentioned; continually we postpone his sacred directions to our own caprices...Tell me, do we evince our gratitude for his manifold wonders on our behalf...? We, who to gratify our animal appetites indulge in forbidden viands; we who under the specious plea of engrossing business refuse to array ourselves with the Tephilin;...we, who would not fasten the scroll of the law to the door post...lest the strangers perceive that we are not of them....⁷

Morais emphasized that all of these religious acts, so deeply engrained in the life of a traditional, observant Jew, were not an end in and of themselves but were a means by which the Jews linked themselves with God. In the neglect of these observances, Morais perceived a decline in the quality of American Judaism, which he accepted the responsibility to try and reverse. His initial tone with the congregation was one of chastisement as he attempted to induce his congregants to commit themselves anew to their professed religion. The

⁷Sabato Morais, "A Few Words on Penitence," delivered at Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia, Oct. 4, 1851, The Occident, Vol. IX (1851) 447-448.

fight against assimilation led by Morais was described by Trude Weiss-Rosmarin in an article examining the development of cultural traditions in American Jewish history:

There are two types of assimilation--assimilation *from* the environment, and assimilation *to* the environment. While the latter results in denial of selfhood and thus leads to extinction, assimilation *from* the environment is enriching. For example, linguistic assimilation *from* the host civilization provided the impetus...for secondary Jewish languages-- [like] Yiddish, [and] Ladino....⁸

Morais wanted to see assimilation from American society so that it would be possible for his congregants to be both Jewish and American without having to choose between the two. He did not believe that these two identities had to be mutually exclusive.

The misconception that one could not be Jewish and American was a prominent theme of Morais' sermons during his early years at Mikveh Israel, and it came to be one of his deepest and enduring passions. In a sermon delivered in the fall of 1852, Morais argued that it was possible to be an observant Jew and an American simultaneously: "...with the spangled banner of liberty in one hand, and the law of Horeb in the other, we will continue faithful citizens of this glorious republic, and constant adorers of the living God."⁹

⁸Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, "The Cultural Tradition of the American Jew," Traditions of the American Jew, ed. Stanley M. Wagner (Denver: Center for Judaic Studies, University of Denver, New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1977) 3.

⁹Sabato Morais, Sermon delivered at Mikveh Israel (Philadelphia, Nov. 25, 1852) Small Collections, AJA.

He was passionate in his assertion that liberty and religion were not mutually exclusive concepts. Morais reminded his congregation of the numerous battles that had been fought in Jewish history for the same rights they now enjoyed as Americans. Jewish lives had not been sacrificed in order to achieve those rights in America. It did not follow logically that the relative ease with which their rights were acquired meant that American Jews should discard their practices and traditions. In a land where Jews lived freely and worked side by side with adherents to Christianity, the desire to blend in with secular society was strong. Morais saw that his congregants wanted to look like their Christian neighbors. He understood that the wish to conform extended to a desire within the congregation to institute changes in the traditional worship service to make it appear more like the worship of their neighbors.

In this sermon from 1852, he was fighting both assimilation and the swelling tide of reform in American Jewry. His perception was that the chronic lack of Jewish education and familial reinforcement of Jewish traditions and practices in American Jewish homes were in large part responsible for the fraying fabric of traditional Judaism in America. In the spirit of his role as teacher and lecturer, Morais expressed criticism of the congregation:

Why this inordinate desire of reform, which threatens to sever the bonds of union which knit together the seed of Jacob? Why this frenzy for imitation in our

worship; as if our religion needed being arrayed in the garments of the Gentiles, to elicit respect and admiration? Do you really wish to know whence this deplorable evil emanates? I will tell you--from a defective education.¹⁰

Morais suggested that an effective educational system could sustain a vital American Judaism. His concern was that even with the best education involving "...thorough knowledge of Holy Writ...our post-biblical history, and the lives of our teachers..." the future of traditional Judaism in America was not guaranteed. If Jewish children still turned their backs on their religious traditions and observance, there was little to do other than mourn their indifference and only then consider the implementation of reforms in order to bring them back to Judaism.¹¹

Soon after his arrival in America, Morais recognized that American Judaism, although familiar, differed significantly from what he had grown up practicing. In his study of religious reforms among German Jews in America between 1840 and 1855, Leon Jick has noted that:

In attempting to retain links with the old ways while rapidly integrating themselves into the new society, they developed a pattern of pragmatic pruning in which the balance between continuity and change was continually readjusted.¹²

This willingness to adjust the service at will, coupled with a distinct lack of strong rabbinic leadership led to a marked

¹⁰Ibid., 8.

¹¹Ibid., 9.

¹²Jick, 95.

reduction in synagogue attendance and Jewish education.¹³ Morais was critical of the parents in the congregation for pursuing exclusively secular educations for their children. He objected to leaving religious education to the passage of years, and he criticized the parental belief that "time and age will teach it to them."¹⁴ This mistaken belief may have developed out of what Jick calls an inability on the parents' part to "communicate their visceral affection for the old forms to a new generation that had no memories of the fullness and warmth of the tradition."¹⁵

Perhaps Morais was already beginning to entertain thoughts of expanding the role of Jewish education to include reaching out to Jewish youth through social means rather than along strictly religious avenues. While Morais recognized the value of a secular education for American Jewish children to ensure their acceptance into the general society, he expressed deep and valid concern that this quest for a secular education and acceptance came too often at the cost of religious identity. His criticism of the American-Jewish lifestyle was not limited to education alone. He remained steadfast in his refusal to reform the service.

Morais employed a note of sarcasm in his declamation against change in the service. Aside from the requests for a choir of female voices with an organ to accompany them in

¹³Ibid., 148-149.

¹⁴Sabato Morais, Sermon delivered at Mikveh Israel (Philadelphia, Nov. 25, 1852) Small Collections, AJA, 8-9.

¹⁵Jick, 150.

order to draw more people into the service, he cynically characterized the additional desires of those who sought reform:

...this does not suffice: our prayers are unintelligible to the audience--we will recite them in our vernacular tongue; they engross too much of our time--we will abbreviate them; besides, this section bears not translation--it would jar upon our fastidious ears; this other contradicts certain prevailing notions...; till, of that religion which our ancestors maintained intact through fire and rack, there remains but a shadow.¹⁶

It is apparent from the tone of his words that Morais was absolutely opposed to removing Hebrew from the service as well as altering a manner of worship that had existed for centuries. His tone also constituted a challenge to the congregation and its leadership to prove him wrong. He believed that through reforms in Jewish education and not in Judaism itself, the propensities for reform and assimilation in his congregation could be curbed and perhaps even reversed.

His desire was for an American Jewry that embraced the best of America and the best of traditional Judaism. His vision was of "...a new generation...proud of their names as citizens of this glorious American republic, but still more proud of professing a religion that proclaims liberty,

¹⁶Sabato Morais, Sermon delivered at Mikveh Israel (Philadelphia, Nov. 25, 1852) Small Collections, AJA, 9.

equality, and fraternity."¹⁷ To that end, he built upon the foundation that had been established by Rebecca Gratz and Isaac Leeser in 1838 when they founded the first Jewish Sunday school in America. The establishment of Jewish institutions of learning in America remained a consistent and dominant theme throughout his career. He made it a point to be at the opening of every Jewish educational institution throughout his service in Philadelphia. He served on numerous educational boards and was intimately involved in the founding and operation of the Jewish Theological Seminary and Gratz College in his later years.

Morais never missed an opportunity to educate his congregation. Every public appearance was a chance to impart some Jewish value, and every time he participated in the opening of another educational institution his own goals came another step closer to realization. When he addressed the Board of Managers of the Jewish Foster Home in Philadelphia on February 12, 1856, he espoused the highest level of tzedakah from Maimonides' eight steps when he encouraged those present not simply to give their money without any consideration for the manner of its distribution. He saw danger in giving money to the poor without also providing a means of lifting them out of their state of destitution. He feared they would become reliant upon the generosity of the wealthy, and he sought to correct what he felt was an

¹⁷Ibid., 10.

egregious oversight: "To avert an issue so opposite to our designs and endeavors, we have but one means; ...the rearing of institutions that should...supply the indigent with work, at a moderate emolument...."¹⁸ He believed that the building of such institutions would lead to a significant reduction in the number of charity cases receiving assistance at that time. He refused to function merely as the voice of conscience for his community. He was a man of action who sought to inspire others in the same direction. Indeed it was Morais himself who had called for the establishment of the Foster Home, and his community had responded.

Morais used his pulpit as a platform for his deep convictions concerning relevant political and social issues from which he could inspire his congregants to action. His habit of using the pulpit as a vehicle to garner response to issues of social action backfired on him more than once, and it placed him in an adversarial position with the adjunta. The first time this happened was in 1858 and it involved Morais' response to the American government's reaction to the Edgar Mortara case.

Edgar Mortara was a young Jewish boy in Italy who had been secretly baptized by his Catholic nurse. When the Church discovered that he had been baptized, he was forcibly removed from his parents' home to be raised within the Church. At the behest of Sir Moses Montefiore and at the

¹⁸ Sabato Morais, "To the Board of Managers of the Jewish Foster Home," (Philadelphia, Feb. 12, 1856) The Occident, Vol. XIII (1856) 612.

urging of Morais, the adjunta of Mikveh Israel passed the following resolution: "Resolved that this Board through the Parnass enter into a correspondence with the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the U.S. requesting the friendly Co-operation of our government towards the restoration of said child to his parents."¹⁹ Montefiore's message had been sent to all of the Jewish congregations in America, and they were quick to respond. Naomi Cohen writes that "[T]he request electrified press and pulpit, and Jews throughout the land took up the fight. From Boston to New Orleans, from New York to San Fransisco, they organized local protest meeting, formulated resolutions, and signed petitions."²⁰ Despite the national Jewish community's unified efforts, their requests were denied. The U. S. President declined to intervene with the actions of the Italian Church thereby maintaining consistency with the American policy of non-interference with the internal affairs of a foreign government. Morais was outraged. Rather than express his displeasure by means of a sermon, he chose to let his silence speak for him. After he had received word through the Secretary of State that President Buchanan would take no action, he omitted the customary prayer for the government from that Sabbath's service. His action drew an immediate reaction from the

¹⁹Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, AJA, Nov. 14, 1858.

²⁰Naomi W. Cohen, Encounter With Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States, 1830-1914 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984) 216.

adjunta. At a special meeting called as a result of Morais' omission, the situation was discussed, and

...on Motion...the following Resolution was duly adopted. Resolved that the Hebrew and English prayer for the Government is part of the regular service in this Congregation and cannot be dispensed with, and that the Parnass notify the Hazan...and...inform him that said prayer should not hereafter be omitted for any reason whatever.²¹

Morais acceded to the adjunta's command, but only because his silence had already made his displeasure with the government's inaction abundantly clear. The adjunta's readiness to impose its will on Morais was an instance of the congregation's arbitrary control that had so incensed Leeser. Morais also resisted the authority the congregational leaders attempted to exercise over him. It was not long before Morais' penchant for taking action when he perceived trouble brought him up before the adjunta once again.

Having become an American citizen in 1854²², Morais' beliefs in basic human and civil rights dovetailed with the rights confirmed by the United States' Bill of Rights, including the innate right of freedom for every person regardless of his or her race. When the United States was threatened by inner discord and disharmony as the battle between North and South over the issue of slavery began to

²¹Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, AJA, Nov. 28, 1858.

²²Declaration Documents, Supreme Court, East District Pennsylvania, V.9A. cited in Nussenbaum, 12.

develop into war, he used the pulpit as a forum from which to exhort his congregants to participate actively in putting an end to the struggle. Preservation of the Union was of great importance to Morais because of his experience of Italy's struggle for unity and a democratic government. He was a fervent and emotional speaker when it came to issues of basic human rights, and his sermons from 1860-1865 reflected those themes. From 1860-1864 Morais called unceasingly for support and maintenance of the Union. His sermons, which appeared with regularity in Jewish newspapers as well as in the local Philadelphia newspapers, consistently challenged the institution of slavery and promoted the Union cause:

We believe that freedom is the birthright of every human being, for without it moral accountability is at an end. We believe that equality is the twin brother of freedom, without which the latter would be an illusion.²³

They who are equal in the sight of the immortal Creator cannot be made inferior before perishable creatures, that the forehead which is upraised towards heaven must not bend low to earth.²⁴

I fearlessly placed myself on the side of those who pledged to work out a universal freedom. I...might have risked my wife and children's livelihood and forfeited the good will of some whom I have had occasion since to honor as zealous and public spirited Israel-

²³The Philadelphia Inquirer (Nov. 30, 1866): 3, and The Hebrew Leader 9:9 (Dec. 7, 1866): 1, quoted in Nussenbaum, 35.

²⁴The Philadelphia Inquirer (Dec. 8, 1865): 3, quoted in Nussenbaum, p. 35.

ites; for I spoke and prayed for Union.²⁵

As the rabbi of Mikveh Israel, Morais felt a responsibility to prick the social conscience of the congregation in order that they might act in a manner that he felt befitted American Jews. This included recognizing and supporting the rights of all peoples to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In the opinion of the newly-elected adjunta which took office in 1864, Morais had spoken out of turn when he exulted at the passage of a new state constitution in Maryland.²⁶ The new constitution declared Maryland a free state, and the adjunta, which had a strong and vocal pro-South minority even though Pennsylvania was a free state, censured him for his stand. These community leaders were savvy enough not to couch their censure in political terms. They made it absolutely clear, however, that they believed it was their right to silence their hazan.

Resolved that as the regular Sabbath and Holyday services required to be performed in the hebrew [*sic*] language by our Hazan are lengthy, many of the Members and Seat-holders become impatient, when out of Courtesy they are compelled to remain for the additional english [*sic*] Discourse therefore Resolved, that henceforth all english Lectures or Discourses be dispensed with, except by particular request of the Parnas made in writing....²⁷

²⁵Morais Sermons, no title, (Dropsie College, Philadelphia, Pa., n.d.) quoted in Nussenbaum, p. 37.

²⁶The Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 31, 1864, p. 4, quoted in Nussenbaum, p. 37.

²⁷Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, AJA, Dec. 11, 1864.

Rather than admit that they were silencing Morais because they disagreed with his political stance, the adjunta used the congregation's short attention span as an excuse to muzzle Morais' controversial exhortations. It is noteworthy that the adjunta made this decision at a time when many American congregations were introducing an English discourse into their services in order to draw more people into the synagogues.²⁸

Morais was outraged over the thought of losing his freedom of the pulpit, a right that clergy held by virtue of their position in the community. He would not be denied his freedom, and he enlisted the aid of congregants who were equally outraged. A battle of words raged for almost a year, during which time several proposals were advanced by each side only to be rejected by the other. Morais insisted upon full freedom of the pulpit and the adjunta responded with proposals ranging from allowing no extraneous speaking to accepting addresses which had been previously submitted for approval.

Finally, in February, 1865, the adjunta offered a compromise: "Resolved, that the Parnas be requested to direct the Revd S [sic] Morais to deliver a religious Discourse on one Sabbath of each month and any Holyday, and that the time for delivering of said Discourses be after the Conclusion of

²⁸Jick, 144-145.

the regular hebrew Service."²⁹ This compromise was designed so that congregants were free to leave without hearing the sermon and without missing the conclusion of the service. If people left without hearing Morais speak, his ability to influence them was negated. Morais rejected the offer because it still impinged on his right of freedom of the pulpit. After many months of acrimonious debate over the issue, Morais sent a letter to a membership meeting in which he asked for full freedom to address the congregation whenever he saw fit during services for both Sabbath and Holydays. At that meeting the following resolution was passed:

That he have permission to deliver lectures, preceeding [*sic*] the last Hebrew hymn upon moral and religious subjects only, on any day that the Synagogue shall be opened for Divine Service; and that on special occasions whenever the Synagogue may be opened by order of the Parnas, that he be permitted to speak on the subjects of the day.³⁰

The significance of Morais' position in the congregation was pivotal to this conflagration over pulpit rights. He had been hired by Mikveh Israel, and it stated in his contract that he was to serve as hazan and lecturer despite the fact that he had received ordination as a rabbi. Prior to Morais' arrival, Leeser had created a model for the American Jewish religious leader. This model included delivering English

²⁹Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, AJA, Feb. 5, 1865.

³⁰Ibid., April 9, 1865.

lectures and sermons on a regular basis before the congregation.

The congregation had an established history for almost a century of employing the services of a reader. During that time the adjunta had exercised control over the actions and duties of their reader or hazan. In this controversy, Morais effectively served notice that he had no intention of submitting to censorship or to any attempts to control his rights and duties as the religious conscience of the congregation. Whereas Leaser had ultimately been forced out of his leadership position at Mikveh Israel for failing to follow the adjunta's orders, Morais was able to defy the adjunta and keep his job. Morais did not respond to conflict in the same fashion as Leaser. Leaser used his journal, The Occident, as a forum to air his anger at the congregation, as evidenced by his diatribe about his contract.³¹ Morais chose to address the congregation directly when there was a disagreement, and this was illustrated by the conflict resolution concerning his freedom of the pulpit. It may have been that this mode of direct communication was more acceptable to the congregation. Another possibility was that at a time of increasing rabbinical presence and leadership in Philadelphia, the congregation did not want to risk losing Morais.

³¹Isaac Leaser, "The Election of Hazan at Philadelphia," The Occident, Vol. IX (1851): 105-114.

At the same time that Morais was settling his argument with the Mikveh Israel adjunta, Philadelphia's Rodeph Shalom congregation was in the process of hiring their first ordained rabbi, Dr. Marcus Jastrow, who arrived in 1866 from Germany. The congregational leadership actively pursued Dr. Jastrow because they recognized the need for a stronger religious presence than a hazan. At Rodeph Shalom, the role of the hazan was different than at Mikveh Israel. Rodeph Shalom's hazan only read the service. Dr. Jastrow was under contract as the preacher, which entitled him to deliver sermons and lectures, teach in the congregation's school, and represent the congregation in the community. This contrasted with Mikveh Israel, where Leeser and Morais had signed contracts to "serve, act, and officiate as...reader,"³² although Morais' contract following Leeser's example also included a phrase about his role in teaching. By employing a rabbi such as Jastrow, Rodeph Shalom congregation succeeded in their quest of retaining strong religious leadership, scholarship, and commitment. The list of duties to which Jastrow agreed, however, were practically identical to those expected of Morais, including Jastrow's subordination to the orders of the president of Rodeph Shalom.³³

Jastrow's employment in Philadelphia only served to enhance Morais' standing at Mikveh Israel. Morais

³²Congregation Mikveh Israel, Vital Records, Philadelphia, PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, AJA, 1851.

³³Edward Davis, 81-84.

represented Mikveh Israel well. He was a passionate speaker, a gifted teacher, and a man who was eager to share his dreams of social justice with like-minded people. Jastrow's arrival was treated with great festivity, and he was hailed as a great scholar and preacher. Mikveh Israel congregation had an equally qualified hazan who was also an ordained rabbi. In the world of congregational competitiveness, Rodeph Shalom and Mikveh Israel stood on equal ground. Morais had won his battle for freedom of the pulpit, and although he remained officially the hazan, his victory accorded him the respect of a rabbi because it coincided with the arrival of Jastrow and reinforced to the Mikveh Israel congregation and adjuncta the importance of having someone of Morais' skills on their bima.

The importance of having a formidable presence on the bima was also supported by the actions of the board of Keneseth Israel, the Reform congregation that had been founded in Philadelphia in 1847. They hired their first rabbi, Dr. Solomon Deutsch, who was a German reformer, in 1857, and in 1861 they secured the services of Dr. David Einhorn as rabbi and preacher.³⁴ The presence of two such strong rabbinic leaders and preachers highlighted Morais' standing both in his congregation and in the community. His scholarship and skills as a preacher began to receive greater appreciation and notice from the Mikveh Israel adjuncta who took pride in his ubiquitous skills. The difference between

³⁴Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel: Its First 100 Years, 1847-1947 (Philadelphia: The Drake Press, 1950) 11-12.

Mikveh Israel and the other two congregations was that both of them employed service readers in addition to their rabbis whereas Sabato Morais carried all of the responsibility for service leadership, teaching, and preaching at Mikveh Israel. With the increased presence of rabbis in America, American Judaism further developed from an exclusively lay-led enterprise into a tradition dominated by strong rabbinic leadership.

Prior to Morais' battle for freedom of the pulpit, when a more moderate adjuncta presided over the congregation, a resolution was passed that provides one of the only references to the Civil War found in the minutes: "Resolved, that the Hazan be requested to include in the prayer for the Government the words, 'May our Union be preserved and its defenders be shielded from danger.'"³⁵ Despite Morais' repeated calls for involvement in the war effort, only the formation of the Ladies Hebrew Association for the Relief of Sick and Wounded Soldiers, organized in May, 1863, seems to have resulted.³⁶

The only acknowledgment of the war in the histories of Rodeph Shalom or Keneseth Israel was in the hiring of David Einhorn by the latter congregation. Mention was made at the time of his hiring that he had become available because his abolitionist sermons at his previous pulpit in Baltimore had

³⁵Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, AJA, Sept. 20, 1862.

³⁶Bertram Wallace Korn, American Jewry and the Civil War (New York: World Publishing Company, 1961) 100-102.

been controversial enough to result in threats against his life. He was forced to flee Baltimore, and subsequently accepted the position at Keneseth Israel.³⁷

It seemed incongruous for the Jewish community, which was committed to Americanizing, to pay so little attention to the war effort. Although congregational records did not reflect activities related to the war, there was evidence of Jewish involvement in the war.³⁸ Perhaps the incongruity occurred because the Jews most deeply committed to the war effort may not have been members of a congregation. The business taken up by the congregations themselves was primarily concerned with their own financial survival.

For most of the period leading up to the war, Mikveh Israel congregation focused on its own welfare as it moved forward with plans to build a new, larger synagogue in Philadelphia. As the construction drew to an end in 1860, the concerns of the board turned to issues of decorum and fundraising. In September, 1860, the by-laws were amended to include the following changes: free-will offerings during worship, such as the auctioning of aliyot, were to be abolished once annual subscriptions reached \$1200 per year, and prayers said on the anniversary of a death would be recited, if the appropriate fee had been paid, every Sabbath for eleven months following the death and on every Atonement

³⁷Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel: Its First 100 Years, 1847-1947 (Philadelphia: The Drake Press, 1950) 13.

³⁸see Korn, 1-120.

Day.³⁹ Money was of paramount concern to the congregation, for the building costs had overextended their means, and they gratefully accepted Morais' offer to relinquish \$300 of his annual salary for the remaining two years of his contract as well as to patiently await the \$500 due him in salary.⁴⁰

During the Civil War years, there was a narrowing of synagogue activities. Aside from Morais' many sermons and addresses concerning abolition, and it is assumed, the continued speaking out for the same from Einhorn, the focus of the congregations rested on financial difficulties and new buildings. Keneseth Israel, too, built and dedicated a new synagogue between March, 1863 and September, 1864.⁴¹ The adjuncta at Mikveh Israel attempted to open up the congregation to a wider audience by the changes made in the by-laws. By abolishing the auctioning of free will offerings during the service, the congregation reduced both the length and the din of the traditional liturgy. The congregation did not claim to be instituting reforms; the changes were made as part of an Americanizing movement to demonstrate to their neighbors that they were civilized, as well as to regain members who might have left due to the lack of decorum shown amidst such an sophisticated society as Philadelphia's. The added pressure from Rodeph Shalom and Keneseth Israel as

³⁹Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, AJA, Sept. 9, 1860 and Sept. 1, 1861.

⁴⁰Ibid., Sept. 1, 1861.

⁴¹Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel: Its First 100 Years, 1847-1947 (Philadelphia: The Drake Press, 1950) 15.

successfully progressive and Reform congregations respectively very likely catalyzed those changes.

The years surrounding the Civil War were significant to the American Jewish community. Beginning formally in the 1850's, Reform Judaism in America grew at a rapid pace throughout the 1850's and 1860's. It is logical to conclude that the changes made to increase decorum at Mikveh Israel were in direct response to the threat posed by the Reform movement within Philadelphia at both Keneseth Israel and Rodeph Shalom. The response of Mikveh Israel congregation, however, was not to follow the same path to reform forged by the other two Philadelphia congregations.

Chapter 3: 1866-1879

Traditionalism and the Rise of Reform

For several years following the conclusion of the Civil War, Sabato Morais and the Mikveh Israel congregation engaged in a flurry of activities both in Philadelphia and in other cities. It was during this period that the Reformers, especially Isaac Mayer Wise, made tremendous progress and gathered more congregations around the banner of Reform Judaism as the American Judaism. Morais had his own vision of American Judaism, and it was not entirely consistent with that of Wise. Morais' conception was of an American Judaism that embraced tradition as well as both the Oral and the Written Torah, yet was forward thinking enough to make changes in practice and observance where necessary in order to maintain a high level of activity and commitment to the Jewish religion and the Jewish people within a traditional context. For Morais, this meant a Judaism that was founded upon and guided by Maimonides' Mishneh Torah.¹

While Morais' goals for Judaism in America remained consistent over the years, congregational activity fluctuated tremendously. During this time period, Morais realized that where he might have been flippant or sarcastic in the past in his addresses concerning reforms, he was now caught in a serious struggle to preserve traditional Judaism, both in Philadelphia and in America. It must have distressed him

¹The Jewish Messenger 21:5 (Feb. 1, 1867): 4, quoted in Nussenbaum, 78.

that many of his congregants did not seem to share his fervor or his commitment to the struggle. They did not even agree with his version of what the struggle was about, because their concerns tended to be focused inward on themselves while Morais worried about the survival of traditional Judaism. Members of the congregation agitated for Protestantizing changes to make the synagogue seem more like its Christian neighbors while Morais fought to maintain traditional Jewish practices within the context of American society.

The late 1860's were characterized by action at Mikveh Israel as the congregation gave Morais two substantial raises of \$500 and \$1000² and investigated the possibility of building him a home adjacent to the synagogue.³ Conversely, the 1870's were noteworthy for the lack of activity within and around the congregation and the precarious status of the congregation's existence. This period of congregational inactivity was not shared by Morais, who fought with increasing intensity to preserve traditionalism. The end of the 1870's saw an upturn both in congregational life and in traditional Judaism as a movement in America.

After the Civil War, there is evidence of a change in the pattern of Jewish leadership in America. In early American Jewish history, leadership was strictly lay, and as

²Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia, PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, (AJA), Sept. 17, 1865 and Sept. 22, 1867.

³Ibid., April 14, 1867.

hazzanim and trained leaders became employees of developing congregations, they were subject to the whims of their respective boards with regard to their duties and their rights. In the late 1860's there was a trend towards stronger rabbinic leadership throughout the United States. Rabbis like Morais, Jastrow, and Samuel Hirsch, the German reformer who arrived in 1866 from Luxembourg to serve Keneseth Israel⁴, in Philadelphia, Wise and Lilienthal in Cincinnati, and Einhorn in New York were examples of dynamic, skilled rabbis. They began to exercise the power implicit in their positions in order to achieve their individual goals both in the congregations they served and in the community at large.⁵

Isaac Leeser was near the end of his life when, in 1867, one of his dreams was realized: the founding of Maimonides College for the education and training of native-born rabbis in America. The establishment of the college reflected the growing emphasis on rabbinical leadership in American Jewish life. From the first meeting in Philadelphia when Leeser initially advanced the idea, Sabato Morais immediately volunteered his services to teach any subject in which his contributions would be most appropriate. The parnas of Mikveh Israel, Abraham Hart, also served as president of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, and his support

⁴Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel: Its First 100 Years, 1847-1947, 15-16.

⁵Jick, 184-185.

and influence were crucial in securing the financial and philosophical support of the Board of Delegates for Maimonides College. This was representative of the developing relationship between rabbi and lay leadership. Hart supported Maimonides College because its purpose was to train rabbis in a traditional setting. Hart shared the concerns of both Leiser and Morais with regard to encroaching reforms, therefore it was logical that they should band together to reach their common goal of training American rabbis to serve traditional congregations. Because the idea for the seminary had originated in Philadelphia, there was never any discussion regarding a location for the school. It was established in Philadelphia where Leiser's dream began and where much of the financial support was located.⁶

Morais served on the faculty of Maimonides College as professor of Bible and Biblical Literature. The other members of the faculty, including Leiser and Jastrow, further indicated that the ideological focus of the seminary was traditional, and that the rabbis of Philadelphia were willing to work together for a common goal. There was an emphasis on the Written Torah and its accompanying texts, but Leiser himself oversaw the courses in Homiletics, Literature, and Comparative History. The men trained at Maimonides College

⁶Moshe Davis, The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in 19th Century America (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1963) 59-62.

were to receive a well-rounded education with a firm rooting in traditional Judaism.⁷

Despite all of the hard work and the dedication of its faculty and its founder, Maimonides College did not last long. When Leeser died in 1868, the American Jewish community was suffering under the tug of war between two unofficially defined factions representing Reform and traditional Judaism. Funding had never been abundant during the formative years of Maimonides College, but with Leeser's death came the certain knowledge that Maimonides College was destined to die as well. There was no one left with the time, the energy, or the skill to fight for funds. In 1873 there were no students at the seminary and in 1875 the Board of Delegates of American Israelites withdrew its support.

Despite the disappointment over the failure of Maimonides College, the battle against reform was far from over. On September 13, 1868 Sabato Morais received a supreme vote of confidence from the adjunta of Mikveh Israel when they elected him to a lifetime appointment as hazan.⁸ While it remained the prerogative of the adjunta to instruct Morais, they did not exercise that privilege after his lifetime election. Morais had established himself as a strong leader, and the congregation allowed itself to be led. At a time when the future of traditional Judaism in America

⁷Ibid.

⁸Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia, PA--
Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, (AJA), Sept. 13, 1868.

looked somewhat unsure, Mikveh Israel affirmed its dedication to the style of Judaism represented by Morais. His lifetime election guaranteed that so long as he served the congregation, it would stand as a living example and an inspiration to supporters of traditional Judaism in spite of the ongoing and escalating struggle with the Reformers. With the security that a lifetime appointment offered him, Morais took even bolder stances on issues regarding both the congregation and Jewish life in America. His sermons lost any hint of sarcasm in their tone, and he began to exercise the power of his lifetime position in the broader Jewish community as he expanded his efforts to garner support for his causes.

Morais had been agitating for years to raise the level of consciousness among American Jews to the plight of their co-religionists in other parts of the world. He was only too aware of the seduction of America, where it seemed that if one worked hard enough, anything was possible. New Americans found it easy to forget the hardships of life in the old country and to ignore the problems experienced by those remaining there. Morais would not allow foreign persecutions to continue unchallenged and he found complacency unconscionable. It was in the spirit of the survival of world Jewry that he established the first chapter of the Alliance Israelite Universelle in the United States in

Philadelphia in October, 1868.⁹ This organization provided him with a vehicle by which he could solicit funds for the persecuted Jews around the world, garner political support among wealthy and influential American Jews for the Alliance's activities world-wide, and increase awareness among his constituents and congregants with regard to the political, economic, and religious state of Jews outside the United States. Morais fought the tunnel vision that American Jews seemed to acquire once they were securely established and upwardly mobile in American society. He refused to allow them to forget their less fortunate co-religionists, nor would he allow them to remain passive observers to persecution.

He devoted the same zeal to his congregation as he did to his broader interests, because the congregation was the basis of his position in the Jewish community. It was his status as hazan and preacher at Mikveh Israel that first afforded Morais the opportunity to be heard on so many different levels and in a variety of publications. It was because of the respect and authority vested in him by Mikveh Israel that he was able to guide the religious observance and ritual practice of the congregation through direct challenges to tradition. One such incident occurred in March, 1869, when Mr. Lucien Moss, a congregant, offered to purchase an organ for the congregation with the stipulation that "...it

⁹The Jewish Record 26:5 (May 14, 1886): 4, cited in Nussenbaum, 61.

be used on all occasions when services are held in the Synagogue."¹⁰

Morais' response to this proposal was swift and uncompromising. The organ had come to symbolize Reform. Numerous congregations, including Philadelphia's own Rodeph Shalom, were in the process of building new edifices and installing organs in pursuit of the decorous, Protestantized service that would attract more Americanized Jews. Morais lashed out in a sermon on Shavuot commemorating the ninth anniversary of the congregation in its Seventh Street building and expressed his opinion about such reforms in general:

Know ye for certain that the pealing of an organ in the synagogue is the death-knell of Jewish rites and tenets. Wherever it has superceded the sound of the living popular voice raised in supplication, it has created a distaste for the Hebrew ritual; it has effected a partial or total abolition of our liturgy; it has brought into the shrine devoted to the One indivisible Lord, the votaries of a triune God...the charms of its music have lured Israel... into the embrace of the church, whence it was borrowed.¹¹

The fervor of Morais' words demonstrated his belief that the introduction of an organ would lead inevitably and inexorably to the corruption of Judaism, and perhaps to its eventual incorporation into Protestantism. Morais felt that the organ

¹⁰Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia, PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, AJA, March 21, 1869.

¹¹Sabato Morais, "An Address on the Feast of Pentecost" (May 16, 1869), 3, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

destroyed the traditional Hebrew ritual because it supplanted communal recitation of parts of the liturgy. In addition, bringing an organ into the congregation meant that Mikveh Israel had succumbed to the wiles of Christianity. Whatever Moss' motivation for extending his offer, Morais did not intend to allow it to reach fruition.

Moss' proposal was worded in a manner indicating that his primary concern was an increase in membership and financial support at Mikveh Israel. He wrote, "As a member of this Congregation and solicitous for its future welfare--I would most respectfully ask that an organ be introduced, during our services, and that the chaunts by the Congregation be then dispensed with--...."¹² Moss' concern for the congregation's "future welfare" implied that in order to keep pace with the other Philadelphia congregations, Mikveh Israel should install an organ or risk losing members to institutions that had already done so. When he requested that congregational singing "be then dispensed with" he was remarking about the outward appearance of the singing. The congregation worshipped together and chanted together. They were not a trained choir, and their chanting probably reflected their lack of skill. Moss was concerned with appearances and not with intention and spirituality. He did not share or understand Morais' belief that the soul of a

¹²Congregation Mikveh Israel, Resolutions, Appeals, and Decisions of the Board of Managers, 1848-1885, Small Collections SC-9631, AJA, March 21, 1869.

congregation was not in its trappings but in the worship and the commitment of its membership. In his limited view, Moss believed that an organ would solve the attendance and financial problems at Mikveh Israel.

Morais' attitude towards Reform was evident in the passion of his response to Moss' proposal. He felt that the Jews in America were being brainwashed or hypnotized by the organ music and he recoiled at the smug satisfaction of the Reformers and their congregants in having found a way to be just like their Christian counterparts. His fear that Jewish identity would become absorbed by Christianity was palpable. Yet, despite the daunting challenge presented by Isaac Mayer Wise and his disciples, Morais' determination to preserve, defend, and champion traditional Judaism grew, and his resolve strengthened. He was so adamant about keeping an organ out of his congregation that he announced his intention to leave if his wishes were ignored or his decision was overruled.¹³ He challenged his congregants, saying to them, "Will the pressure of this all-absorbing mania for imitation carry you along with others as victims to the Moloch, misnamed 'reform'? Will you, despite my correct representations and my remonstrances, enter into a league with those who labor to Christianize Judaism?"¹⁴ He had laid a challenge before Mikveh Israel, and the congregation

¹³Sabato Morais, "An Address on the Feast of Pentecost" (May 16, 1869), 5, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

¹⁴Ibid., 6.

supported him. They declined Mr. Moss' generous offer. The congregation's determination to refuse the gift at the very moment that organs were becoming the *sine qua non* of Americanized synagogues, solidified Morais' position as a strong leader within his congregation. Despite the terms of his contract in which he remained subject to the orders of the president, Abraham Hart was sympathetic to Morais' arguments, and supported the hazan's efforts to preserve traditional practices.

While Morais was struggling for the survival of traditionalism, another Philadelphia congregation was starting its journey along the road towards identifying itself as a Reform congregation. In 1866, German-trained Dr. Marcus Jastrow arrived from Warsaw to accept a lifetime appointment as preacher at Rodeph Shalom. Within months of his arrival, the congregation began to make changes in its ritual designed to increase the level of order and decorum in the service. These changes were similar to those introduced at Mikveh Israel, including the abolishment of free-will offerings during services. Unlike Mikveh Israel, however, Rodeph Shalom experienced a significant rise in its membership following the Civil War. Rodeph Shalom had not only hired Dr. Jastrow, but they also operated their own school. Moreover, the services at Rodeph Shalom were conducted according to the German, or Ashkenazic rite. This was the custom that was prevalent among the majority of Jews in Philadelphia, so it was naturally more attractive than the

Spanish-Portuguese rite observed at Mikveh Israel because it (the Ashkenazic rite) was familiar to those raised in Central European synagogues.

It soon became apparent that a new building was needed at Rodeph Shalom to accomodate the increasing numbers of congregants. A committee was convened to establish new rules and regulations to accompany the new synagogue, and, with the approval of Dr. Jastrow, two significant decisions were made. The first of these was that there would no longer be a gallery for the women. They would sit instead on one side of the new synagogue while the men would sit on the other side, and second, "it was advisable and desirable that an organ be placed in the synagogue."¹⁵ In Morais' eyes, Rodeph Shalom had begun its slide down the slippery slope to Reform, and he could only watch in sorrow as another Philadelphia congregation embraced Reform (the first having been Keneseth Israel).

Keneseth Israel's rabbi, Dr. Samuel Hirsch, had been a leading spokesman of Reform in Germany prior to his arrival in the United States. He was one of the more radical reformers as evidenced by his first act at Keneseth Israel, where he abolished the wearing of head coverings.¹⁶ During the time that Mikveh Israel was in a period of stasis and Rodeph

¹⁵Edward Davis, 82.

¹⁶Malcolm H. Stern, "National Leaders of Their Time: Philadelphia's Reform Rabbis," Jewish Life in Philadelphia 1830-1940, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia: ISHI Publications, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1983) 184.

Shalom was just beginning to grow and change, Keneseth Israel's Dr. Hirsch hosted the first Reform rabbinical conference in America in 1869. It was organized by Rabbis David Einhorn and Samuel Adler from New York, and the thirteen rabbis present passed a series of resolutions reminiscent of German Reform, including the rejection of a personal Messiah, the abolishment of the distinctions between Cohens, Levites, and Israelites, the substitution of immortality of the soul in place of resurrection of the body, an increased emphasis on the use of the vernacular in prayer instead of Hebrew, and the embracing of the diaspora as a part of God's plan.¹⁷ This conference also introduced a split in the Reform group due largely to problems of ego between Isaac Mayer Wise and the others. Because Wise's self-appointed position as head of American Reform was usurped by Einhorn and Adler when they called the conference together in Philadelphia, he called his own conference in Cleveland the following year, 1870, to which he invited only those who supported his views and respected his authority. Wise convened another conference in Cincinnati in 1871, in which a resolution was passed detailing the guidelines necessary for the establishment of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College.¹⁸ ..

While the Reform movement was advancing rapidly during the early 1870's, those same years found Mikveh Israel in a

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Moshe Davis, 156-158.

state of stagnancy. For a three year period, 1871-1873, the congregation held no meetings for which a quorum was present. This meant that no congregational business was accomplished during those years. There were no new members accepted, no financial decisions were made, and there are no records of any discussions about ritual or ceremonial changes. For all intents and purposes, Mikveh Israel was frozen for three years.¹⁹ What could have caused such a breakdown in the congregation? Was this same inactivity paralleled in other congregations as well?

It is possible that because of the external and internal pressures to reform, the congregation found itself in an uncomfortable position, divided between those who wished to institute reforms, like Lucien Moss, and those who desired to remain committed to the traditional path, like Morais and Abraham Hart. Such a division may have paralyzed the congregation, rendering its leadership incapable of moving ahead, and so inertia was allowed to rule, as the congregation limped along for three years. It is possible that Morais' great devotion to Maimonides College may have diverted his attention from his congregational duties during that period as he felt the need to speak out against the actions of the Reformers with their shameless duplications of Christian trappings in the service. It is likely that this period of stasis was caused by a combination of the

¹⁹Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia, PA--
Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, AJA, 1871-1873.

aforementioned factors coupled with the tremendous financial burden the congregation had incurred upon building the Seventh Street synagogue in the late 1850's and early 1860's. The financial situation of the congregation had concerned Morais over the years, and on more than one occasion he voluntarily relinquished a significant portion of his salary in order to alleviate the problem.²⁰ The internal struggle over what direction the congregation would take given the popularity of reform denoted one factor, and the daunting debt was another that, when combined, created paralysis in the congregation. Although there were other congregations in the same state of religious flux, Mikveh Israel was apparently unique in its inactivity during the years 1871-1873. The only decision the board made during those years was to grant Morais a vacation in the country during the summer. This was the first mention of vacation time for Morais, and it appeared in 1871. Another factor not to be ignored is the death of Morais' wife in March, 1872.²¹ Her death and his option to take a vacation may also have contributed to the state in which Mikveh Israel found itself.

Other congregations responded to the pressures exerted by the popularity of instituting reforms by embracing the push for change. Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia represents a good example of a traditional congregation that introduced

²⁰Ibid., Sept. 1, 1861, April 9, 1865, Oct. 14, 1878, Nov. 30, 1879.

²¹Ibid., June 4, 1871, March, 1872.

significant changes into its ceremonies and rituals, its by-laws and its physical structure during those same three years, 1871-1873. In 1871 Rodeph Shalom, under the leadership of Marcus Jastrow, adopted a new prayerbook which was better suited to a congregation that did not know Hebrew yet still wished to worship in a traditional, albeit vernacular, format. Moreover, in late 1868, the size of the congregation had increased to such an extent that they purchased a new lot in order to build a bigger synagogue. The new synagogue was completed in June, 1871, and it included a large and expensive organ. Additionally, in 1871 changes were made in the conducting of services. Only one-third of the weekly Torah portion was read, services began at a later hour on Shabbat and holiday mornings, and provisions were made to have a choir present during worship.²² Perhaps the most significant change was from separate seating for men and women to family pews.²³ Even though head coverings had not been abolished, many changes had occurred. The congregation was no longer identified as upholding traditional practices by men like Morais, whose reaction to organs in general was sufficient for him to criticize Rodeph Shalom's continued self-identification as traditional.

The challenges Morais faced did not come from the Philadelphia community alone. The years during which the

²²Edward Davis, 86-88.

²³Rodeph Shalom Minutes, August 28, 1870, cited in Karla A. Goldman, "Beyond the Gallery: The Place of Women in the Development of American Judaism" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1993) 205.

reform rabbinic conferences were held were watershed years for the leaders of the traditional movement. They found themselves divided as individuals like Marcus Jastrow came to be identified with the side of reform because of the congregations they served. The death of Isaac Leeser, too, created a void in traditional leadership. Sabato Morais stepped in to fill the void, but by 1873, he found himself virtually alone in his fight to maintain traditional standards of worship and ritual practice among American Jewish leaders.²⁴

That same year, however, also brought reinforcements. 1873 saw Morais' position augmented by the arrival of two new rabbis in the New York community, Frederick de Sola Mendes and Aaron Wise. Together with their congregations (Mendes at Shaaray Tefila in New York and Wise at Beth Elohim in the same city), these three men revitalized the traditional movement and began to reclaim forgotten goals and dreams.²⁵ 1873 was the year that Mikveh Israel emerged from its state of lethargy and began once again to take notice of both itself and the world around it.

Much of their resurgence was in response to the mounting Reform challenge. During the years that Mikveh Israel had removed itself as a factor in American Jewish historical development, the conditions laid out for the establishment of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations had been met, and

²⁴Moshe Davis, 166.

²⁵Ibid.

in 1872 it was formally organized. Reform was surging ahead under the leadership of Isaac Mayer Wise in Cincinnati. He represented his version of Judaism as American Judaism, because it responded to the changing times and social needs of American Jews. Leon Jick has captured the prevailing attitude of American Jews after the Civil War in observing, "In the postwar years, economic advance, accelerating acculturation, and pervasive optimism nourished the rising tide of reform that suffused the American synagogue."²⁶ Despite the burgeoning of reform, traditionalism was still very much alive, especially in light of the arrival of new rabbis like Mendes and Aaron Wise. Changes were made by the traditionalists, however, in an attempt to reach more people.

The early 1870's were the time when such changes were called for in the education process of Jewish children in America. The Sunday school was deemed inadequate for instilling the children with sufficient knowledge of Hebrew, Jewish history, laws, customs, and rituals. In an attempt to correct this perceived shortcoming, the Hebrew Free School Society was established in New York in 1872. The traditionalists organized it as a supplementary school rather than on the Sunday school format because the supplementary school provided a greater opportunity to provide a Jewish education with a more consistent, longer school session than

²⁶Leon A. Jick, "The Reform Synagogue" The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 88.

the two hours per week offered on Sundays.²⁷ The Hebrew Free School Society was a success and it provided a much-needed renaissance for the traditional movement.

This renaissance was further demonstrated in Philadelphia as Mikveh Israel organized a Literary Society with Sabato Morais as president. For Morais the society offered another opportunity to educate his congregants, and he seized upon it as a means of reaching out to them in a context outside of the sanctuary.²⁸ Morais' involvement in this organization indicated that he was changing his strategy in his struggle to maintain tradition. Jeffrey Gurock describes two views that were held by traditional synagogues and their leaders in response to the Americanization of Jews. The first view was "...that the Orthodox synagogue must neither accept nor accomodate those who do not recognize and obey past traditions."²⁹ This seems to have been closer to Morais' initial attitude toward those members of his congregation and his community who agitated for reforms. As demonstrated previously, he thought such people were Christianizing the synagogue. He did not subscribe fully to this philosophy, however, as evidenced by Gurock's conclusions about the second view. In contrast to the first view, the second view is inclusive. Such synagogues and

²⁷Moshe Davis, 173.

²⁸Nussenbaum, 54.

²⁹Jeffrey S. Gurock, "The Orthodox Synagogue" The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 38.

their leaders "...often purposefully instituted novel--but to their minds religiously permitted--liturgical, sermonic, and ancillary synagogue activities."³⁰ By the 1870's Sabato Morais had become more closely aligned with Gurock's second group. He had apparently arrived at the conclusion that to maintain the hard line of the first view would mean the eventual demise of the congregation as more and more people were driven away by their disinterest in the service and their lack of connection to anything else in the synagogue. The solution was to organize activities and groups that would serve to draw people in and reconnect them with tradition through other vehicles.

Mikveh Israel's Literary Society served as the model for Philadelphia's Y.M.H.A., the Young Men's Hebrew Association, which was organized in 1875, once again with Morais as president.³¹ The Y.M.H.A. became the cultural center for young Jewish men, offering opportunities for social interaction and educational opportunities with classes taught by Morais and others. It provided a place where the young men could come and immerse themselves in a Jewish environment that recognized the need for forward thought and which was designed to combat complete assimilation amidst an increasingly secularized American society. Organizations

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Benjamin Rabinowitz, "The Young Men's Hebrew Association 1854-1913," (Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, 37, 1947), 230, cited in Nussenbaum, 54.

such as these worked to revitalize interest in traditional Judaism in America.

In 1875 still another institution was founded that was to hold crucial importance in the relationship between reform and traditionalism as separate and distinct modes of Judaism. The Hebrew Union College began its first set of classes in Cincinnati in that year, and its auspicious beginnings were initially supported even by staunch traditionalists like Morais. Morais served as an examiner for the College, having been persuaded by Isaac Mayer Wise, the College's founder and president, that its students would be instructed in all of the classic Jewish texts. Morais, whose zeal and dedication concerning traditional Judaism were well known to Wise, may have harbored a fond wish that the Hebrew Union College would replace Maimonides College as a seminary for training traditional rabbis. In that same year, Morais published his own proposal for an American Judaism in which he demonstrated a willingness to institute changes in the prayerbook as well as a resigned acceptance of the differences in attitude and desires between immigrant Jews and their American-born children. He expressed the need, just as Isaac Mayer Wise had earlier, for a uniform liturgy and a uniform ritual for American Jews to follow. With regard to the changes in the prayerbook that would be necessary to attract Jews in America back to the synagogue, Morais said:

Expunge, then what relates to the ordinances followed by the ancients in the performances of sacrificial

rites; strike out what belongs to Mishnic and Talmudic lore; reduce the number of Psalms now to be daily rehearsed; avoid, as far as practicable, the reiterating of a supplication, confession, or sacred song; eschew the utterance of all sorts of denunciations; compare philologically long-established Rituals; study to discover in them what is more correct in diction, select what is more chaste in style, more exalting in ideas... Then endeavor to fill up a portion of the space made empty by the expurgatory process with compositions suited to our existing wants. The printed...writings of our philosophers and poets can supply a vast deal; the learning of our modern Rabbis may also be of service....³²

In these proposals, Morais displayed an astonishing willingness to sacrifice large parts of the liturgy and revamp it in a fashion that would render it more appealing and more relevant to American Jews. Yet in Morais' mind, these concessions were still consistent with the preservation of traditionalism, which remained his primary objective. Although he had changed his approach in championing traditionalism, he still cannot be identified completely with Gurock's second view. He held deep-seated beliefs with regard to the service and the language, and his proposal illustrated the absolute limits he would impose upon any changes in the service. He unequivocally refused to remove Hebrew as the language of prayer because it was Hebrew that had tied the Jewish people together over the miles and

³²The Jewish Messenger 38 (Nov. 12, 1875): 5, quoted in Moshe Davis, 163-164.

throughout the ages. Hebrew was the link between all Jews. Furthermore, he maintained his opposition to the introduction of an organ into the synagogue, stating that it was not only because of its Catholic origins, but because "...it has inevitably brought into the shrine of the Unity, Gentile players and Gentile choristers...."³³ Apparently his fear of Christian contamination and influence within the sanctuary remained, and his objection to an organ was still absolute.

The importance of Morais' willingness to compromise cannot be underestimated. Whereas Isaac Mayer Wise was known for attracting supporters and losing them just as rapidly because of significant inconsistencies in his stated philosophy versus his actions, Morais was a man of his word who was not putting forth his proposal solely for the purpose of gaining constituents. Morais was dedicated to developing a uniquely American Judaism that would embrace both the traditions of Judaism and the freedom of America. He laid out his standards, but the popularity and allure of reform soon showed him that there would never be a single American Judaism. Over time it became clear that although Reform Judaism and traditional Judaism in America were unlike Judaism anywhere else in the world, they could not be unified into one American Judaism.

In 1877 Morais still harbored hopes that the goal of an American Judaism was attainable. In his role as examiner for

³³Ibid., 165.

the Hebrew Union College, he wrote that "The college in Cincinnati may unequivocally be pronounced an object deserving the support of Israelites who wish that attachment to the ancestral faith be founded upon a knowledge of its precepts, and an extensive acquaintance with the national literature."³⁴ Morais, however, withdrew his support from any further Reform Jewish organizations after the infamous Trefa Banquet in 1883 at the first ordination from the Hebrew Union College. It was clear to him that Isaac Mayer Wise could not be trusted to fulfill his own dream of a seminary providing American-trained traditional rabbis to the Jewish community. Morais was left to begin once again; to rebuild an association of traditional rabbis and religious leaders who were committed to the same goals.

The late 1870's witnessed a series of significant events in American Jewish history that contributed to the development of a strong traditional-minded group of Jewish leaders in Philadelphia and New York. In 1877 formal anti-Semitism became manifest in America when Joseph Seligman and his family were denied admission to the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga, New York. The publicity surrounding this incident unleashed a wave of exclusion for Jews from resorts. This led in turn to the establishment of exclusively Jewish resorts and hotels.³⁵

³⁴From the Mikveh Israel Files. Cited in Moshe Davis, Sabato Morais: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography of his Writings (PAJHS, XXXVII, 1947), 84, quoted in Moshe Davis, 177.

³⁵Moshe Davis, 192.

The rise in anti-Semitism may also have been triggered by the acceleration of immigration from Eastern Europe. Immigration had virtually ceased during the Civil War, but in the years following its conclusion, waves of immigrants began arriving. During the early 1880's Eastern European immigration exploded, but by the late 1870's the numbers of immigrants were sufficient to create distaste among both Jews and non-Jews alike. The new immigrants were dressed shabbily, spoke Russian and Yiddish instead of German or English, possessed no trade skills or specialized training, and were perceived as a general burden by the established Jewish community in America. Murray Friedman addressed the concerns of the established Philadelphia Jewish community, writing, "...the older elite worried about how the Russian Jews would effect their own standing in the community."³⁶ These "elite" did not want to be associated with the new immigrants whose ways were alien to the Americanized Jew.

While the American Jewish community was grappling with blatant prejudice, changes were occurring within the Jewish communal representative bodies of the nation. In 1859 the Board of Delegates of American Israelites was formed in direct response to the Mortara incident as a way of uniting the American Jewish community to combat anti-Jewish activities around the world. This national body did not include such prestigious congregations as Mikveh Israel or

³⁶Murray Friedman, "Introduction: The Making of a National Jewish Community," Friedman, 8.

Shearith Israel in New York, neither of which wished to subject themselves to the pressures or influences of other congregations.³⁷ When the Union of American Jewish Congregations was formed in 1872, its purpose was to establish a theological seminary, publish new textbooks for religious schools, and compose an ideological statement representative of Reform Judaism and providing distinct limitations for allowable reforms.³⁸

Almost immediately after the formal organization of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, discussion began about combining the Board of Delegates with the new congregational union. It was decided that the Board of Delegates would be absorbed by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and in 1878 the Board of Delegates became a standing committee of the new union, still devoted to the fight against injustice towards Jews throughout the world.³⁹ Because of the fact that the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was an instrument of the Reformers, congregations like Mikveh Israel continued to refrain from participation:

...under the Charter and Laws of the Congregation they find that the Body has no authority to bind the Congregation or its members to any such undertaking:..Resolved: That while this Congregation sympathizes with the objects of the 'Union'..., in view

³⁷Moshe Davis, 101-103.

³⁸Michael A.Meyer, Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1988), 260.

³⁹Ibid., 261.

of the peculiar Contract obligation under its charter, between it and its members and seatholders, we deem it inexpedient...to join the proposed Union.⁴⁰

Mikveh Israel was an autonomous organization, subject only to the authority invested in the adjunta by the members, and as such, the congregation was free to choose what associations it would join. Its insistence on remaining outside of such associations gave the congregation the opportunity to involve itself in whatever cause or causes the members and/or the rabbi believed worthy. In this way Mikveh Israel continued to control its own destiny. The congregation refused to allow itself to be pressured into joining the Union, and Morais and the adjunta apparently believed that they were not removing themselves entirely from involvement in decisions that would shape the future of American Judaism.

This belief was reinforced in 1879 when the American Hebrew was created as a mouthpiece for the traditionalist viewpoint, and the first formal ideological statement of traditional Judaism was published in its pages that same year.⁴¹ The statement called for a return to the halakhic process of interpretation due to the irrelevancy of many of the current laws which concerned the sacrificial rite. Such a return would require a synod composed of knowledgeable and appropriately educated rabbis who were qualified to render judgement on pertinent issues.⁴² Although this plan was to go

⁴⁰Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia, PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, AJA, April 28, 1878.

⁴¹Meyer, 260 and Moshe Davis, 200-204.

⁴²Moshe Davis, 200-201.

unrealized, the traditionalists had regained their initiative and their vitality. They had an expressed goal of creating an American Judaism that countered the Judaism of the Reformers.

Initially, the goals of the Reformers and those of the traditionalists had been the same. As Jakob Petuchowski has written, "Judaism, from its very beginning, had been a developing and progressive phenomenon, undergoing various stages of transformation in response to environmental and historical challenges. The very concept of 'tradition' was a progressive concept, enabling the latter-day Reformer to be guided by the past."⁴³ Both Wise and Morais would have agreed with this statement, but Wise, in trying to unite all of America's Jews under the auspices of Reform, seemed to lose sight of his original intentions, unless they had been completely ego-driven from the outset. Morais and his congregation were also committed to the unification of American Jewry, but only within the context of clearly specified guidelines and within the limits of tradition.

The period from the end of the Civil War through the 1870's was in general a time of relative inactivity among the traditionalists, while the Reform Movement took huge steps into the future by formalizing as a movement by establishing permanent institutions such as the Union of American Hebrew

⁴³Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Abraham Geiger and Samuel Holdheim: Their Differences in Germany and Repercussions in America" (Cincinnati, 1976), 2.

Congregations and the Hebrew Union College. The period of inactivity at Mikveh Israel paralleled the decrease in activity among the traditionalists, and this parallel cannot be entirely coincidental. Morais' attention both to the congregation and to the movement may have been lacking due to the death of his wife and the demise of Maimonides College, the lack of others with whom to share leadership, and general financial concerns. Moreover, he had been forced by the circumstances in his own community to revise his earlier narrow opinions of changes within the synagogue community, as evidenced by the founding of the Literary Society and the Y.M.H.A.

It was not until the 1880's that the traditionalists gained enough momentum to establish their own institutions, and when that happened, Sabato Morais and Mikveh Israel were leading the way.

Chapter 4: 1880-1889

The Birth of The Jewish Theological Seminary

The decade of the 1880's was a time of remarkable growth and change in American Judaism as trends solidified into movements, and movements entrenched themselves through the development of institutional foundations. From his position at Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, Sabato Morais was heavily involved in the process of change and formalization.¹

As the 1880's began, the primary concerns of Jewish leaders in the United States were synagogue attendance, lack of financial support, the deep divisions between the reformers and the traditionalists, Sabbath observance, and the inadequate education of Jewish children. These themes recur throughout the history of American Judaism, echoed again and again whenever a congregational history is traced.

The 1880's saw the United States emerging from an economic and financial depression during which Mikveh Israel almost lost its building to its creditors. During the early 1870's Mikveh Israel did not hold any congregational meetings for which a quorum was present for a period of three years, 1871-1873. This unfortunate pattern repeated itself in 1880.² True to form, Morais took action that inspired his

¹Due to the unavailability of congregational minutes beyond 1880, it was necessary to reconstruct the circumstances surrounding Mikveh Israel using the contents of the American Hebrew and the Jewish Exponent.

²Congregation Mikveh Israel, Minute Book, Philadelphia, PA-- Congregation Mikveh Israel, Ms. Coll. #552, (AJA), 1880.

congregants to rally in order to save Mikveh Israel, one of the proponents of traditional Judaism in America. "...the Revd S. Morais...agreed to relinquish (\$250.00) of his salary annually, from Jan 1st 1880 to Jan 1st 1882 inclusive...making his salary for that period \$3250 annually."³ By sacrificing a portion of his own salary for the sake of the congregation, he set an appropriate example for others to follow.

At the same time that he was fighting for the financial survival of Mikveh Israel, he was waging an emotional and public campaign for religious equality for Jews in the United States. His efforts were in response to repeated statements by politicians that this was a Christian nation. In an 1880 Chanukah address, Morais pointed to the attempts of "the Church" to have its supremacy acknowledged in America, observing:

It is arrogance and ignorance...to claim religious equality, for this does not exist...[T]he statute book of Pennsylvania makes no provision for putting Israelite on a par with Christians.⁴

Morais pointed out that despite the federal government's prohibition against the establishment of a national religion, it was left to each individual state to decide how this might be enforced.⁵ Indeed, by 1880, there were still states, including Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, and North Carolina,

³Ibid., Nov. 30, 1879.

⁴American Hebrew 5:3 (Dec. 10, 1880): 40-41.

⁵Ibid.

that forbade non-Christians from holding public office, thereby creating an atmosphere of religious inequality. In the spirit of liberty, Morais concluded his thoughts by saying, "I have faith...in the progressive tendencies of the people of this Republic. I hope to live and rejoice at the rescinding of laws encroaching on human rights and hostile to the spirit which the Declaration of Independence breathes throughout."⁶ He believed passionately in the freedoms that America purported to offer her citizens. After he became a citizen in 1854,⁷ his fervor for helping new arrivals to American soil feel welcome and valued encouraged assistance from various benevolent societies, immigrant aid organizations, and congregations. His influence was spreading, and his position as a leader in the Jewish community in Philadelphia was further solidified by his actions. He led by example, never asking more from his community than he was willing to give himself.

Morais did not want to see more Jews disappear into the American society and culture. He continued in his efforts to guide them in assimilating from their new host culture, drawing income, housing, and education from it while maintaining their traditionalism. He extended a warm welcome to new immigrants, regardless of their preference for the Ashkenazic custom. Morais argued vehemently for the rights

⁶Ibid.

⁷Declaration Documents, Supreme Court, East District Pennsylvania, V.9A., cited in Nussenbaum, 12.

of the Russian-Jewish immigrants who poured into the United States during the 1880's. He urged his co-religionists "to appoint committees or to adopt any other means they may deem proper for the pecuniary relief of those who have so strong a claim on our sympathies and means."⁸ Morais' point was that the well-established Jews of Philadelphia had conveniently forgotten how they struggled to make their way upon their own arrival in America. It was a relief to put the past behind when starting over again in a new world, but the newly-arrived Russians needed more than the reassurance of personal safety. They needed jobs, job training, money to pay for housing until they stood on steadier financial footing, food, and clothing. Morais impressed upon the Philadelphia Jewish community the need to help the Russians simply because they were Jews in trouble. He argued that organizations that had been set up as benevolent societies should not exist for the purpose of discriminating against some Jews while helping others. His eloquence and passion on this issue reverberated through a piece of correspondence to the American Hebrew:

Shame on those renegade rabbis who dare, before the ark of God, from the pulpit of Jewish Temples, to say, that these our brothers are 'too low' for us to extend the hand of sympathy and assistance. That we must send them back, prevent them at all risks from reaching these shores, lest America become Russianized! Aye, they are low enough to obey the word of their God, to keep His

⁸David Sulzberger, "Russo-Jewish Immigration," Publications of American Jewish Historical Society, XIX, (1910), p. 125, quoted in Nussenbaum, 62.

ordinances, and respect His Sabbaths. We want them not. Shall their evil example destroy the distinction we have labored so many years to effect?⁹

Morais apparently did not perceive any threat in the influx of Russian-Jewish immigrants. Although their ritual customs and practices differed from his own and from those of his congregation, he welcomed their traditionalism. Their presence seems to have invigorated him in the effort to champion traditional Judaism. His desire to help the Russian immigrants also led him into working relationships with his fellow rabbis in Philadelphia without regard for religious philosophies.

In October, 1884, Morais and a group of Philadelphians including Rev. Morris Jastrow and Rev. Samuel Hirsch established The Hebrew Immigration Society for the purposes of protecting newly-arrived immigrants and helping them find work.¹⁰ Morais' attitude towards the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all residents of the United States influenced his every thought and deed. Only in America could he have fought so tenaciously to fortify traditional Judaism. He drew strength from his guaranteed rights as an American, and he exercised them to their fullest extent, not only for himself but also on behalf of recent immigrants and others in need. He believed himself the consummate American Jew, remaining devout in his religious

⁹American Hebrew 7:5 (Aug. 5, 1881): 135.

¹⁰The Jewish Record 20: 2 (Oct. 3, 1884): 4, cited in Nussenbaum,

practices while simultaneously exercising his rights, especially the right to free speech. He grew bolder in his addresses to his congregation, issuing direct challenges to them in the hopes of inspiring them to action, as for example, in 1880 when Mikveh Israel congregation was in danger of losing its building.

The early 1880's found Mikveh Israel in a serious financial crisis. Congregational funds were insufficient to make payments to the mortgage holders on their building, and several deadlines had not been met. During the High Holidays, Morais

...called attention to the approaching centennial anniversary of the Congregation...and...exhorted his hearers to pay the debt on the building (about \$30,000). He said..."This congregation...is the bulwark of conservative Judaism. Shall it remain so or shall it be razed to the ground? Shall it live or die? This day you must decide before you leave the walls of this sanctuary. For myself, I shall always oppose unwarrantable innovations, the apings of Gentilism which my soul condemns and which mean the destruction of our holy religion...."¹¹

The passage of years had not diminished Morais' ardor for traditionalism. He still viewed reforms such as organ and choir, family pews, and services in the vernacular as unJewish. Part of the difficulty in the congregation was the persistence of some members to reform. Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia was a Reform congregation, and Rodeph Shalom

¹¹American Hebrew 4:4 (Sept. 10, 1880): 39.

congregation had instituted reforms into their worship, so Morais' congregants had other choices. His opposition to "unwarrantable innovations" reflected his conviction that Mikveh Israel as an institution of traditional Judaism did not have to change in order to survive. His statement implied that he would not remain if such changes were implemented. His argument contained a slight tone of desperation with regard to the survival of Mikveh Israel. He feared for the future of his congregation as he once more defined his limits and waited for the congregation to decide their fate as well as his own.

What Morais had in passion and commitment to Judaism, his congregational leaders seemed to lack. Abraham Hart was no longer the parnas, and this left Morais without a strong ally on the adjunta. While he preached to inspire his congregants to save the congregation by opening their pockets, the adjunta was not able to gather a quorum, new members were not being elected as a result of this inability, and the organizational structure of the synagogue appeared on the verge of collapse.¹² Morais' pointed words during the High Holidays finally moved them to action. Within a few weeks the congregation had rallied and gathered \$1000 in subscriptions. They declared an open meeting in June, 1881, for the congregation and "such members of the community as may be interested...."¹³ The rationale behind the open

¹²American Hebrew 7:3 (June 5, 1881): 28.

¹³American Hebrew 7:5 (June 17, 1881): 53.

meeting was that the synagogue had supported others in need and was open to serve Jews regardless of their economic standing. The congregation hoped to experience the beneficence of the broader community. Only one group of Philadelphia Jews was not solicited, "...it is too humiliating a surrender of principles in the K. K. Mickve Israel to purchase a longer existence with the assistance of Hebrews avowedly opposed to its conservative course. The synagogue whose worship I conduct shall not be thus supported with my expressed or tacit approval."¹⁴ With these words, Sabato Morais made his position on reform absolutely clear. He wanted no part of their money because he wanted no involvement with them if they continued on their path of group destruction. If Mikveh Israel accepted financial assistance from supporters of reform, those same supporters might have pushed the congregation to institute the changes Morais had been battling for thirty years. Morais was a proud man who would brook no deviation from the high standards he set for himself and, by association, for his congregation.

In 1883 Morais severed whatever tenuous connection he had felt with the Reformers when, at the occasion of the first ordination at the Hebrew Union College, shellfish was served at the celebratory banquet. In his outrage he wrote an article for the American Hebrew in which he said, "...I

¹⁴American Hebrew 7:6 (June 24, 1881): 64-65.

recoil at the thought which presented itself unbidden, on my learning of the Anti-Mosaic banquet at Cincinnati. It behooves the President of Union College to condemn what has evoked the remonstrances of the right-thinking."¹⁵ Wise refused to accept responsibility for the event, and Morais apparently lost all respect for him from that point on.¹⁶ The repercussions from the Trefa Banquet allowed the traditionalists to see that Wise's allegiance was really with the reformers. He referred to the laws of kashrut as "purely national laws for Israel," and did not grant them any religious or spiritual significance.¹⁷ This blatant act of disregard for tradition led to the withdrawal of support for the seminary by the traditionalists. It also solidified the position of Hebrew Union College as a training ground for Reform leaders. The Trefa Banquet is significant because it finally clarified without a doubt that reformers and traditionalists had incompatible practices, priorities, and ideologies.

It was also during the 1880's that Morais spearheaded the drive to found The Jewish Theological Seminary. The final catalyzing force that led to the push for this long-held dream was the increasing formalization of the reformers

¹⁵American Hebrew 15:10 (July 20, 1883): 2, quoted in Nussenbaum, 105.

¹⁶Nussenbaum, 105. See also American Hebrew 18:3 (Feb. 29, 1884): 35-36; 19:5 (June 13, 1884): 69; 39:8 (June 28, 1889): 144-145.

¹⁷American Israelite (Aug. 3, 1883, Dec. 28, 1883), quoted in Michael A. Meyer, "A Centennial History" Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion At One Hundred Years ed. Samuel E. Karff (The Hebrew Union College Press, 1976) 42.

into a Reform Movement. Throughout the late spring and summer of 1885, Kaufmann Kohler, a radical reformer serving Beth El in New York, and Alexander Kohut, a traditional rabbi who had just arrived in the same city to serve Ahavath Chesed, engaged in a polite yet pointed debate between reform and traditional viewpoints, ideologies, and practices. Their interchange was published in the American Hebrew. In these essays, they addressed each other specifically and argued their points with a lot of verve and persuasion. Kohut provided the steadying influence the traditionalists needed in order to organize and present a united front against the reformers. He accepted a call to Ahavath Chesed in 1885, and immediately initiated the series of events that would lead to the irreparable rift between reformers and traditionalists.¹⁸

In his inaugural sermon from the pulpit of Ahavath Chesed, Kohut provided for the first time an expression of the ideology of the traditionalists as a unified, cohesive line of thought defined in opposition to that of Reform. After emphasizing the importance of the chain of tradition as the basis for Mosaic-rabbinical Judaism, he posed the question that was the crux of the differences between reform and traditional Judaism:

Is Judaism definitely closed for all time, or is it capable of and in need of continuous development? I answer both Yes and No...Yes, *because religion has been*

¹⁸Moshe Davis, The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in 19th Century America (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, The Burning Bush Press, 1963), 222.

given to man; and as it is the duty of man to grow in perfection as long as he lives, he must modify the forms which yield him religious satisfaction, in accordance with the spirit of the times...No, in so far as it concerns the Word of God, which cannot be imperfect...imperfect as you are, strive to perfect yourself in the image of your perfect God. Hold in honor His unchangeable Law and let it be your earnest task to put new life into the outward form of our religion....¹⁹

According to Kohut, the continued existence of the Jewish community was based upon its foundation in the Torah and the Rabbis. It was the acceptance of such an authority which could provide stability.²⁰ Without it, Judaism *qua* Judaism would cease to exist. This was perhaps the most persuasive argument against the actions of the reformers, who instituted sweeping changes into the liturgy, flouted the dietary laws, and prayed in English or German, not in Hebrew. The impact of Reform's disregard for traditional strictures was a fracturing of Judaism in America. Traditionalists viewed reformers as arbitrarily setting policy and practice to suit the latter's desire to be *au courant*. By changing too many of what traditionalists perceived were the foundations of Judaism, reformers had undermined it and were rendering it unrecognizable as Judaism. Accordingly, under Kohut's model of Judaism as a fixed system existing within a dynamic environment, the reformers were not living Jewish lives because they changed the Word of God and did not "[H]old in

¹⁹Alexander Kohut, The Ethics of the Fathers (New York, 1920), quoted in Davis, 223.

²⁰Moshe Davis, 222.

honor His unchangeable Law." They instituted changes motivated in many cases by the desire, to use Kohut's words, "to put new life into the outward form of [their] religion." The traditionalists objected both to the depth and breadth of the changes as well as to the perceived motivation underlying them. Kaufmann Kohler was quick to answer the series of charges leveled against the reformers, and his responses, like Kohut's addresses, were published in serial form in the American Hebrew.

Like Kohut, Kohler used the pulpit as a venue for his response. In a sermon to his congregation, Temple Beth El in New York, Kohler observed that:

...all conservative Jews cling tenaciously to every law and tradition of the past, denying the very title of Jew to any one who deviates on principle. But as Reformed or enlightened Jews we humbly ask: Can we or ought we to observe all those obsolete and meaningless practices of the past, or ought we to replace them by forms more adequate to the age, more expressive of, and impressive with, the awe of holiness? Is Judaism to be but a sacred mummy, or a fountain of life?²¹

The battle lines were clearly drawn between the two groups. Each had its own unique way of referring to the other. To the reformers, those who adhered to the traditional ideology were anachronistic, while to those committed to the conservation of Mosaic-rabbinical law and practice, the reformers had gone beyond the borders of Judaism.

²¹American Hebrew 23:5 (June 12, 1885): 67.

Kohler continued his investigation of modern Judaism under the overarching question of whether Judaism was destined to go "Backwards or Forwards?" The basis for reform, according to Kohler, was the fact that "...the Jew in ...modern civilization demands different forms of religion, more expressive of the grand, world-redeeming truths Judaism is to represent and teach." He contended that Judaism needed a living God, for it "...is a *living faith*, not a religion confined to dead letters." The goal of Reform was a religion that appealed to reason as well as to the heart.²² Kohler espoused a belief system in which the laws of Moses that dealt with anything outside of ethical law had become obsolete. For example, laws connected to the sacrificial cult and priestly purity applied only to life inside Palestine, and were non-binding in the Diaspora.

In his reply, Kohut lauded Kohler for the timeliness of his question regarding forward versus backward movement. However, Kohut remarked that American Judaism could not exist in a Jewish vacuum. He believed that in a country where freedom of speech was a constitutionally protected right, the majority would hold the dominant position. This majority opinion would also discover "...that progress...has its boundaries, and must know its limits." He believed that by discarding the classical Jewish texts, rites, and practices, the reformers would find nothing left that was based on any

²²American Hebrew 23:6 (June 19, 1885), 84.

integral Jewish authority. The fear of losing religious identity due to a lack of grounding on any sort of tradition was legitimate. The possibility that nothing from tradition might remain that would render Kohler's Judaism recognizeable to a traditional Jew catalyzed further discussion and debate.

Kohut thus championed many positions that Morais had long espoused, and Morais quickly joined the exchange in his support. The American Hebrew published a series of open letters between Morais and Kohler in its issues of June and July, 1885. Morais commenced the exchange by expressing his respect for Kohler. He was fearful that Kohler's teaching would be especially dangerous. Kohler was earnest, scholarly, and sincere in his convictions that Reform Judaism was a Prophetic Judaism trumpeting the ethical laws of Judaism. It was charismatic but misguided leaders like Kohler who presented more of a danger to Judaism than those who were ready to discard it completely. Kohler's respect for the past created the illusion of some kind of traditional authority for the changes he espoused, but Morais would not be assuaged.

Morais indicted Kohler, saying, "You it is that have thus lifted up the axe to strike at the root of the tree which fed and sheltered your fathers."²³ How could a reputable leader like Kohler be blind to that which was

²³American Hebrew 23:7 (June 26, 1885): 98-99.

absolutely clear to Morais? In Morais' view, disregard for the foundations of Judaism could only lead to its demise. Morais wanted nothing more than to win Kohler over to the side of traditionalism, to Morais' notion of American Judaism. Why was it that these Jewish leaders, together with Isaac Mayer Wise, who exercised such influence over the nascent institutions which would come to define American Judaism, and who held up similar visions of a united and unified American Judaism, were unable to find common ground on which to meet? The name-calling and finger-pointing obscured their ability to see that their actions were tearing at the very fabric of Judaism in America. Their arguing appeared to work against the greater goal of a unified American Judaism, even if each man harbored his own view as to what that unity entailed.

In his earnest attempts to win Kohler over to conservatism, Morais pointed out that reform was neither new nor unique to Judaism, but he distinguished those reforms from the sort of assault on tradition that was currently underway:

The rabbis, too, were reformers...when the liberal application of the Torah...conflicted with the best social interests of the commonwealth, the leading minds in Israel sought out, and effectively applied, the spirit of reform. No design to conciliate Gentilism in its chameleon-like changes, actuated our sainted preceptors. The alterations they agreed upon were inspired by an eager wish to maintain the faith,

and through their marvellous [*sic*] foresight have we remained imperishable.²⁴

Morais' style was almost cajoling, as if he wanted to say to Kohler, "See, we have made reforms, and we are capable of looking ahead to the future, so why ally yourself with those who seek to undermine true Judaism?" The reformers, feared Morais, were bent upon turning Judaism into another branch of the Christian faith by divesting it of all Jewish trappings. If the reformers wished "to maintain the faith" they needed to examine their motivations for change. If "the spirit of reform" was "effectively applied," as for instance in Morais' earlier proposal to reform the liturgy, then traditionalism would flourish as a forward-thinking and progressive yet consistently Jewish movement.

The focus of Kohler's response was Morais' contention that biblical criticism and scientific study of the Hebrew Scriptures were counterproductive to religion. Kohler claimed to be searching only for the truth, and he queried, "Can pious conservatism fairly and intelligently account for all the errors and short-comings of the Bible...? I think not, but critical research can." Moreover, Kohler asserted that Mosaic-rabbinical law "...was fit only for an age of semi-culture." Therefore, he had found it necessary to make a choice concerning the direction he desired his religious sentiments to take, and he concluded, "I surrender my belief in the Divinity of the Law of Moses rather than I do my

²⁴American Hebrew 23:8 (July 3, 1885): 115.

belief in God."²⁵ Kohler seemed to be arguing about the limits of the possibilities of religious belief for a rational mind while Morais was arguing religiosity. The former argued on behalf of a rational-intellectual approach to Judaism in contrast to the latter, who argued from a traditional, text-centered system of worship and practice. It appears that they were in some cases arguing in favor of the same things, such as the unification of American Jewry, the need for reforms in some areas of ritual and practice, better education for Jewish children, and increased attendance in the synagogues. In their areas of disagreement, however, the lines of argument became muddled. Each man decried the other's ideology and dismissed elements in both reform and traditionalism respectively that might have given them common ground on which to meet. Reform was anathema to traditionalism just as traditionalism seemed anachronistic to reform.

In what would become a final attempt to communicate with Kohler prior to the fateful Pittsburgh Conference, Morais attempted to point out the error of the Reform way. Morais challenged the reform policy of following the teachings of Prophetic Judaism to the exclusion of all else. He refused to believe that Torah-based Judaism could be discarded, apparently with little afterthought or regret. He argued that the reformers were misreading and misinterpreting the

²⁵Ibid., 120.

prophets, and perhaps even taking the prophetic writings out of context to prove the veracity of their claims:

I concede that God's inspired Wisdom may promulgate a system of worship differing outwardly from that instituted in ages long bygone. You allow human Reason to blot out laws and ordinances obviously intended for the government of a people whom the Most High sanctified to His apostleship. Then you seize upon the prophets, and, forcing into your hands a pen of destruction, demand that they shall write Mosaism dead. No, in the name of truth, I must once more raise my voice against the wrong of which "Radical Reformers are guilty." Our Seers cannot be constrained to proclaim the Torah extinct. They will ever declare it inextinguishably alive; but it must live not in sheets of parchment...It must live in the hearts of Israel....²⁶

Both men argued in favor of a living Judaism, yet their views differed from each other so radically that they were unable to approach any consensus of opinion. Morais was unable to relinquish Torah as the ultimate voice of authority, and Kohler was unable to accept it as the same. Morais felt no compunction about offering harsh criticism of Kohler and his followers. They represented a direct threat to his way of life, and their presence and influence caused unrest in his own congregation. Because of men like Kohler, Morais was forced to expend large quantities of time and energy simply protecting Mikveh Israel and its mission from the marauding presence of reform elements which sprang up consistently over the years.

²⁶American Hebrew 23:9 (July 10, 1885): 137.

Under the leadership of Kohler, the Reform Movement developed its first formal platform in the fall of 1885 at the Pittsburgh Conference. Isaac Mayer Wise presided over the proceedings, but the text of the platform was entirely that of Kohler.²⁷ The Pittsburgh Platform contained ideological statements that were considered untenable and heretical by the traditionalists.

...We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only the moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization...all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress, originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation...we consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.²⁸

There was nothing in this statement to which the traditionalists could assent. Its ratification represented a watershed in American Jewish history. Reform apparently

²⁷Meyer, Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism, 268.

²⁸Ibid., 387-388.

intended to remove all boundaries while traditionalism continued to emphasize walls that could protect American Jews from the threat of change. The acceptance of the Pittsburgh Platform by the nineteen Reform rabbis present at the conference touched off a chain reaction across the country. There were numbers of rabbis who had previously allied themselves with the reformers simply because they felt that the traditionalists were not forward-thinking enough. These same rabbis, however, could neither condone nor accept the principles outlined in the Pittsburgh Platform. Rabbis Marcus Jastrow and Benjamin Szold were two of the influential rabbis in America who rejected the Pittsburgh Platform and joined with Morais and Kohut in the formal establishment of the Conservative Movement.²⁹

The Conservative Movement was formalized in response to the Pittsburgh Platform. Rabbis led by Sabato Morais were striving to combat the evils they saw inflicted upon the American Jewish community by Reform and its teachings. Morais' greatest concern was for the future of Judaism and its survival as traditional Judaism. He knew that in order to ensure such survival, it would be necessary to take immediate action. He turned for help to the oldest and most prestigious congregation in the United States, Shearith Israel of New York. He proposed that Shearith Israel serve as the organizing force in assembling those rabbis who shared

²⁹Moshe Davis, 228.

the same fears with regard to the continuation of traditional Judaism. Shearith Israel's preacher, Henry Pereira Mendes, suggested to the board of trustees that Morais and others who adhered to the ways of traditional Judaism "be invited to come together to discuss the organization of a Jewish seminary in New York" that would follow traditional mores.³⁰ Morais chose New York as the site for the gathering because of the fact that the overwhelming majority of Jews in the United States resided there. The sheer number of Jews meant there was greater potential for forthcoming financial support from that city. Moreover, if he could count Shearith Israel among his supporters, the legitimacy and validity of his mission would be strengthened.

Shearith Israel and Mikveh Israel have a long and storied history of close involvement and commitment to one another. The congregation that is known as Mikveh Israel was formally organized and built its first building during the time of the Revolutionary War, when many of Shearith Israel's leaders, including the hazan, Gershom Mendes Seixas, moved to Philadelphia to escape the British occupation. These men from New York were instrumental in the creation of Mikveh Israel, and on this basis, the two congregations developed a relationship in which each supported the other or came to the

³⁰Minutes of Shearith Israel, Jan. 7, 1886, p. 304, quoted in David and Tamar de Sola Pool, An Old Faith in The New World; Portrait of Shearith Israel 1654-1954 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 386.

assistance of the other in times of need.³¹ 1886 was one of those times, and Shearith Israel was prepared to answer Morais' call for help.

In January, 1887, The Jewish Theological Seminary held its opening exercises. Morais, the guiding light and motivating force for the institution, delivered an address at the opening in which he briefly outlined the purpose of the seminary:

Judaism in America imploringly calls for help. Stripped by some of the saintly robe donned at Horeb, and compelled to put on polluted garments borrowed of Gentilism; exposed by others to contumely and made to appear graceless and effete because of its old age; decried as unsocial by the worldly; disfigured by the fanatics, Judaism in America needs defenders panoplied in sacred knowledge, girded with faithfulness.³²

The Jewish Theological Seminary was to represent the pure and unsullied form of biblical and rabbinic Judaism. It would strive to disparage the unjust reputation given traditionalism by the reformers. The new seminary, which espoused no sectarian ideology save that of traditionalism, would educate such defenders and send them out into the vast reaches of the United States, where they would teach all they had learned. In this way the survival of Judaism would be assured.

³¹Pools, 427-429.

³²American Hebrew 29:9 (Jan. 7, 1887): 132.

Sabato Morais was moved to action by the passage of the Pittsburgh Platform, because it was at that point that he realized it would not be possible for the Reform Movement and the proponents of traditionalism to cooperate and reconcile their differences. Reform was a movement that continued to push forward. Its leaders seemed to believe that the rational, intellectual, truth-seeking approach of the German Reformers was the way to practice their Judaism. They were not bothered by the move to reject Mosaic-rabbinical law in favor of ethical law. They seemed to perceive no potential for hypocrisy or conflict in rejecting the Torah, the foundation of Judaism, and continuing to call themselves Jews.

Conservatism grew out of the desire of Morais and his fellow traditionalists to counter these reform tendencies. Morais had the foresight to know that once the Pittsburgh Platform had been drafted, partly in response to his goading of Kohler for answers, nothing short of immediate action would be required to save Judaism; to conserve all that had been rejected.

Although The Jewish Theological Seminary came into existence quickly, the groundwork had been in process for years. Morais and others like him had argued with Isaac Mayer Wise over Wise's inconsistencies, and with Kohler regarding Sunday Sabbath observance. In addition, Morais took issue with other proponents of Reform over the rejection of so much of what identified Judaism to the outside world

and to Jews themselves. Reform wished to remove the barriers that stood between them and the rest of the outside, secularized world, and to reinterpret practices and traditions according to the demands of the people and the times. Conservatism desired those identifying aspects of traditional, historical Judaism to remain intact, even if it meant that they were looked upon as sectarians by the Reformers.

Morais was instrumental in the development of the Conservative Movement in America. He was a man of wide reputation who had made a name for himself in the United States by refusing to remain silent when faced with the injustices and social misfortunes around him. He cried out against the Mortara case and preached passionately and ceaselessly against slavery during the Civil War years just as he had preached earlier for Unionism. In the face of an enormous influx of Russian Jews, he rallied his community to help their co-religionists in need.

Sabato Morais made things happen. He was a man of deep convictions who knew precisely how he felt about issues, and just as importantly, he was not afraid to speak up and be heard. His leadership skills had been fine-tuned by his years at Mikveh Israel, and his influence had increased as his tenure there lengthened. He was recognized as a leader within the Philadelphia community and in New York, the home of "his" Seminary. He followed through with his plans, and his persistence brought him a fair measure of success.

Philadelphia held a prestigious position in the American Jewish community prior to Morais' appointment there because of the work of his predecessor, Isaac Leeser, and the efforts of members of the Mikveh Israel congregation. Philadelphia's other rabbis, including Jastrow and Hirsch, also had national reputations that brought further prestige to the city. In addition, the history of strong lay leaders like Manuel Josephson and Abraham Hart, who were prominent in the American Jewish community, enhanced Philadelphia's importance. Morais helped to maintain the high profile of the Philadelphia community through his strength of character. His ability to argue substantive issues without delving into character assassination or stooping to personal attacks against those with whom he disagreed enabled him to communicate effectively with them.³³

Simply to counter reform tendencies, however, was not Morais' highest goal. Like Wise, he envisioned a unified American Judaism, albeit a traditional Judaism. Morais desired to re-form the American Jews, not Judaism.³⁴ In yet another communication from Morais to Kohler, he encouraged Kohler to do the same:

What concerns us all now most deeply is the rearing of a generation, reverent, thoughtful, and ready to lend its aid to the moral elevation of millions among our co-religionists who do need refining influences and a

³³See American Hebrew 32:4 (Sept. 2, 1887): 50 in which Morais responds to an attack from Isaac Mayer Wise.

³⁴Moshe Davis, 234.

soul-inspiring example. Change your championship of a pseudo "Reform" for that of a veritable reformation, and you will have labored with the Lord and in the interest of humanity.³⁵

From this statement it is apparent that Morais and Kohler both were concerned about the education of Jews in America. Morais had stated his opinion and his goals with regard to Jewish education in America as early as 1852.³⁶ But Kohler had gone so far as to publish a series of plans for changes in the religious school curricula and hours in the American Hebrew in 1886. Here again they differed drastically in their educational ideals. Kohler's belief was that

In order to give us...well-principled, conscientious and whole-souled Jews, our Sabbath School must work more upon the heart, must stir up the emotion and take hold of the realities of life...The chief end...of religious education...is...the moral and spiritual development of man...in the estimate of Prophetic Judaism, moral perfection is the only aim of religion. To do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with thy God--this is what the Lord requires of thee. The rest is only of secondary importance, a mere help to reach the end.³⁷

Morais objected to this assessment of the goals of religious education. If Bible was not taught, the students would have no basic Jewish foundation upon which to foster their "moral and spiritual development." Between his radical

³⁵American Hebrew 32:4 (Sept. 2, 1887): 53.

³⁶Sabato Morais, "Thanksgiving Day Sermon" (1852), AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

³⁷American Hebrew 28:7 (Sept. 24, 1886): 100.

views on religious education and his authoring of the Pittsburgh Platform, Kohler stirred up deep opposition to Reform. Sabato Morais was the man who stepped forward to rally the traditional Jews along the Eastern seaboard and unite them in the cause of Conservatism.

Morais' standpoint on Jewish education differed greatly from that of Kohler. In his outline of goals for The Jewish Theological Seminary, Morais said,

As far as it lies in my power, those destined to ascend our pulpits shall draw knowledge at the fountain-head, not from streamlets running with corruption. The word of the Bible in its original purity shall command profound attention; its purport, when obscure, shall be sought at the hands of commentators, trustworthy by reason of their thorough acquaintance with the construction, the genius, the spirit of Holy Writ.³⁸

Kohler wanted his students to learn *about* the Bible; Morais was going to *teach* the Bible. In his statement of goals, Morais once again emphasized the importance of Torah as the source of Judaism. Such fundamental differences set these two great men apart from each other in ways their mutual respect and admiration for the other's accomplishments could not overcome.

It is significant that Philadelphia was the center point in the struggle between Reform and Conservatism. From the date of its formal establishment, Mikveh Israel had served as

³⁸American Hebrew 26:2 (Feb. 19, 1886): 19.

a beacon to other American Jewish congregations, particularly since the time of Leiser. Isaac Leiser was a major figure in early American Jewish history. It was Leiser who helped establish the first Sunday school programs. He founded the original Jewish Publication Society which, after a few failed attempts, was re-started in 1888 by Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf, also of Philadelphia.³⁹ Perhaps the most important contribution made to American Jewry by Leiser was the introduction of an English discourse, or sermon into the structure of the service. The exercise of this rabbinic privilege enabled Leiser and Morais after him, to inspire the congregation into action, to declaim injustice and wrongdoing, and above all, to teach about Judaism, its history, and its ethical and moral structure.

Philadelphia, by virtue of the men and women who served Mikveh Israel both in a lay and professional capacity, established itself as a Jewish center. It was the home of the first extra-congregational aid society, the first Sunday school, the first Jewish Publication Society, and the first English sermon. A Jewish Hospital was established there as well as a Jewish Foster Home, several immigrant aid societies, and a few weekly Jewish journals, including Leiser's The Occident, and the Jewish Exponent.

In Philadelphia, Morais delivered impassioned political sermons from the pulpit at Mikveh Israel, and he was the

³⁹Friedman, 186.

moving force behind fights for social justice and calls for social action throughout his tenure at the congregation. His commitment and attachment to his adopted home was so great, that when he was offered the position as senior rabbi at Shearith Israel in New York so that he might be closer to his beloved Jewish Theological Seminary, he declined on the grounds that it would be too difficult to leave his home and his people.⁴⁰

It is appropriate that the inspiration and the driving force for Conservative Judaism rose out of Philadelphia, a city in which religious diversity had been generally accepted since the time of William Penn. Sabato Morais spent his life working tirelessly for the Judaism he loved so well, a tradition that was based on the Mosaic-rabbinical laws and the concomitant customs and rituals. Morais' selflessness in establishing The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York was coupled with his pragmatism, for he realized that financial backing and grass roots support would be more forthcoming in a city where more Jews resided. The formalization of the Conservative Movement in the United States appears to be the first such movement in world Jewry, although there were obvious tendencies towards conservatism in Europe, as demonstrated by the immediate influence of Alexander Kohut. From its origins as a reactionary trend bent on countering reforms instituted by the German Reform movement in America,

⁴⁰Moshe Davis, 236.

Conservative Judaism established itself as a vital, forward-thinking movement.

The 1880's marked Sabato Morais' formal elevation to the role of strong and influential leader within the American Jewish community. He demonstrated his influence within Mikveh Israel as he rallied his congregants in order to save their building and ensure their continued presence as a proponent of tradition on the broad spectrum of American Judaism. His leadership abilities culminated in the establishment of The Jewish Theological Seminary, for which he drew together two separate and distinct communities, Philadelphia and New York, in pursuit of a common goal. Sabato Morais was not one to rest on his laurels, though. He was no longer a young man, but he continued to fight for traditionalism both at Mikveh Israel and in the Jewish community at large.

Chapter 5: 1890-1897

Sabato Morais: The Consummate Rabbi

Following both the economic depression of the 1870-1880's and the formalization of Reform ideology in the Pittsburgh Platform, American Judaism underwent a true renaissance. Any hope of reconciling the disparate movements had been lost after Pittsburgh, and American Judaism was identified by two increasingly distant points on the Jewish spectrum: Reform and Traditional. Traditional Judaism, after nearing the brink of extinction during the 1870's and early 1880's, was catalyzed into action by what were considered unacceptable and heretical statements made by the Reformers in their platform. Sabato Morais and Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia led the way. Morais, after founding the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, continued to commute between the two cities despite his advancing age. Mikveh Israel became known as one of the most financially supportive congregations for the Seminary, and its level of commitment became an example for other congregations.

The 1890's found the institutions of traditional Judaism thriving. Congregations were growing and moving, and some changes were apparent within the infrastructure of the congregations themselves. Morais' involvement in social action and social justice issues continued at a high level, and despite the fact that he suffered from a variety of serious illnesses as he entered his seventies, he refused to

slow down. His dreams were being realized, and he would not sit by and watch while others worked. He continued to inspire and lead by example until the day of his death in November, 1897.

Morais repeatedly referred to the Jewish Theological Seminary as his "Benjamin," the child of his old age. It was his proudest accomplishment, and he nurtured it much like a parent nurtures and cares for a child. Because he lived in Philadelphia, Morais was forced to commute to New York, a trip he made three times each week by train in spite of his advancing age. He also operated a sort of branch office of the Seminary in his home in Philadelphia. From the early to the mid-1890's, he instructed a couple of students privately, although they were formally enrolled in the New York school. For whatever reason, whether it was financial, professional, or personal, these two young men studied in Philadelphia with Morais. It was planned that they would join their class at the Seminary for their senior year. One of the young men, Gerson Levi, eventually received rabbinic ordination from the Seminary.¹

Morais served as president of the faculty, a position that carried no salary. His administrative duties in that capacity included interviewing candidates for both the student body and the faculty. In addition, he would deliver

¹Robert E. Fierstien, A Different Spirit: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1886-1902 (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1990) 77,87.

occasional lectures to the students either on the Bible or on Jewish theology. Over the course of the next few years the Seminary continued to grow and develop under the watchful eye and care of Morais. As a token of appreciation for all that he had given to the Seminary and in recognition of his emphasis on learning, the Seminary library was renamed in his honor in 1893.² The richness of his legacy was guaranteed to endure.

Once the Jewish Theological Seminary had begun its classes, and its future looked promising, Morais was able to turn his attention to other issues as well. The rift between reform and traditionalism was growing ever wider, and Morais was determined that Mikveh Israel would not fall prey to the seductive nature of reform. His sermons during the 1890's focused on those two themes: the Seminary and the struggle with and against reform.

His Kol Nidre sermon in 1890 was reflective of the pain and anguish he felt when he witnessed the breakdown in Jewish education, the disregard for kashrut, and the figurative destruction of the Torah. He argued that there was a fine line between Reform ritual and trinitarianism, and that those individuals who disregarded the Torah, both written and oral, were flirting with Christianity. Morais used the expression "Jewish ceremonialism" to indicate that Christianity had arisen from Judaism, and because of this close historical

²Ibid., 87-88.

association, diligent observance was necessary to prevent that thin thread from breaking. In this particular address, he was referring to the continued pressures to reform that were present within his congregation. Morais charged that an individual who practiced Judaism arbitrarily

...impugn[s] the authority of the whole book who asserts that those ordinances, which fashion and convenience please to disregard, have lost their validity...What becomes of the main idea that underlies the Torah--the belief in One uncreated and incorporeal God--if the volumes which impart that truth are to be tampered with at pleasure?"³

Frustration, anger, and fear resonated through his words as Morais fought for what he believed. His fervent conviction was that Judaism *qua* Judaism could continue only if the rituals and ceremonies that had bound the Jewish people together for millenia were practiced in perpetuity. To change Judaism by removing the essentials and arbitrarily deciding upon which practices to retain and which to discard was anathema to Morais because it meant the end of Judaism to him:

The *Yichud* and the *Mitzvot* are indissolubly connected. A tree stripped of its branches and foliage cannot afford us shade. Do not lop them off, my brethren. Under the religion, compared by our moralist of yore to a luxuriant tree, we found shelter against pelting storms of persecution. We shall still obtain an abiding security and be forever preserved....⁴

³Jewish Exponent 7:26 (Oct. 3, 1890): 1.

⁴Ibid., 2.

Morais' anxiety was palpable in his words, but what was its source? In the American society surrounding them, Jews were a minority, albeit an influential one. But just as they influenced, so too were they influenced by those around them. The desire to be like their neighbors and to have the same lifestyle in order to further the acceptance of the Jews into the predominantly Christian society naturally led many Jews to abandon their traditional roots in favor of Reform.

Morais was still battling for assimilation from American society rather than to it. Children followed the example set for them by their parents, and this process of assimilation was disruptive to the traditional lifestyle. The principal source of Morais' anxiety was most probably the call for reforms in ritual and ceremonialism from within his own congregation together with the death of older congregants and the withdrawal of members who chose Reform congregations over Mikveh Israel.

Rodeph Shalom congregation hired Dr. Henry Berkowitz in 1892 to serve as their rabbi when Dr. Jastrow's age and health rendered him unable to fulfill his responsibilities. Berkowitz was a graduate of the Hebrew Union College, and his arrival in Philadelphia signified Rodeph Shalom's firm commitment to Reform. Berkowitz joined his fellow alumna Joseph Krauskopf, who had been at Keneseth Israel since 1887. The presence of these two radical reformers was a formidable challenge to the aging Morais. Almost immediately, significant reforming changes were instituted by Berkowitz.

Whereas Rodeph Shalom had previously been a traditional congregation with moderate reform leanings under Jastrow, it became a Reform congregation under Berkowitz.⁵ Perhaps the most telling example of this shift occurred in 1895 when the Rodeph Shalom congregation met to consider adopting the Union Prayer Book. While Jastrow and his followers were opposed to the change, Berkowitz argued persuasively in favor of it by appealing to the sense of unity that was desired among American Jews. The new prayer book contained little Hebrew because Berkowitz, who had served on the committee that created the Union Prayer Book, "...loved the Hebrew but recognized the impossibility of maintaining it now. He looked to the future."⁶ The decision was made to adopt the new prayer book, and with that vote, Rodeph Shalom broke completely with its traditional past and fully identified with the Reform Movement. This affiliation was finalized with the decision to associate with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations later in 1895.⁷

Morais was fighting the changes occurring in his own city as well as within his congregation. He had already expressed a willingness to implement changes into the liturgy through the elimination of some of the psalms and extraneous readings and the addition of modernized prayers for the local and federal government. He had eagerly embraced the practice

⁵Edward Davis, 105.

⁶American Hebrew 57:7 (June 21, 1895): 170-171.

⁷Edward Davis, 108.

of delivering a sermon in English on the Sabbath and holidays. But he drew the line at the elimination of Hebrew from the service.

As early as 1852, he had inveighed against praying in the vernacular in a sermon delivered to his congregation.⁸ Morais reiterated his feelings about the nature of changes in the liturgy during the course of a lecture delivered before the Mikveh Israel Association in 1893. Changes can be made neither capriciously nor unilaterally. Changes may only be made "...as of old, by an authority--a synod of sincere, God-fearing men looking only for the well-being of their co-religionists, and for the promotion of true harmony in sentiments, in devotion, in attachment to the religion of Israel, and to the sacred Hebrew language...."⁹ These are the commonalities that tie Jews together. The elimination of these ties would lead inevitably and inexorably to the destruction of Judaism. This was Morais' greatest fear.

Following Rodeph Shalom's decision to adopt the Union Prayer Book, Morais met with a class of Hebrew school students and directly addressed the primacy of Hebrew:

I notice that our ministers...tell us that they love Hebrew, but that it is very difficult to retain the language. I want to say that I not only love Hebrew, but that I also want to retain it, because I believe that it is our only way to maintain Judaism. You may depend upon it that if the Hebrew tongue should ever

⁸See Chapter 2, p. 27.

⁹American Hebrew 52:18 (March 3, 1893): 586.

become extinct the sun of Judaism will set, never to rise again.¹⁰

These were the same battles Morais had been fighting for years, yet as he grew older his words became more passionate and poignant. It was as though he felt a sense of desperation with the onset of each demand for reform in his congregation and his community as well as signs of aging in himself. In his younger years he had not hesitated to challenge his congregants in order to goad them into action. This behavior was exemplified when the burden of debt threatened Mikveh Israel with closure. But concurrent with age was perspective. Perhaps he realized that despite all he had accomplished in his continuing fight for traditionalism, the struggle would continue after he was gone. Perhaps the poignancy of his words illustrated his resignation to that realization.

In late 1891 he suffered from pneumonia, and again in 1893 he fell victim to a sudden serious illness attributed to overwork and exhaustion from his constant travels between New York and Philadelphia. In 1896 he was sick during the high holidays, and was unable to fulfill his duties, so a student from the Seminary conducted services at Mikveh Israel.¹¹

As his tenure at Mikveh Israel reached forty years in 1891, Morais focused more intensely in his sermons and other

¹⁰American Hebrew 57:9 (July 5, 1895): 221.

¹¹Jewish Exponent 10:12 (Dec. 25, 1891): 3, 13:10 (June 9, 1893): 3, American Hebrew 53:7 (June 16, 1893): 210, and 59:22 (Oct. 2, 1896): 545.

addresses on two different topics: first, he inspired backing for the Jewish Theological Seminary and second, he continued his constant struggle against reform. He was choosing his battles carefully, and conserving his energy for matters of paramount importance. On the occasion of his fortieth anniversary with Mikveh Israel, the congregation honored him. In response to their gifts, Morais said, "During my career in the ministry I have striven but to do one thing--and that is, my duty; duty not only to my congregation, but to the whole house of Israel."¹²

One of the finest examples of Morais' fulfillment of his duty to all Jews was his instrumental role in bringing Philadelphia's cloakmakers' strike to an end in 1890. Because of his continuing involvement with the hundreds of Russian immigrants who had settled in Philadelphia and who sought assistance from The Hebrew Immigration Society, he was kept abreast of the strike, which included many Russian Jews. Morais visited the families of some of the strikers and distributed money and food stuffs that had been donated by his congregants. He was deeply affected by the squalor in which the Russians were living, and he promised to do what he could to facilitate negotiations between the manufacturers and the union.¹³ When he was unable to accomplish an end to the strike because of the unwillingness of the strikers to compromise, he wrote a letter to them which was read at their

¹²Jewish Exponent 8:24 (March 27, 1891): 2.

¹³Ibid., 7:18 (Aug. 8, 1890): 6.

next meeting. He reminded the strikers that "...the manufacturers...had agreed to all points which you submitted to them, except to your demand for the discharge of certain men in their employ...Precious time was lost because of that...difference...and meanwhile both sides became provoked to a degree which prevented an amicable settlement." He reminded them of the needs of their families and exhorted them to bring the three and a half month strike to an end.¹⁴

The strike ended the following week, and in an editorial in the local Jewish paper, Morais was given much of the credit for the outcome: "Week after week...he argued with the Russian Jewish cloakmakers to stop the strike; and the men looked up to him with high regard."¹⁵ Morais had been involved with the Russians since the moment of their arrival on American soil, and despite the language barrier, he was able to make himself understood by them. When Russian Jews living in the poorer sections of Philadelphia experienced a series of assaults, Morais met with the Russian community, and it was reported in the Jewish Exponent:

He dissuaded his hearers from organizing societies or clubs for their own protection, as the law of the land would afford them the same rights and protection as it gave to other citizens of the community. He urged them to embrace citizenship and become thoroughly American....¹⁶

¹⁴Ibid., 7:20 (Aug. 22, 1890): 5.

¹⁵Ibid., 7:21 (Aug. 29, 1890): 6.

¹⁶Jewish Exponent 9:20 (Aug. 21, 1891): 2.

Here again Morais was concerned that the Russian immigrants experience assimilation from the host culture, not to it. By assimilating from American society, the Russians could experience the political advantages of America while maintaining their distinct cultural and religious identity. Morais saw part of his duty as taking responsibility for the Americanization of the Russians, to help them understand that life in America was not like life in Russia had been. He showed them that in America they had certain guaranteed rights. He invested time and energy helping the new immigrants find housing and work. He fought for better treatment by the larger American Jewish community, and because of his efforts, he earned their trust. In a communication published in the Jewish Exponent, Morais wrote, "...a kind intercourse between American and Russian Jews will benefit the latter. It will show that freedom means a power for good...therefore, whatever Russian Jews undertake for mutual improvement ought to meet the hearty approval of American Jews and be furthered by unobtrusive counsel."¹⁷ It was the trust Morais inspired that helped him to effect an end to the strike.

Morais inspired trust in everyone who came in contact with him. Because of his sincerity, integrity and the strength of his convictions, he was able to communicate effectively with his congregation and his community. He

¹⁷Jewish Exponent 7:2 (April 18, 1890): 5.

could make the strong statements that he did because people knew where he stood. Tribute was paid to him for precisely that quality. On the occasion of Morais' fortieth anniversary at Mikveh Israel, Emil G. Hirsch, a radical Reform rabbi in Chicago, authored an editorial for his journal, the Reform Advocate:

Wide as is the gap which in religious matters separates us from the venerable rabbi of Mickve Israel, we are free to confess that among the living ministers today there is none to whom we pay more willingly the justly-earned tribute of veneration. Dr. Morais stands...at the other end of the line measuring the varied shades of Jewish views...but...In his voice there is never an uncertain ring...He is the best type of Italian Sephardi, in whom the old Jewish orthodoxy...is most beautifully wedded to culture and learning.¹⁸

Much of what he had accomplished, according to Morais, was due to his congregation and the fact that it was an American congregation. In his fortieth anniversary sermon, he expressed his appreciation for the privilege of freedom of the pulpit in a country where all people could be free:

Even more than a spot devoted to the interest of Judaism, in the broadness of its noted beneficence and its promotion of knowledge, has this synagogue proved itself at all times. In its center an altar high and pure was raised to patriotism. To lay on it sentiments of undivided devotion to the country that has stamped out slavery and declared sentient beings

¹⁸"A Tribute to Dr. Morais by Dr. Hirsch," Jewish Exponent (April 17, 1891): 3.

entitled to wear the ennobling badge of freemen became the theme of ardent exhortations and entreaties, which echoed forth from these consecrated courts. Many were occasions on which the occupant of that pulpit could speak on topics not immediately within the range of ritualism; for brimful of events have been the past four decades.¹⁹

Morais was describing what he believed was an appropriate level of assimilation. As the recognized leader of Mikveh Israel and traditional Judaism in America, Morais set the example for his congregants and his community. He exercised his constitutional right to free speech from Mikveh Israel's pulpit, and instructed his congregants on local, national, and international developments in the Jewish world as well as the secular world. America afforded Morais and his congregation privileges as Jews that they did not know in other countries. In America Jews could fight for their constitutionally guaranteed rights and receive recompense for their troubles, as witnessed by Morais' outcries against the labeling of America as a Christian nation.²⁰ He fought not only the politicians who applied the label but also his own co-religionists whose desire for reform threatened Judaism with Christian influences.

Morais could not have known the full extent of the struggles in which he would become engaged when he accepted his post in 1851. By the 1890's Reform and traditional Jewish ideologies were fundamentally incompatible, and

¹⁹Jewish Exponent 8:26 (April 3, 1891): 5.

²⁰American Hebrew 5:3 (Dec. 10, 1880): 40-41.

finger-pointing and the trading of accusations and insults had become standard. At the Central Conference of American Rabbis meeting in 1896, Isaac Mayer Wise, in his address to the conference, said that "...the most important congregations in the country were represented...[and] the existence of this representative body proved that American Judaism and Reformed Judaism were identical...." As the American Hebrew reported, "In the course of his message, Dr. Wise did not fail to intimate that the Conference, as a reform body, represents American Judaism. The others are the sects and, therefore, anachronistic minorities."²¹

Although Morais, too, made statements against the Reformers, he did not claim that traditional Judaism was the true representative of American Jewry despite the fact that such representation had been his original goal. Instead of engaging in superior posturing, Morais chose to mount an educational attack against Reform. Philadelphia had established Hebrew educational societies and Sunday school organizations prior to his arrival there, and Morais was a fervent proponent of such schools. He spent large quantities of his time engaged in teaching. His sermons served a variety of purposes simultaneously, including education, inspiration, and motivation. He knew that in order to keep his congregants coming to the synagogue on a regular basis, he had to engage them. His sermons were timely, yet they

²¹Ibid., 59:11 (July 17, 1896): 279.

always managed to convey his own agenda. In a sermon delivered on the first day of Passover, he said the following:

I proceed--slowly but trustfully--looking devoutly forward to the day when I may present evidences of conscientious endeavors; the acquisition of sacred knowledge to be veraciously expounded; ministerial dignity enhanced by affability; rigidness of observances with freedom from intolerance. But as it is not amid the ranks of the wealthy that I can go in quest of our future shepherds; as among the lowly I can alone hopefully seek for the minds bent on cultivating a literature indispensable to the rational continuance of the synagogue, I must let the riches of the rich supply the needs of the students who try to gain the requisite qualifications.²²

When Morais spoke of the wealthy Jews, he referred to those who had assimilated to American society. They had become consumed with achieving financial success to the exclusion of traditional Judaism. The second generation followed the example of their parents. These were the Jews who focused on secular education, not religious knowledge. Morais knew that the chances for finding students for the Seminary among the economically disadvantaged were better than with the privileged, because the former had fewer secular educational options, and they were less distanced from Judaism. The poorer Jews tended to be the more

²²Jewish Exponent 9:5 (May 8, 1891): 5.

observant and traditional Jews because they had not been caught up in the fever of capitalism.

He recognized the different ways in which Jews Americanized, and he used that knowledge to his advantage when it came to seeking new students and raising money for the Seminary. In a short paragraph, Morais reminded his congregants of the existence of the Jewish Theological Seminary. He emphasized its importance to the continuation of traditional Judaism in America by creating a verbal picture of the rabbi as shepherd, leading the Jewish people with knowledge, dignity, and affability. He reiterated his own position on the importance of connectedness to the past, to ritual and ceremonialism as well as history. In addition, he appealed for funds to support the students in the Seminary. He expanded upon the basic overview of his aspirations for the graduates of the Seminary when he addressed their first commencement in June, 1894:

The synagogue is a main lever of your operations. By it you can lift up what often lies low--a worship of voluble tongues and lips into a worship of intense spirituality. In the synagogue, your living, your thrilling word can change apathy into enthusiasm. For, truly they understood human nature who said that what flows from the heart opens its way into other hearts. In the synagogue, youth is given by you luminous illustrations to show that Judaism is an emanation Divine... Hebrew youths so instructed will look up confidently to you as their friendly mentor... Knowledge, which is the password of the Jew, you are pledged to promote, and watch over it that it may not be lost... Let yours be a

ministration of Jewish knowledge, leading to a reverential synagogal service and to a broadening of human sympathies.²³

Within this charge, Morais presented his model for leadership. He had conducted his rabbinate at Mikveh Israel in the very manner which he advocated for the first graduates of the Jewish Theological Seminary. By adhering to the standards enumerated above, he had achieved recognition as a leader in Philadelphia Jewry and traditional Judaism in America. The highest qualities of a rabbi to Sabato Morais were duty, education, tradition, and Hebrew. But Morais did not ignore the realities of American Jewish life, nor did he neglect the fact that life in American society might require a different type of curriculum from that of a standard yeshiva.

From the outset, he maintained that the Seminary would not "...dare ignore the claims of the age and of the country in which we live...."²⁴ He addressed this even more specifically in a letter that was read at the first summer meeting of the Jewish Chautauqua Society, another of the organizations he had helped to establish: "If, in this age and this country, the occupant of the pulpit...must possess secular requirements that shall enhance the value of the lessons imparted, he surely dare not fall short of those attainments which give a right to the title conferred upon

²³American Hebrew 55:8 (June 22, 1894): 241-242.

²⁴Jewish Exponent 8:1 (Oct. 10, 1890): 4.

him."²⁵ In America, Jews were not confined behind ghetto walls by outside authorities. There was a public education system that was secular, and immigrant parents who sent their children to the public schools learned about America and its policies as their children studied those subjects. A congregation such as Mikveh Israel wanted more out of a sermon than an inscrutable lecture on an obscure line of text. Morais was able to engage his congregants because he possessed extensive knowledge about secular as well as religious issues and events.

Although the Seminary itself did not teach secular subjects, the students were expected to be in possession of well-rounded educations and to be involved in opportunities that would provide enlightenment in areas of secular study. Matriculating students were initially given the opportunity to receive a secular education concurrent with their rabbinic training, but in 1896, the trustees of the Seminary decided "that no student should be ordained unless he had first received a college or university degree."²⁶ If the rabbi lived up to Morais' aspirations, then secular knowledge would be augmented through the activities of daily living, in which the rabbi would engage in the world around him. Morais was keenly aware of the potential for leadership and teaching by example in the American rabbinate. In order to lead and teach by example, however, the rabbi had to be above reproach

²⁵American Hebrew 61:13 (July 30, 1897): 385.

²⁶Proceedings, J.T.S.A., 1896, cited in Fierstien, 78.

in his own life. He had to live what he preached in order to maintain credibility with his congregants.

Morais' ethics were of the highest level, and despite his earlier conflicts over freedom of the pulpit during the Civil War, he believed that "[T]he rules of ethics...demand that as soon as a preacher discovers himself at variance with his church, he should step down and out of the pulpit occupied...."²⁷ In a stirring and passionate sermon delivered before Mikveh Israel in 1892 on the occasion of the congregation's thirty-second anniversary at the Seventh Street location, Morais enumerated the changes that had been wrought in other congregations and that some of his own congregants desired. After forty-one years in the pulpit in Philadelphia, he had seen more changes to his beloved Judaism than he could ever have imagined. He had witnessed with tremendous sorrow the excision of Hebrew from the services in many American congregations, an action that led to the inevitable lack of desire to study among the young people. And in his own congregation, he watched as parents neglected their responsibility to educate their children in the ways of Judaism, and he stood on the pulpit week after week, year after year, and saw attendance wane. He listened to his congregants agitate for family pews, choral and instrumental music in the service, and other reforms that he considered unacceptable.

²⁷Jewish Exponent 9:8 (May 29, 1891): 6.

As he had always done, Morais told his congregants how he felt about the pressure to reform. This time, with uncharacteristic resignation, he admitted he felt "...powerless in the face of prevailing evil...."²⁸ He told the congregation exactly where he stood with regard to certain reforms. He would not brook an abolishment of Hebrew from the service. To do so would mean "...tearing my very heart's strings, and sundering apart this religious body confided to my guardianship, in order to please the inconsiderate who look upon the culture of the Sinaic language as purposeless and burdensome, while spending years on so-called accomplishments of no real value."²⁹ To eliminate Hebrew would be to eliminate one of the most important identifying feature of Jews in America.

Underlying Morais' words lay the implicit declaration that if changes in the synagogal practices such as those he had outlined were made, he would, in accord with his ethical code, be forced to step down from the pulpit at Mikveh Israel. His perception of the situation was: "...either hold on to ancestral Judaism at the cost of the sacrifice of means, of time and bodily enjoyments, or avow our abjuration." He never forgot that he stood before God, and

²⁸"A Discourse By Dr. Morais before the Mickve Israel Congregation," Philadelphia, 1892, 7-8. My thanks to Dr. Karla Goldman for providing me with a copy of this sermon.

²⁹Ibid., 8.

God could not be deceived by people professing to be Jews who did not uphold traditional standards of observance.³⁰

He confessed that his faith in his community in Philadelphia had been badly shaken by changes being instituted in the other congregations there. He vowed that despite his advancing age and his failing health, he would "...try to work on in order to confirm the strong in the Jewish belief and strengthen the weak."³¹ So long as he was able, Morais continued to battle against the insidiousness of reform in order to keep it at bay from his congregation and its members, whom he felt should share his commitment to traditionalism. To maintain membership at Mikveh Israel implied acceptance and support of traditional Judaism particularly because both Rodeph Shalom and Keneseth Israel were Reform in ideology and worship. All three of these congregations were committed to American behavior and aesthetic. Their point of divergence was their manner of expressing their Judaism.

Sabato Morais cannot be accused of being inflexible and unwilling to entertain changes that could enhance the work of the congregation or its worship service. Any change, however, had to be in keeping with the boundaries provided by the written and oral Law. In his Rosh Hashanah sermon in 1893, "[H]e said that Mickve Israel, which translated means 'Hope of Israel,' might be orthodox in its forms of worship,

³⁰Ibid., 11.

³¹Ibid., 12.

but might yet be progressive in so far as its members were concerned."³² In fact, when it came to the status of women in the congregation, Mikveh Israel was out in front of all the other congregations, whether traditional or Reform.

In 1884 the adjunta of Mikveh Israel passed a resolution stating that "Seat-holders (both male and female) are eligible to membership after holding seats in the Synagogue for one year."³³ Morais recognized the importance of women in the synagogue, stating in 1892 that it was women "...whose presence increases the size of the congregation on Sabbath and Holiday mornings remarkably."³⁴ Mikveh Israel was the first congregation that translated its recognition of the importance of women into a change in status. It was apparently the first American congregation that granted women membership without changing to a family pew setting. Women at Mikveh Israel could hold membership, and they remained seated in the gallery.

Morais realized the influential role that women must play in the continuation of the synagogue and of traditional Judaism in general. After all, it had been women who had founded the first Hebrew Sunday School Society,³⁵ and many women taught therein. Women had been instrumental through

³²Jewish Exponent 13:24 (Sept. 15, 1893): 7.

³³Congregation Mikveh Israel, Resolutions, Appeals, and Decisions of the Board of Managers, 1848-1885, Philadelphia, PA--Congregation Mikveh Israel, Small Collections 9631, AJA, Sept. 1, 1884.

³⁴"A Discourse By Dr. Morais before the Mickve Israel Congregation," Philadelphia, 1892, 8.

³⁵Wolf and Whiteman, 304.

the vehicle of Ladies Aid Societies and Sewing Circles in providing food, coal, and clothing to the indigent and needy. Morais advocated giving women the recognition they deserved, and he proclaimed his wishes from the pulpit on Kol Nidre, 1894:

...I believe that deliverance from the sin of indifference will be largely woman's work. She, under Providence, may prevent the dissolution of the genuine Church of God, the Hebrew Church...You, women of Israel, are stronger in faith, if weaker in body. I once overheard a radical of radicals complain that woman's conservatism is a hindrance to liberalism; that, in general, she opposes the abolition of distinguishing rites of the Hebrew Church...Oh, may the Book, open on this dreaded night at the Bar of The Supreme Judge, show the names of our American mothers chronicled among the glorious women of the Jewish race who kept watch over the religion of Sinai and made it imperishable.³⁶

Sabato Morais came to rely on the women of Mikveh Israel to meet his challenges to care for others and to assist him in his attempts to revitalize the congregation and reestablish its vibrancy. The American Hebrew published an editorial column discussing the role of women in the synagogue in which the author claimed that the lesser role of women was due not to the narrowmindedness of the congregations or of Judaism. Rather, it was due to the examples being set for congregations by the Christian groups surrounding them. Those Christian congregations saw nothing

³⁶American Hebrew 55:25 (Oct. 19, 1894): 738.

wrong with soliciting funds from women, but they could not bring themselves to think that those same women might have an opinion about the workings of the organization itself. The author went on to say that while Radical Reformers were trying to claim credit for being the first to extend the rights of women, Mikveh Israel had granted women full membership and the right to vote eleven years previously:

"The fact has not been proclaimed with any blare of trumpets; but the renewed energy in the religious life of Mickve Israel and in its various fields of work is no doubt traceable to the influence of women in congregational affairs...."³⁷

Morais had found an untapped resource that had a direct correlation to the activity level and commitment displayed by the members of his congregation. Women were even included in the proceedings of the Theological Seminary Convention, a fact commented on and used by the American Hebrew to demonstrate the inaccuracy of the Reform stigmatization of traditional Jewish values and practices: "Although much is said by our Reform friends as to the stigma that is placed upon women by Orthodoxy, it has remained for Mickve Israel, that staunch exponent of orthodoxy, to bring women actively into the work of the synagogue, and the result has been gratifying...."³⁸

The annual meeting of the congregation in 1982 brought news of further change within the service:

³⁷American Hebrew 57:15 (Aug. 16, 1895): 354.

³⁸American Hebrew 58:19 (March 13, 1896): 531.

The members confirmed the action of the Board in determining to engage a choir of men and boys, under a competent leader, to assist in the rendering of the divine services. This is a decidedly new step for the congregation, which has always adhered to strictly congregational singing. The new system, however, meets with the approbation of the Minister of the congregation.³⁹

Based on Morais' other concerns for the congregation's future and on his support for the innovation of a choir at Mikveh Israel, it is a fair assumption to make that he was trying to maintain pace with the other congregations in Philadelphia. But it may have been also that inconsistent attendance at services by his congregants meant that on any given day most of those present did not know the melodies or the *nusach* used in worship. It is further assumed that the choir was to be composed of members of the congregation itself, without any outside influences.

At the same time that Morais was struggling against false and overblown accusations about his unwillingness to institute reforms, Mikveh Israel's counterpart in New York, Shearith Israel, was on the verge of making crucial decisions about its future. In 1895 Shearith Israel decided to move, and they purchased a plot of land on which to build a new synagogue.

Like Mikveh Israel, Shearith Israel had resisted all attempts to introduce innovations into the traditional

³⁹American Hebrew 51:21 (Sept. 23, 1892): 669.

Spanish-Portuguese custom that had been their way from the congregation's inception in the seventeenth century. When the decision was made to move the congregation, there were members who saw the move as an opportunity to introduce reforms in to the building itself as well as to the liturgy and the rituals. After lengthy and drawn-out debates that culminated in what was considered the highest attendance at any congregational meeting, only one issue remained. The lone issue was whether or not to introduce family pews rather than continuing the tradition of separating the sexes during services. During the course of the discussion, a petition was presented from ninety-one women protesting against any changes in the customs of the congregation. Finally the issue was called to a vote at which time it was overwhelmingly defeated; Shearith Israel would continue to worship in the traditional manner.⁴⁰

This vote was important because it proved that Jewish women who followed traditional practices did not feel demeaned or cast out by the men in the congregation because separate seating was maintained. Another blow was struck against the Reform stereotype of traditional congregations as backward and repressed. The women of Shearith Israel did not want their worship practices or their sacred space changed. The vote also indicated that the role of women had taken on a new dimension in traditional congregations other than Mikveh

⁴⁰American Hebrew 57:6 (June 14, 1895): 138-139.

Israel. The women had united against change, and the congregation had listened to their protestations.

Morais was invited to speak at the dedication of the new Shearith Israel building, and he used the opportunity to once again exhort those who adhered to the traditional ways to persevere in their path. He fully realized the difficult position in which American Jews found themselves and the influences which tempted them to stray from their conservative congregations:

Here, a longing to compete with non-Israelites, in their efforts towards gaining temporal success; there, the pernicious example of wealthy Israelites, whose general abandonment of the Sabbath closes before workingmen of our faith many an avenue leading to the obtainment of an unstinted livelihood...⁴¹

America functioned on the Sunday Sabbath, a condition that placed traditional Jews at an economic disadvantage. They would not conduct business on their Sabbath, and businesses were closed on Sundays. The choices for a traditional Jew were limited. He could either desecrate the Sabbath by working, or lose a day's earnings by spending the day in *shul*. The dilemma of American economic realities meant that the men found themselves having to work on the Sabbath in order to sustain their families. It became an added responsibility on their wives to nurture the religious identity and practices in both the home and the synagogue.

⁴¹American Hebrew 61:3 (May 21, 1897): 84.

Morais recognized this shift and determined to use it both to his and the congregation's advantage:

Not so easily can I apply the remedy...But without making a palliative for men's trespasses, I turn to the women of my people...To you, my sisters in the household of Israel, I appeal for the creation of a genuine revival, through the dear ones ever responsive to your religious emotions.⁴²

In the years subsequent to the decision at Mikveh Israel to expand the rights and responsibilities of women, Morais had obviously realized what invaluable allies the women and mothers in the congregation could be. They showed their families the beauty of the Sabbath, the joy of worship, and the feeling of accomplishment following the attainment of knowledge. Morais turned to the women because the men had proven to be generally unreliable when it came to educating their children in the ways of Jewish life and practice. He asked the women to take responsibility for reinvigorating their families with a love of Judaism. Traditionally, it was the mother who fostered a love of Judaism within the home. Morais knew he would not get through to the men and convince them to come to services, so he turned to the women with the hope that they might somehow fill the void. This was another example of the changing role and status of women in the congregation. But the women could not meet all of the Jewish needs in the family. Their efforts needed resources and

⁴²Ibid.

reinforcement from the synagogue, and these were provided through the development of new educational programs and opportunities in the congregation..

Education was the key to the conservation of the traditional ways. It was Morais' duty to educate his people in the ways of Judaism. The Hebrew language, the liturgy, the melodies, and history had shaped the character of the Jewish people throughout the ages. All of these were integral to the traditional Jewish experience.

When Morais realized that religious services alone were not sufficient to accomplish his goals, he had to decide whether to follow Gurock's second category of traditional leadership. In the end, Morais was suspended between the two poles of exclusion and inclusion. In consultation with the congregational board at Mikveh Israel, it was decided that the congregation would establish a lecture series designed to increase attendance as well as knowledge.

With the goal of making the opportunity to receive a Jewish education available to adults who desired to learn but had not attended Sunday school or Hebrew school, Morais and members of his congregation founded the Mikveh Israel Association. The significance of establishing the organization was that Morais' character and his presence were no longer enough to bring people into the synagogue. The congregation needed to offer enticement in order to capture the interest of those who were not regular attendees as well as the unaffiliated Jews in the community.

The Association was established in 1892 with a two-fold purpose: "(a) Of strengthening the Congregation...as a conservator of Jewish faith, knowledge, law and traditions, and (b) Of promoting the mental and moral welfare of all who may become members of the Association." Arrangements were made, based on the second criterion, for individuals who were not members of the congregation to establish associate membership if they wished to partake of the course offerings made by the Association.⁴³

At the time of its establishment, the Association was competing with Sunday services at Keneseth Israel congregation, where Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf delivered regular sermons. Keneseth Israel had moved into a new building in September, 1892, and the building housed a library that had been established by a group called the "Knowledge Seekers." This group was established by Krauskopf in 1888, and its goal was "to advance the knowledge of Judaism among themselves and within the Congregation." By 1893, the Knowledge Seekers had become the organization in the congregation that "conducted lectures for adults on Jewish subjects and printed a weekly journal."⁴⁴

Rodeph Shalom congregation also underwent further growth and development concurrent with the establishment of the Mikveh Israel Association. Henry Berkowitz arrived in 1892,

⁴³Jewish Exponent 12:6 (Nov. 11, 1892): 3, and American Hebrew 52:3 (Nov. 18, 1892): 77.

⁴⁴Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel: Its First 100 Years, 1847-1947, 23-26.

and in 1893 he founded the Jewish Chautauqua Society with the cooperation and assistance of Sabato Morais.⁴⁵ Morais' high sense of duty was evident throughout his efforts to educate the Jews of his congregation and his community and to perpetuate the particular brand of traditional Judaism that he had created in America. His strivings toward his goal did not stop at the walls of his congregation, as evidenced by his cooperation with Berkowitz. The Society was "devoted to matters of interest to the readers of the various courses of the Department of Jewish Studies in the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circles." It was composed of congregations that covered the spectrum from Radical Reform to Conservative, and the purpose was to effect an open and free exchange of information between rabbis and lay people.⁴⁶

By the 1890's there was also a growing movement desirous of formally organizing the history of the Jewish experience in America, and in answer to that call, the American Jewish Historical Society was founded in the rooms of the Jewish Theological Seminary's new building which had been dedicated two weeks earlier. Morais was a member of the organizing committee for the new Society.⁴⁷

Morais was held in such high regard by his peers that early in 1892, an offer was made to him by the rabbi at Shearith Israel, Dr. Henry Pereira Mendes that remains

⁴⁵Meyer, 286.

⁴⁶American Hebrew 61:10 (July 9, 1897): 300.

⁴⁷American Hebrew 51:6 (June 10, 1892): 188, and Jewish Exponent 11:5 (May 6, 1892): 6.

unprecedented. Because of Morais' intimate involvement with the Jewish Theological Seminary both as founder and as president of the faculty, he found it necessary to travel on a frequent basis between Philadelphia and New York. In an attempt to ease the strain and burden of travel on the venerable man, Pereira Mendes proposed that Morais come to New York and serve as rabbi at Shearith Israel. Pereira Mendes would then serve as his assistant, in other words, abrogate his own position in favor of Morais. After much thought, Morais determined that he was unable to leave Mikveh Israel, his home for the previous forty-one years.⁴⁸

By the time of Pereira Mendes' proposition, Morais had already begun to feel the pressures of his age, having survived a bout of pneumonia. In his address to the graduates of the Seminary in 1895, he seemed to be making preparations to pass on the garments of traditionalism he had worn so well for forty-four years in America. As he stood before them, his words reverberated with his own continuing struggles against those who wished to corrupt and destroy Judaism. His exhortation resonated as the voice of wisdom and experience:

I implore of you to go forth hence clothed in honesty. Never to seek popularity at the cost of veracity. Let none of you say, "if I bend my course towards that direction, I may forfeit the good will of some whose financial standing in society lends them temporal power." Consult your hearts and let your principles

⁴⁸Jewish Exponent 10:25 (March 25, 1892): 3-4.

govern your deeds.⁴⁹

Those words echoed the standard he had set years earlier when he refused to accept money from supporters of Reform to pay off the overdue loan on the Seventh Street building. When it came to the integrity of his convictions, Morais would tolerate deviation neither to one side nor the other.

On one of his final trips to New York, Morais spoke at the dedication of the new Shearith Israel synagogue. As he concluded his remarks, he alluded to his increasingly fragile state of health when he said, "[W]hether or not I shall be allowed again the privilege of addressing you, I bid you, my brothers and sisters in faith, in the Name of our God, Farewell."⁵⁰ The eloquent simplicity of his words was typical of the manner in which he expressed himself.

In the months before he died, Morais remained steadfast in his commitment to the causes to which he had devoted his life. When it was learned that Christian missionaries were actively pursuing and inducing young Jewish children to attend the Christian schools, he was there, as he had been in the past, to counteract and put down the missionary effort.⁵¹ Less than a month prior to his death, he participated in one of his favorite pastimes, the opening of a new Sunday school in one of the Philadelphia congregations.⁵²

⁴⁹American Hebrew 57:26 (Nov. 1, 1895): 666.

⁵⁰American Hebrew 61:3 (May 21, 1897): 85.

⁵¹Nussenbaum, 64, and American Hebrew 61:20 (Sept. 17, 1897): 591.

⁵²Jewish Exponent 26:1 (Oct. 22, 1897): 4.

On the evening of November 11, 1897, Morais had tutored some students in his home. Later that same night he suffered a stroke and died within a matter of hours.⁵³ Sabato Morais died in his seventy-fourth year after having served Mikveh Israel as rabbi for forty-six years. His death cast a long shadow over traditional Judaism, the American Judaism that he had helped to create and had nurtured carefully for so many years.

Tributes poured in from around the United States and the world. Kaufmann Kohler said of Morais that "...he was the strongest and most formidable opponent of Reform; yet at the same time admired and respected by friend and foe for his high principles, for his scrupulous conscientiousness and his constancy in his views...he was the banner-bearer of Conservative Judaism in America, the pillar of Orthodoxy, unbending and unswerving."⁵⁴ Those stellar qualities included Morais' commitment to the people Israel and to any and all who were in need of assistance or advocacy. His death meant the end of an era in which American Judaism had endured inconceivable upheavals only to settle into a pattern of co-existence between two movements both of which have earned the moniker of American Judaism, namely that of Reform and Conservative.

Sabato Morais played a crucial role in the birth process of Conservative Judaism, and he helped to create it as a

⁵³Nussenbaum, 17.

⁵⁴American Hebrew 62:3 (Nov. 19, 1897): 67.

uniquely American movement. His vision pulled Mikveh Israel through periods of stasis, and that same vision enabled him to know when to institute changes in the ritual practice or the administration of the synagogue.

In a final gesture typical of the manner in which he had lived his life, Sabato Morais reached out to his students in his last will and testament and gave of himself one more time:

I give and bequeath to the Jewish Theological Seminary, wherever located, if conducted according to the principles expressed in its constitution, all my Hebrew books and books connected with Hebrew literature, except those of a liturgical character which can be used by my children...or be lent to the Congregation Mickve Israel, of Philadelphia, for the use of the attendants at the synagogue.⁵⁵

The legacy that Morais left behind continues at Mikveh Israel and at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He once said, "I regard the Synagogue as a bell, which awakes slumbering thoughts. The Synagogue rings in our ears the notes of a song, matchless, unique."⁵⁶ Sabato Morais was the bell who awakened the love of Judaism in America.

⁵⁵American Hebrew 62:4 (Nov. 26, 1897): 109.

⁵⁶American Hebrew 61:3 (May 21, 1897): 85.

Conclusion

Over the course of the forty-six years that Sabato Morais guided Philadelphia's Congregation Mikveh Israel, the congregation continued in its role at the forefront of American Judaism. It was a role into which the congregation had been thrust at its inception during the Revolutionary War. The congregation took the responsibility of leadership seriously, and this commitment was nurtured first by Isaac Leiser and then by Morais. Under Leiser, Mikveh Israel became the first congregation to offer regular sermons in English. Morais continued that practice upon his acceptance of the pulpit. Morais also led the congregation through financial difficulties and ideological controversies with the Reformers that continued even after his death.

Morais was responsible for presiding over conflicts within his own congregation regarding whether or not to introduce reforms into their worship service and ritual practices. Although the language of the service remained Hebrew and the minhag remained Spanish-Portuguese, Morais recognized that in order for Mikveh Israel to survive the pressures of American society, he would have to make some changes. The changes that he instituted were insightful and demonstrated far-reaching vision. His was the first Jewish congregation to recognize women as full members with voting rights in the congregation. He made adjustments in the liturgy to eliminate some of the repetition and eventually

agreed to a choir of unaccompanied male voices for the purposes of assisting the congregation in its worship.

Above all else, Morais emphasized the importance of education and Hebrew as the links that would perpetuate traditional Judaism in America, and it was to this task that he devoted most of his time. His zeal and commitment eventually led to the founding of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, a project accomplished late in his life, but which represented his crowning achievement. Mikveh Israel played an instrumental role in this process as the congregation displayed unstinting support for the rabbi who had served them so long and so well.

The relationship between rabbi and congregation developed over many years as Morais tested the limits of the adjuncta's tolerance. Once Rodeph Shalom and Keneseth Israel congregations in Philadelphia had hired prominent rabbis to expound from their bimas, Mikveh Israel's lay leadership recognized the value of and the need to validate their own leader. Morais trained his congregation to appreciate his talents, and they in turn learned to look after his needs.

The significance of Morais' accomplishments centered on his relationship with Mikveh Israel congregation. The leadership model that he left behind focused on community involvement, Jewish education, and a love of traditional American Judaism. He was committed to maintaining traditionalism, and it was his zeal for that cause that fueled his efforts until his death. Morais' memory lives on

at the Seminary in the library which bears his name and in an endowed chair on the faculty established as a memorial by the Conservative Jews of America who, with Morais' death, had lost their flag-bearer.

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