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A RABBI NAMED ISRAEL

The Life and Works of Rabbi

Edward L. Israel

Edward Paul Cohn

Thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master
of Arts in Hebrew Letters
and Ordination

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Jewish Institute of Religion
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Referee, Prof. Jacob R. Marcus

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Digest of Thesis

This thesis, A Rabbi Named Israel, is an indepth analysis of the life and works of Rabbi Edward L. Israel. Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, he received his education and rabbinical degree from the Hebrew Union College in 1919. In addition to discussing Edward Israel's service as a chaplain in World War One and his early ministries in Springfield, Illinois and Evansville, Indiana, this essay probes the origins of Israel's Zionism and fervor for social justice.

The major portion of this thesis describes in chronological order, the development of Edward Israel's social justice activities as they came to flourish in Baltimore, Maryland while he was rabbi of Har Sinai Temple. The myriad of interests and causes which he served is focused upon. Also the reasons for his becoming a Zionist and the details of that transformation are also dealt with.

As Israel's reputation grew his participation in and leadership of many organizations become more and more numerous. The man's personal magnetism, charm and charismatic energy attracted people to him and made him many friends and devoted supporters. Edward Israel was energized and intense. Nothing he set his mind to do could be done half-heartedly. But rather, he immersed himself into the

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thick of heated debate on emotional and complex issues and wrested some sense from the chaos.

Edward L. Israel, the man, was a complex individual. A man who loved his wife and family dearly, but who knowingly chose to risk an early death from heart failure, rather than slow down his frenetic pace of activity. He enjoyed life, and yet gave it up for those causes which he deemed to be more important than himself and his own family.

Acknowledgements and Dedication

No words of thanks are adequate to describe my appreciation to Dr. Jacob R. Marcus for his kind guidance and careful assistance during the entire period of my work on this essay. God grant to this wonderful rabbi, teacher and Jew many more years of health and scholarly achievement.

I am deeply grateful to the family of Rabbi Edward L. Israel, his widow and "pal dearest" Amelia, and his sons, Charles and Edward L. Jr., for their valuable assistance to me and for their trust in my abilities. Their kindness to my wife and me when we were in California will never be forgotten.

To my dearest Mother and Father go my heartfelt love and thanks for all of their years of tender care and sacrifice on my behalf. I shall always honor them and sing their praises, for they have always been with me. If I am ever to be anything, they are the ones who deserve so much of the credit.

In closing, how does one extend a mere "thanks" to that one who is life of your life, breath of your breath. To my darling Andrea, who has faithfully typed my manuscript copies and who, more importantly, has encouraged me and cared for my every need this thesis is dedicated.

E.P.C.

Introduction

Many years before I decided to enter the Reform Jewish rabbinate I had heard stories about Rabbi Israel. My family has been associated with Baltimore's Har Sinai Temple for close to fifty years and Rabbi Edward L. Israel frequently touched the lives of my grandparents and their children. The Cohn family was far from a prominent one in Rabbi Israel's congregation, which included many of the most prestigious and wealthy of Baltimore's German-Jewish families. No, the John Cohn family, was a modest household in the remote town of Glen Burnie, twenty miles from the Jewish community. And yet Rabbi Israel made them feel welcome at Har Sinai. He inspired my grandparents and parents to love Judaism and to proudly lead a Jewish life. He confirmed, Bar mitzvahed and married my relatives, and he earned their love and admiration.

As a second year student at the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, I decided to write the biography of Rabbi Israel so as to find out for myself just what made him so great. Now I know. Encouraged by Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus, my most honored and beloved teacher and friend, I secured Rabbi Israel's papers and memorabilia from

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his widow, Amelia, and his family. For three years the material was gleaned from every possible source, including a trip to California, with my wife of a few days, so as to interview Mrs. Israel and one of her sons in person.

And now four years later the inspiring story is complete. Never have I regretted my choice of Edward Israel's life story as my thesis subject. I have come "to know" him myself, and, I only pray that my own ministry to American Israel will be half as noble and useful as was "Uncle Ed's."

Edward Paul Cohn
Cincinnati, 1974

"A Rabbi Named Israel"

Chapter One

Edward Leopold Israel was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on August 30, 1896. Edward was one of two sons born to Charles and Emma Israel who resided at 3589 Wilson Avenue in Avondale, at that time, the heart of the Cincinnati Jewish community. Edward's father, Charles, was a successful insurance agent with the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company. Edward's mother was the former Emma Linz also of Cincinnati.¹ Mrs. Israel was a stout, but friendly woman who was especially hospitable and warm to young people. The Israel family often took in one or two boarders who were students at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Although these individuals were boarders, they were regarded as "members of the family" by the generous, and hospitable Israel family.²

Edward had a very close family life. Although he was close to his mother and always respectful of her wishes and of her sacrifice for her children, it was with his father that he had a special relationship.³ The religious life of the Israel family was determined by Charles Israel. They did not have an orthodox style family life because Charles Israel did not believe in orthodoxy. Instead, the Israel

family participated in the Reform Jewish program of Rockdale Avenue Temple with which they were affiliated. They frequently attended services there on the Sabbath and on Sunday mornings, and both Israel sons, Dorman and Edward were confirmed at Rockdale Temple by Dr. David Philipson.⁴

Shortly before his death, Edward Israel reminisced about his boyhood in Cincinnati and of his father's ardor for Reform Judaism.

The names of the prominent laymen who figured actively in the leadership of Reform Judaism in the early days of the twentieth century were frequently heard in our home. My lamented father - saintliest of men - would occasionally talk to me about the future leadership of American Reform Judaism. He was an earnest Reform Jew. He regretted especially the misunderstanding with which the large mass of Jews in America viewed the Reform movement. He yearned for the time when those breaches would be healed, and the vital, evolutionary spirit of 'Reform' would at the same time be saturated with a deep sympathy for every living value of Jewish tradition, and with a sympathetic attitude toward the groping aspirations of the Jewish masses. In his simple yet deeply penetrating spiritual manner, he saw that Reform Judaism is the most democratic expression of Judaism the world has even known, ... 'Someday,' he would say to me, 'that gap will be spanned and those misunderstandings will be bridged. Then one of the most brilliant eras of Judaism will ensue.'⁵

Edward Israel attended public schools from the first grade through high school. He graduated from Woodward High School in 1913. By this time he was a strong, large and rugged man, who was also an able athlete. He was chosen, in 1913, as one of the top five speakers in his graduating class, having spoken on the topic, "The Law and Human Progress" in the class oratorical contest.⁶ His fellow students viewed him as being likeable and friendly:

Ed has the characteristics of all stout people. Smile, and he'll laugh; laugh and he'll roar. His good nature and his jovial disposition make him a desirable companion everywhere. But it is as a student and an orator that 'Eddy' shines above them all. When one can couple joy and work successfully as 'Ed' does, a future minus the thorns awaits him.⁷

In 1910 Edward Israel began his nine year course of study at the Hebrew Union College. Throughout his high school and college years Israel took classes concurrently at the Hebrew Union College. "He was a pretty bright boy and young man, with a good and keen mind, and able to study hard and sincerely, and he did so well in his studies that he won scholarships, which then did not have to be paid back to H.U.C., for most of his nine years..."⁸ Edward's first experience as a congregational rabbi occurred purely by

accident. After he had been a student for only one year at the Hebrew Union he was assigned by the College President, Dr. Kaufman Kohler, to fill the pulpit of Rabbi David Mendoza in Norfolk, Virginia. The Norfolk rabbi became ill just before Rosh Hashanah and his congregation had wired Kohler for a substitute. There were no rabbis or upper classmen available so Kohler picked who he felt was the brightest student in the Preparatory Department, Edward L. Israel. Armed with an eager spirit and some "borrowed" sermons provided by the President's office Israel officiated, at age 18, as rabbi of Norfolk. "The poised youngster made a deep and favorable impression on the congregation."⁹ In 1917 Edward Israel was awarded his A.B. degree from the University of Cincinnati. He had also studied philosophy at Harvard University during two summer sessions in 1916 and 1917.

Clearly as a student and rabbi, Edward Israel was "extremely popular among his fellow students and colleagues who remembered his youthful pranks, his bubbling enthusiasm and his hearty laughter."¹⁰ He was an "active participant in all the affairs of the College, including student body affairs of the College, our Literary Societies, the Zionist

activities, the H.U.C. Monthly, our baseball games, student parties, dances, and shows - entertainments - and the like."¹¹ Reminiscing after Israel's death, a former classmate commented of him: "How clearly I can hear Ed's peals of laughter as he hit upon some outrageous pun. How his eyes shone as he threw back his great head in a roar. Then he would set his lower jaw a little off center to stem the avalanche while his shoulders heaved and his black curls danced...."¹²

Edward Israel's ministry to student congregations was most extensive, in that he served congregations as student-rabbi from 1914 till his ordination in 1919.

From 1914 to 1916 Israel was student-rabbi of Muskogee, Oklahoma. Many of his student sermons reflect a great degree of influence from Talmud and Midrash courses he was then taking at the College. One frequent theme on which he preached was the need for Jewish unity and an end of divisiveness among the several branches of Judaism. Speaking on Shabbas Shuvah in 1914 he charged:

Friends, we are too often guilty of the charge that we are snobbish. We either scorn our brother Jew entirely or we look down upon him with patronizing air.... Harmony is the keynote. Let our attitude toward our orthodox brethren be that of the outstretched

hand, the fraternal grip.¹³

Similarly, in an address to the student body of the College in 1916, Edward Israel discussed his philosophy of Reform Judaism which also stresses a concern for Jewish unity within Reform.

Now, many of us in this student body do not hold strictly to the dietary laws but our violations of them are not matters of principle. It is a perversion of true Reform Judaism to say that it stands against doctrines like Kosher and Tref to which orthodoxy holds so tenaciously.... Reform Judaism is pre-eminently constructive and conservative. It aims to interpret our whole past in the light of the present.¹⁴

From 1916 until his ordination he served congregations in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Covington, Kentucky, and his own home congregation, Rockdale Temple in Cincinnati.

As his senior year approached Edward Israel prepared to write his thesis under the supervision of professors Julian Morgenstern and Moses Bottenwieser who were, respectively, his thesis referee and coreferee. The thesis was entitled, "The Book of Chronicles from the Historical Standpoint" and it consisted of ten chapters. Israel's thesis advisors were pleased with the quality of his scholarship and the competence of his biblical research. They wrote in

their critique of the thesis:

The author has handled his material and problem with modesty and reserve, yet with intelligence and appreciation of the novel points of the solution which he offers.¹⁵

The advisors sharply scored Isreal on his periodic "vagueness of thought and tendency to reason in a circle."¹⁶

Nevertheless, both Drs. Morgenstern and Buttenwiesser were in agreement that:

It is refreshing to handle a thesis which offers some new matter as this does and to be able to approve in a general way of its methods and conclusions. Its acceptance is gladly recommended.¹⁷

On Saturday afternoon, April 5, 1919 a class of ten men received their rabbinical ordination from President Kaufman Kohler. Edward Israel was one of those ten. He received his degree in absentia, however, because of his voluntary enlistment into the army chaplancy. Thus, as Edward Israel made plans for the Passover seder for the troops in Chaumont, France, he was awarded his degree in far away Cincinnati making him officially "Rabbi" Israel at age 23.

By early Fall of 1918, Edward Israel had decided that he must, in all conscience, take part in the "great war" in

Europe as a chaplain to the Jewish troops. He felt compelled to leave school before his ordination so as to minister to the needs of the Jewish soldiers who felt the need for a rabbi. In October 1918, Israel requested the assistance of Rabbi David Philipson, University of Cincinnati president Charles Dabney, and insurance executive John L. Shuff in helping him enlist in the Field Artillery, Central Officers Training School of the United States Army. Each of the letters stressed his capabilities, honesty, and high patriotism, and that "though a theological student and therefore exempt from military service it has been his desire for sometime to serve in the great cause for which our country is fighting."¹⁸ University of Cincinnati president, Charles Dabney emphasized, in his letter of recommendation, that Israel was "a young man of estimable character and of good standing in the community. I believe, if given the opportunity, he will develop into an intelligent and competent officer."¹⁹ Letters were sent out by the H.U.C. registrar and president, in early February, 1919, certifying that Edward Israel had completed all requirements for the rabbinical degree and that he was serving as rabbi at the Rockdale Temple. Shortly afterward, Edward was

accepted by the Jewish Welfare Board (J.W.B.) as a non-commissioned chaplain to the Jewish American troops.²⁰

Israel boarded the U.S.S. Siboney, on March 10, 1919 for transport to Paris, France and by late March Rabbi Israel had been stationed in Chaumont, France. In a letter to his fiancée, Amelia Dryer, in Cincinnati, Ohio, he reported that:

I gave a short sermon on the memories of home that throng one at the time of the Passover, and how Judaism of the true sort has such a strong hold on its followers because it has seized upon the psychologically binding force of home ceremonies such as the seder.²¹

From the first moment in Europe it was his ministry to the Jewish fighting men which was most important to him.

Israel's hard work on behalf of the "boys" was recognized by the Jewish Welfare Board officials and he was commended for "the splendid way in which you have taken hold of the work at Chaumont."²² Chaplain Israel was very popular with the enlisted men and they came frequently to his little room in the Y.M.C.A. hut in order to talk with him and to enjoy the hospitality he would provide for them.

I distributed J.W.B. literature and had boxes of cigarettes, candy, chewing gum, and cigars on my table for free distri-

bution at all times, as well as the latest English and Yiddish papers. The room was well filled at all hours when the boys were at leisure.²³

On May 20, 1919 Israel received orders of transfer to Brest, France, where he served as Jewish chaplain of the Brest area. Here he performed several weddings of American Jewish men to French Jewesses, conducted regular Sabbath services for the men, and coordinated the Decoration Day services for the entire camp. Throughout these months of service as Jewish chaplain in France Edward corresponded regularly with Miss Amelia Dryer of Cincinnati, who was to become Mrs. Edward L. Israel. His letters to her record much of his activities and accomplishments while an army chaplain. But, most importantly they reveal his emerging self-image as a future congregational rabbi.

According to Amelia Dryer Israel, "I did not know Ed until I was grown, I think it was about 1917 or 1918 that we met. We met at a party and he was going with someone else at the time. We started to go together and at a New Years eve party we stayed up and watched the sun come up."²⁴

Edward and Amelia were engaged to be married when Edward left France in 1919. The wedding date was to be set upon

his return to the United States. Israel wrote to his sweetheart from Chaumont, France, shortly after the date of his ordination in absentia in Cincinnati.

All that I have seen but convinces me of what I told you back home, that he who has not taken some part in the great war will forever hang his head in shame. I cannot understand my colleagues. Our Jewish men over here absolutely crave for them. They want them more than anything else. Yet so few of the boys who are really capable were willing to give up positions. All the talk of 'service' turned into 'bull' when it came to putting words into action.²⁵

The wartime service was having a positive effect upon Edward Israel's beliefs in his own abilities as a rabbi. Throughout his letters to Amelia Dryer he frequently expressed his increasing desire to set out on his own in a pulpit upon his return to America. "I am acquiring," he wrote, "more and more confidence in my ability to go ahead, and, although I am keeping away from conceit, I know that I can go into a position at anytime when I want when I get home and we are not going to wait...."²⁶ Referring to his inner fears and doubts which once he felt he wrote:

I admit that when I left the United States, I was generally tired and disgusted with certain things, but it needed only this contact with the men over here to give me

the confidence and courage to go ahead. There is nothing like the ministry, and it took me to go to Europe to realize it... the rabbinate is a wonderful opportunity for entering and influencing the lives of men.²⁷

Edward Isreal made during his months in France the decision to serve his fellow Jews via the ministry of the rabbinate. But one more decision was also necessary to make. When he left Cincinnati he had terminated his position as assistant to Dr. David Philipson at Rockdale Temple. He now had to decide whether to return to that position, assisting the powerful and nationally prominent Reform rabbi, or whether he should set out on his own, as his own boss, as the rabbi in a smaller town. On one occasion he confided to his "dearest pal," Amelia, that:

I really wonder how things are to be in Cincy when I get back. You know how I feel about staying there. I have not changed in the least, but what is worrying me is that my obligation to Dr. Philipson will not be of such a nature that I cannot possibly refuse him should he offer me the job. I do so want to go out into the world with you for us to work out our own salvation together. I feel more confident than ever that we are going to be successful.²⁸

A couple of months later while in Paris, Chaplain Israel met Cyrus Adler, a well known American Jewish leader

who was visiting France with Louis Marshall working on behalf of Jewish interests at the Paris Peace Conference.

Adler asked Israel who he was and recognized the name Edward Israel as being Dr. Philipson's assistant in Cincinnati.

Adler assured Chaplain Israel that he had heard Philipson speak glowingly of him when Adler had last spoken with him.

When Edward expressed doubts about remaining at the Cincinnati position, following his return to the United States, the Jewish leader asked for an explanation; was Edward Israel planning to leave the rabbinate, he inquired.

I answered, 'not at all.' And then I gave him my reasons. And he advised me even as you, dearest, to be my own boss in a small town and learn self-reliance and then go from there to a larger city. ... I used the opportunity to fix myself in his mind by telling him that one of my reasons for not wanting to return was that I differed considerably in my views from Dr. P. and that I knew my work there would end in a personal quarrel with a man who had been awfully decent to me. I wanted to impress upon him the fact that I was no 'little Philipson' mimicing Dr. P. in everything.²⁹

By the time Israel left his post as Army chaplain in France the decision had been made not to return to Cincinnati as Dr. Philipson's assistant.

On June 21, 1919 Edward's hopes were realized when he

received his travel orders to the United States which would return him to his Amelia and to the challenge of the Reform ministry. His ship the S.S. Leviathan, was due to sail on the 28th of June from LaHavre, France, with a scheduled arrival on July 6, 1919 in New York. Once aboard ship Rabbi Israel wrote a letter describing to Amelia, with great delight, how he and a friend were sneaking "upstairs" to eat in the first class dining room while the others of his army friends ate "below." Turning a little more serious, he confided to his future wife his self-doubts as to his own suitability for congregational life. He wondered whether he would be able to inspire and lead Reform Jewish congregants effectively with his personality, talents, and own particular style of religious expression.

Except for a moral attitude towards life, I seem to have none of the qualities I should have, as a minister. Oh, I can be sanctimonious - horribly so - at time, but then I catch myself smiling at myself at such moments. And so far as anything of a typically 'religious' trend, such as rigorous observance of ceremonies and all that, I find myself entirely out of sympathy with it all.³⁰

Edward Israel returned to America, in July of 1919, ready to dedicate himself to the challenges and demands of the

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congregational rabbinate. Now he would begin his efforts to apply his "moral attitude towards life" to many of the human dilemmas and social inequities of American life in the Nineteen-Twenties and Thirties.

Chapter 2

Early Ministries

By the time Edward Israel had returned to Cincinnati, Dr. David Philipson was well aware of Edward's decision to set out on his own. There were surely no hard feelings, however, since Rabbi Philipson took it upon himself to help Israel secure his first appointment. Early in July of 1919 Philipson had been informed of an opening in Springfield, Illinois at Temple B'rith Shalom (Covenant of Peace). A letter was quickly sent to the Springfield congregation asking that they consider young Rabbi Edward L. Israel for the position. The congregation replied to Philipson that, although they had:

... communicated with a Rabbi in the South but have made no arrangement with him, and from the tone of your letter as well as from reports which we have concerning this young man, it would seem that he would be well qualified for our pulpit.¹

Dr. Philipson returned their letter with assurances that he would have Israel get in touch with them as soon as possible. By mid-July Edward was on a train headed toward Springfield, where, after a brief and cordial interview, Edward Israel became the new rabbi of B'rith Shalom Temple.

Edward was rabbi of this congregation for only one and

a half years. Most of the details of his ministry in Springfield have become obscure since, regrettably, the minutes of the congregation for that period of time have been lost. Naturally, from his sermons and addresses, some of which have been preserved, one can detect a rabbi who is not quite sure of himself, and who often sounds like a beginner. Mrs. Amelia Israel, who married Edward in November of 1919, shortly after he had assumed the Illinois position, has commented that in those days she could see her husband become more and more mature in his rabbinic role.

I think when he started out, of course he always had a feeling for humanity, but I think he became much more of a crusader as he got older. He wanted to get out and fight for his causes rather than just being vocal about them. In that way I think he changed as time went on.²

By reading his sermons and addresses one may surmise a great deal concerning Edward Israel's view of his role as rabbi, his personal religious beliefs, as well as his opinion of world issues and problems. For instance, his inaugural sermon before the B'rith Shalom members pledged his untiring efforts on their behalf. He began with this insistence:

I maintain that I am rabbi of Temple B'rith Shalom, Springfield, Illinois. I am not merely here as a prospective candidate for Temple Emanu-El, New York City, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, or any other metropolis. My duty as I see it, is to serve Temple B'rith Shalom with my whole heart and soul, and not to 'grandstand' or 'show off' with the hope of attracting outside attention.... I am here to work, to shut out from my thoughts anything but that which contributes to the good of this community in which I now make my home.³

Then the young rabbi proceeded to express his view of religion and his own feeling of what being a Jew meant:

Religion to me has a broad and radical meaning. It is full of tolerance of divergent ideas and beliefs. It yields to reason and respects honest faith. But my religion in all its breadth and radicalness never ceases to be Judaism. It never loses sight of its Jewishness and is never ashamed of the name Jew or the word Judaism, Universal to the extreme, it is full of leniency and latitudinarianism. Yet I remain the Jew and no fad nor fancy, nor the paltry love of social advancement or the cowardly fear of prejudice can make me anything but a strong-backed Jew.⁴

On Friday eve, September 12, 1919 Edward Israel was formally installed as rabbi of B'rith Shalom, by his boyhood rabbi and longtime mentor, Dr. David Philipson. During the time that Edward was in Springfield he preached on a wide

variety of topics. Most sermons were carefully prepared and typed. Many included a special page of extracts of highlights from the address which was submitted to the newspaper for publication each Saturday. Some of the sermons were scriptural, but most emphasized messages of citizenship and Americansim. One, which was preached to the Elks Club on Decoration Day, 1920, extolled the virtues of patriotism and recollected Israel's own participation in a memorial service while in France during the war. On another occasion Israel took issue with the Springfield Ministerial Association by playing down the dangers of dances for teenagers. "Close our respectable dances?" he asked indignantly.

Drive our young people into the dark seats of automobiles along country roads? Feed the healthy minds of boys and girls with a nasty attitude toward an innocent pleasure? Drive them from the frank, open, healthy contact of the decent dance floor to dark, dangerous nooks? Never!⁵

Undaunted, Rabbi Israel must have created even more of a sensation as he differed further with the Ministerial Association by defending the rights of the prostitutes of Springfield and claiming that it is not the prostitute which is the "cause of social evil". She is the pitiful and

pitiabile victim of a terrible system."⁶ The real culprits, Israel charged, were the so-called upright ones who "visit her" and the miser "who rents his property for such purposes."⁷

The year and a half spent in Springfield was a time of formulation of goals and objectives; a period of trial and error for the new rabbi. The Isreal's home life was an equally challenging experience. Amelia Israel recalls how she and "Ed" were married shortly after he was installed in the Springfield position. As he explored the ins and outs of being a pulpit rabbi, she was learning how to cook and keep house. The congregants were very kind and generous to the young rabbi and his wife, helping them out whenever possible and giving them a generous wedding gift as well. Their stay in Springfield was made doubly busy by the arrival of their first son, Charles Edward, "Chuck" Israel.⁸ Over twenty years after Edward Israel left Springfield, the B'rith Shalom congregation was to say this of their former rabbi, following his untimely death in 1941:

His attractive personality and abilities won him the friendship which endures. Whether among the members of this congregation or among strangers, he always felt at home. He left the impress of his personality upon our congregation and community. His open-mindedness, his

tolerance of spirit, and his sympathetic understanding made him a leader in both Jewish and non-Jewish circles... he was endowed with a fighting spirit which brought him to the defense of the unfortunate We knew him as a teacher in Israel who lived by his preachments... Our expectations and hopes were realized in the passing years as his abilities won nation-wide recognition.⁹

Edward Israel was elected rabbi of the Washington Avenue Temple in Evansville, Indiana on May 5, 1921 for a one year term. He was chosen "to officiate in our pulpit and Sabbath School and to perform other duties of the Rabbi at a salary of \$350.00 per month."¹⁰ Just one year later he was given a three year contract and an increased salary of \$4500.00 and the use of the parsonage.¹¹ Upon the Israel's arrival in Evansville they could find no housing to rent and so were forced to live in a downtown hotel for several days. The congregation, recognizing their predicament, purchased a home for their rabbi's use. In recollection, Amelia Israel remembered Evansville with fond thoughts:

It was a wonderful community. A very, very religious minded and temple going congregation. We loved the whole bunch.¹²

From his Evansville pulpit he continued to preach sermons of an instructional nature.¹³ In one of his first

sermons to his Washington Avenue Temple congregation Rabbi Israel made a plea for the cooperation of the temple's parents in stressing the importance of regular religious school attendance and in instilling within each child a respect for Judaism. Only by this means, said Israel, would there be perpetuated the Jewish peoplehood and tradition. And so he insisted: "If life is made noble by the spiritual fathering of ideals, it is made concretely noble by the implantation of those ideals into the coming generation."¹⁴

Also while rabbi in Evansville, Edward Israel delivered a long series of discourses on "What Do the Jews Believe?" He admitted in his opening lecture entitled "Are Beliefs Worthwhile?" that Reform Jews were probably divided into two groups of thought regarding religious beliefs. One, he claimed, was that group which was unconcerned about religious beliefs, theirs or anyones. They were those who felt religious beliefs were old fashioned, and theology "moss-grown." The second group, which Israel believed to be a much smaller segment of Reform Jewry, held the opinion that their own religious opinions were totally true and right, so much so that each one becomes "a fanatic on the subject, intolerant of criticism or discussion of his own dogmas, blind to the

existence of sincerity in the faiths of other men."¹⁵

On one particular sabbath evening Israel seemed to anticipate the current interest in ecology when he preached a sermon promoting a "clean up, paint up" drive in Evansville. Choosing a text from the story of the disaster of Aaron's sons who had offered strange fire upon the altar, Israel said: "It is the sad story of the progress of man that he makes no effort to retain the clean beauty of nature as he advances in his mastery over the things of the earth."¹⁶

Early in 1921, during a sermon entitled: "Modern Theology," Rabbi Israel explained how modern religion had best depart from the intricate and involved theological disputations characteristic of the Medieval period and of days long past. In those days, said Israel, "divorced from life, theology became the mental gymnasium for wizen fossils and dried up pedants."¹⁷ The concern of the modern theologian is not why God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but rather,

modern theology concerns itself with the moral character of Pharaoh and his attitude toward his fellow creatures, his value as a member of society. It asks "Did Pharaoh have the right to oppress a people? Has any man in any capacity whatsoever, the right to oppress any fellow man?" And the social consciousness has entered, through modern theology, the problem of poverty,

the problem of social disease and industrial strife. Modern theology would ask of Pharoah 'what of those little children whose lives were worthless in your estimation?' And modern theology asks of the cotton growers of Imperial Valley, California and of all who evade the child labor laws 'what of these innocent young lives whose blood you grind out for greedy gain?'¹⁸

In still another message delivered to his Evansville congregants, Rabbi Israel discussed his firm belief that both religion and science should and must remain open minded to any and all theories of spirit-life until they be proven to be false. "At the present day," said the rabbi, "our world is being stirred by the alleged investigations and discoveries of Oliver Lodge, Conan Doyle and others in the realms of the so-called spirit world."¹⁹ He explained the widespread popularity of their project by pointing to the public's yearning for information regarding their dear ones lost during the First World War. In any event, Israel insisted, neither science nor religion have anything to fear by such explorations into the spiritual. Although he personally was most skeptical of spiritual life he admitted:

'God's in His Heaven' and with that confidence we can go fearlessly in our search for truth, assured that whatever may come to light, - 'All's

right with the world.'²⁰

The year 1921 marked Edward Israel's first attendance at the yearly convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis which was held that year in Washington, D.C. Rabbi Israel served on two C.C.A.R. committees for that year; the standing committee of thanks.²² It may be interesting to note that at the very beginning of the 1921 C.C.A.R. Yearbook there is a long, fold out photograph which records the Reform Rabbis' visit to the White House and reception by President and Mrs. W.G. Harding. At the extreme left end stands Edward Israel, a tall, stocky, broad shouldered young man in open jacket.

By 1923 the minutes of the Washington Avenue Temple recorded two special meetings of the board of trustees which were called to discuss the future status of their rabbi who had received a call first to the Toledo, Ohio pulpit and then finally to one in Baltimore, Maryland. In the first case the Board recommended to the congregation "that beginning November 1, 1921, the salary of Rabbi Israel be increased to \$6000.00 per annum or \$500.00 per month including free house rent."²³ In the second case, the call to Baltimore, the Board met once again on July 16, 1923 and heard

Rabbi Israel report on "an offer he had received from the Baltimore congregation and advised that he had been elected to the pulpit there."²⁴ The president and temple Board reluctantly let Rabbi Israel go since they could not meet the financial offer of the Eastern congregation and they realized in all probability that their rabbi was ready for the challenges of a larger congregation.

Edward had enjoyed his years in Evansville and several times had ignored offers of positions from other congregations. On one occasion he wrote to a member of the Tulsa Oklahoma temple, which had invited him to become their rabbi, that he was very much satisfied at Evansville and that "unless something in a much larger community would arise, I feel that Evansville is my field of work."²⁵ The offer from Maryland was apparently what Israel was looking for, because by August 2, 1923 the Evansville Board was looking for a new rabbi and Edward L. Israel was on his way to Baltimore's Har Sinai Temple.

Actually, the Har Sinai congregation had expressed interest in Edward Israel as early as April 24, 1923. Rabbi Louis Bernstein had passed away in 1922 and Rabbi Harvey Wessel was serving as spiritual leader for a year. The Har

Sinai people contacted David Philipson in Cincinnati, who had years earlier served as rabbi of Har Sinai. Philipson recommended Israel to the Baltimore congregation, explaining that "though loth to leave Evansville he is willing to enter into negotiations with you. He is a young man of fine ability. He is an excellent speaker."²⁶ The former Har Sinai rabbi described Israel's successful ministry in Evansville and in the general community. He emphasized how long he had known Edward and how the young man had assisted him at Rockdale Temple years before. "He is American through and through. I know of no young man in the ministry whom I can commend more highly for you."²⁷

Throughout the months of letter writing back and forth between Israel, Philipson, and Har Sinai, Edward made clear the fact that he was "not pining to leave Evansville. The real pining is the sad thought of leaving."²⁸ He insisted that if the Baltimore group wanted him they must act fast since the Evansville congregation must have plenty of time in securing a rabbi before the Holy Days.²⁹ The Har Sinai committee arranged to meet Rabbi Israel in early July and were so impressed with him that they recommended his election as rabbi. Israel was unanimously elected, on July 9, 1923, as

the new Har Sinai spiritual leader. Upon hearing of their vote, Israel acknowledged the honor by writing the following in a letter to Mr. Jacob Hornstein of Har Sinai.

The responsibility is great but the opportunity is rare and with the sincere effort that I shall give to the work and with the co-operation of men like yourself whose heart is so wrapped up in the success of the congregation, there is no reason why we cannot look to an era of great accomplishment.³⁰

Thus at the age of twenty-seven Edward Israel was elected rabbi of America's oldest permanently Reform Jewish congregation. The years from 1923 to 1941 were to witness fantastic accomplishments by Edward L. Israel. As will be detailed, Israel achieved national prominence as chairman of the Social Justice Commission of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, spokesman on behalf of the Histadrut and worker for Zionist causes, and as president of the Synagogue Council of America. Each Sunday morning would find hundreds of worshipers often filling the 1000 seat Bolton Street Temple so as to hear Rabbi Israel's provocative lecture-sermon. Israel's eloquence and personal charisma became almost legendary in his lifetime. His magnetism and zest attracted hosts of friends and admirers into the Har

Sinai membership.³¹

The Baltimore Years 1923-1941

The whirlwind of activity which characterized Edward Israel's years as Har Sinai's rabbi is reflected in his long list of organizational offices which he held while in Baltimore. In 1931 he was elected president of the Seaboard Region of the Zionist Organization of America; in 1933, while serving as chairman of the C.C.A.R. Social Justice Commission, he was appointed by President Roosevelt to the National Board of the National Public Housing Conference. In 1934, in addition to becoming the president of the Baltimore branch of the American Jewish Congress he also was appointed by F.D.R. as a member of the Consultative Group of the Advisory Commission of Social Security. As each year passed he became increasingly involved in nation-wide offices such as head of the Social Justice Commission of the Synagogue Council of America (1936), delegate to the World Jewish Congress in Geneva (1937), first vice-president (1939) and the president of the Synagogue Council of America (1940). Finally, in 1941, Israel was elected executive director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. This was truly the

apogee of this distinguished career for along with this honor came also the full control over the future leadership of this important organ of Reform Judaism in America.

Let us now examine Edward Israel's Baltimore ministry, his role in the Maryland civic area, and the story of his participation in the Zionist movement.³²

1. The Har Sinai Pulpit

Edward Israel firmly believed that the synagogue, as a dynamic instrument of Jewish life, could remain relevant to life by applying the prophetic spirit and standard to social affairs. His sermons reflected this passionate belief, which was so basic to his religious outlook. "He combined doctrine with social reform as he proclaimed God's word in an age of inequality, fascism, and unemployment."³³ Though few of the sermons remain in textual or even outline form, the temple bulletins, which supplied his sermon titles, reflect his intense interest in prison and labor reform, the rights of the Negro, population control, public education, and the enlightenment of Christians regarding Judaism. Mrs. Edward Israel, years after her husband's death, recalled his basic philosophy of life, which she believes to have influenced

his entire rabbinical career:

To me his whole purpose in life was helping humanity and of course Jewish people in particular. I don't think he was much inclined to discuss his feelings about God and what it meant to him. Everything he did and said was tied up with some humanitarian cause of some sort.³⁴

Right from the beginning it was evident that the Har Sinai congregation needed new leadership which would attract new members into the old, established congregation. New members would mean fresh ideas with which to revitalize the temple's program. New people would also help to assure the future growth and development of the religious school and congregational auxiliaries. Of course too, new members would help the temple financially to strengthen itself and to meet its fiscal obligations. Israel determined to attract new blood by giving Har Sinai some positive notoriety. His sermons were controversial and interesting. He wholeheartedly gave of his time and energies to the congregation.

Frequently, during his first several years in Baltimore, Rabbi Israel would turn to his membership with the summons to: "Make yourself a Har Sinai booster. Sign up, a new member. Don't wait till next Rosh Hashona. Do it now."³⁵

Those individuals who were responsible for bringing in new temple families were rewarded by an honorable mention from the rabbi in his Bulletin Column. During the first year of Edward L. Israel's ministry at Har Sinai the congregation grew numerically by 35 per cent.³⁶

But, increase in size was not Edward Israel's only goal. His ministry was one to the individual man or woman who daily struggled to earn a living in a competitive world, and who endeavored to lead a significant and meaningful Jewish life. Rabbi Israel truly loved people and earnestly sought to assist them in their needs. Repeatedly he urged the membership to call on him for any and all reasons.

Many people are timid about taking a rabbi's time for this or that, fearing that he will consider himself needlessly bothered. Rest assured that as long as the present incumbent is Rabbi of Har Sinai, nothing that you regard as sufficiently important to call to his attention will receive anything but his immediate attention and undivided interest.³⁷

Shortly after his arrival in town Rabbi Israel addressed himself to another important goal of his rabbinate at Har Sinai: that of remaining close-knit despite an increase in membership. In an open letter to the members he wrote:

It is my earnest hope that neither bigness nor uncongeniality will stand in the way of our finding each other. We want to be big and, insofar as my efforts and your cooperation can develop us, we are going to grow. But we are going to grow without losing that human touch without which life is cold and barren.³⁸

Edward Israel planned to build his congregation into more than a house of prayer, but also into a focal point of civic and social reform. "But," he made clear, "plans have to be made slowly and worked out carefully, if we would have them constructive, rather than sensational."³⁹ In his installation address, however, the new rabbi urged his members not to be afraid of the moving and changing world. He said:

There are people who would advocate as a panacea for the apparent weakening of religious loyalty a blind and uncompromising return to all that is old and traditional. ... To pursue that course is to sign the death warrant to organized religion. Only open hearts and minds, ready to investigate all that is new and follow it if it is worthwhile will save religion.⁴⁰

One year after his arrival in Baltimore, Israel chose to sound a strong call for social justice in his Rosh Hashonah sermon. This sermon was among Israel's earliest denunciations of labor inequality. Although conceding that Abraham's near sacrifice of his son, Isaac had been a great

and awesome test, Israel cited cruelties within modern society which were even more horrid and which also tested modern man's faith. The Sun-Papers account of the sermon specified that -

The rabbi, summing up modern cruelties mentioned gossip, heartlessness of big business in crushing competition, child labor and war. Between child labor legislation and the argument advanced against it - State's rights - there surely can be no choice, Rabbi Israel said, if the humanitarian standpoint is to be considered.⁴¹

On another occasion Rabbi Israel, speaking on the subject "The Jew as a Businessman" declared that J.P. Morgan and Company "employ the same business methods that brought scorn and reproach to the Jews who used them several centuries ago."⁴²

Although there was great stress placed upon social justice issues Rabbi Israel also chose current literary works and popular drama current upon the New York stage as topics for his Sunday lectures. The Sunday services, which began after the Succos holiday, until the end of March, featured a brief prayer service, with choir and organ furnishing liturgical music and anthems. The focal point of the service was the forty to forty-five minute address by Rabbi

Israel. What was Israel's purpose in these services? On one occasion he explained this as his objective:

I endeavor to make the Sunday morning pulpit a happy combination of the expression of the worshipful attitude in life and the intellectual contemplation of vital problems of the day. The prayers I utter are your prayers. The opinions I present in my lectures are my own. They are expressed without dogmatic intolerance. Their aim is to stimulate thought through honest discussion rather than to compel agreement and to silence opposition..... Of one thing you can be certain. Whether the views expressed find sympathetic response or not, you can be sure that no word is spoken or omitted through compulsion.⁴³

In addition to the Sunday service which was most popular and well attended, until it was discontinued in 1938 due to Rabbi Israel's failing health and his increasingly demanding schedule, there was both a Friday evening and a Saturday morning sabbath service. The Saturday service was always a weak point in the congregations' attendance record. Israel, year after year in his annual reports to the temple, bemoaned the poor turn outs. If there were no bar mitzvahs scheduled for a particular sabbath morning, Rabbi Israel would preach his sermon, usually which had been based upon the Torah portion of the week, to a disappointingly small

attendance. In fact one time he challenged his congregants with this: "If Saturday morning is to continue to mean anything as a sabbath in Jewish life and if you want it to mean anything, the whole affair is up to you."⁴⁴ And he concluded with these very sharp words:

It is not my job as a rabbi to beg people to come to temple. My colleagues who do this, to my mind, err. It is my job and my vowed ideal to offer from my pulpit the most inspiring type of religious devotion and discourse of which I am capable.⁴⁵

Beginning in 1938, with the discontinuance of the Sunday morning service, Har Sinai began to hold late Friday evening services. In addition, under Rabbi Israel's promptings, Har Sinai began to introduce more ceremonies into the worship such as Hebrew brochas (blessings) over the Torah by laymen, cantorial music sung by a soloist from the altar, the kiddush chanting and the candle lighting services as well.⁴⁶ Also in 1938 the congregation, at the insistence of Rabbi Edward L. Isreal and a group of forward looking officers, purchased the Maryland Country Club property on Park Heights Avenue for the use as the Har Sinai Religious School quarters.⁴⁷ Evening services for the sabbath were now held at the suburban Temple Center while morning, High

Holy Day and Festival services continued to be held in the downtown temple on Bolton Street. This Temple Center enabled Har Sinai to be the first Baltimore temple to locate in the heart of the emerging new Jewish neighborhood.

As a teacher, Edward Israel was beloved by his pupils. He was not only a fiery spokesman and preacher for human rights, but he was also a tender man of great wit and empathic warmth. "He was 'Ed' to the adult members of his flock and 'Uncle Ed' to the children."⁴⁸ Israel worked tirelessly at improving the temple's religious school which was headed by the efficient and capable Mrs. Herman. Rabbi Israel instituted sisterhood mid-week book reviews, oneq shabbat study sessions, raised the confirmation age to 16 and, in cooperation with Dr. Charles S. Levy, introduced sex hygiene lectures for teenage boys.⁴⁹ Thus as a congregation preacher, teacher, and friend, Edward Israel was a superb leader and an inspiring incentive to religious action. Edward Israel, in the manner of the prophets of old, knew that he could not remain silent in the face of great wrongs and human suffering, because God's work remained to be done by men on earth, and that work was most urgent.

II. Rabbi Israel in the Community

Edward Isreal soon became a very sought after speaker receiving many invitations each week to speak at various meetings, assemblies and conventions. Frequently he would address church groups and non-Jewish clergy meetings in the Baltimore area. On several occasions he petitioned his Board of Trustees for permission to absent himself from Har Sinai in order to attend various out of state meetings or conventions of Zionist causes, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Synagogue Council and any number of other organizations. One should be aware that Rabbi Israel was subjected to constant and sometimes bitter criticism from some of his congregants who could not fathom their rabbi's world-wide and nation-wide interests and who would have had him be more of a congregational, local rabbi. Some of them charged "that when he was well he was out of town lecturing and when he was in town he was sick in the hospital. There was a craving for his personal attention and affection."⁵⁰ Rabbi Israel explained his extensive involvement in public activities in this manner:

More and more in these days of complicated civic and religious activity, the

rabbi is called upon to take roles of leadership outside the synagogue, as well as in communal life at large. The prime requisite, of course, is that these demands of a general religious and communal nature do not interfere with the essential activities of congregational life.... My public appearance as speaker by invitation on numerous occasions is of course, an excellent opportunity for expanding the message of our pulpit, as well as bringing the name of Har Sinai before the public at large.⁵¹

Israel clearly believed in the efficacy of the spoken message and thus he engaged in an extensive ministry to the Jewish and general community. For instance, here is his extensive speaking schedule for the first half of the religious year 1928-29.

April

25th Pittsburgh, Pa., Interdenominational Seminar on Coal Industry

May

2nd Sovereign Club

11th Cumberland, Md., 75th Anniversary Congregation B'er Chayim

13th Menorah Lodge, I.O.B.B.

16th Lancaster, Pa., Interdenominational Good Will Meeting

27th Kansas City, Mo., Methodist Episcopal Quadrennial

28th United Order True Sisters

29th Playground Athletic League Graduation

June

11th Ritchie Civic Club
12th Yedz Grotto
21st B.P.O.E. Olympic Games Dinner
23rd Veterans Foreign Wars Banquet
25th Chicago, Ill., Central Conference American Rabbis

July

16th Makato, Minn., State Teachers College
17th Winona, Minn., State Teachers College
18th Duluth, Minn., State Teachers College
18th Minneapolis, Minn., University of Minnesota
19th St. Cloud, Minn., State Teachers College
19th Moorhead, Minn., State Teachers College
20th Bemidji, Minn., State Teachers College

August

26th Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina
27th Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina

September

11th Catonsville Sterling Club
18th Baltimore Sterling Club
30th 313th Infantry Memorial Service
30th Young Mens Hebrew Association.⁵²

The files of the Baltimore Sun Papers record many articles about Rabbi Israel's various speaking engagements in the Maryland area. For instance, Israel spoke on such subjects as Jewish occupational distribution before the C.C.A.R. convention in Ashville, North Carolina;⁵³ adolescence to the Amity Club of Baltimore;⁵⁴ human rights of the citizens of China before a mass meeting of the "Hands-Off" Conference at the Lyric Theater, Baltimore;⁵⁵ and the religious prejudice against Governor Smith to the Eastern

High School Alumnae group.⁵⁶

In addition, there many published articles written by Edward Israel, for various publications, during his "spare" time. These articles also reflect the wide breadth of the rabbi's interests and concerns. His religious expression was never to be narrowed down to a pew or a single congregation. To the contrary, Edward Israel hurled himself into almost every social cause and human concern which men encountered during the Nineteen Twenties, Thirties, and early Forties. Israel's religion was a social religion which was unable to say "amen" to the inequalities and gross injustices of life. Hence he, like many before him, helped to turn the pen into a fiery sword by applying the dictates of Judaism, as he viewed them, to the contemporary issues of controversy. Rabbi Isreal stated his case, no matter what the topic may have been, in a logical and polite manner, but never compromising a principle or mincing words to protect the reputation of higher-ups in powerful positions.

In an article entitled, "The Problem of Increasing Population" Edward deplored the failure of religion, in thousands of years, to end wars by making out of man a "peace-loving animal."

For all our 'beating our swords into plowshares' and for all our 'Princes of Peace' and our 'Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man' - yes, I commit an even greater hersy - for all our Leagues of Nations, we are as militant as ever.⁵⁷

Israel laid much of the blame upon the problem of over-population. Any nation which is running short of both food and living area, argued Rabbi Israel, will ultimately be forced to turn toward militarism. The solution, he admitted, will only be found:

...when religious and idealistic forces in human life will realize that they are dealing with a human race that is tied to earth as well as to heaven, and when we give a little more attention, both religious and otherwise, to how to fit man for the job of life instead of merely trying to prepare him to wear wings and play a harp.⁵⁸

Such iconoclastic remarks, coming from a member of the clergy, were bound to create a public sensation. Israel soon came to be, not merely respected within the Baltimore area, but beloved as well. Not only amongst the Jews, but the non-Jewish community as well was captivated by Rabbi Israel's warmth, his wit and great charm. Once, in 1930, Rabbi Israel was invited to participate in a forum discussion of Judasim, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Agnosticism.

The program took place before a packed audience in Baltimore's Lyric Theater, most of whom had come to see the famous lawyer and agnostic Clarence Darrow, who was a participant in the program. Here is how the Baltimore Post described the surprising results, in their paper the following day:

A callow youth, quite unsophisticated in the dangers of the world, stood on the stage of the Lyric Theater last night and made Clarence Darrow, eminent Chicago lawyer, look like a new member of the bar pleading his first case. Not that the defender of Leopold and Loeb - the man who talked rings around the golden-tongued William Jennings Bryan in the famous Tennessee 'monkey-trial' - did not prove himself an eloquent and convincing orator. Darrow was all that. But Rabbi Edward L. Israel, of Har Sinai Congregation, who explained 'Why I Remain a Jew' was even more. His first sentence - in which he confessed his lack of sophistication and consequent unwillingness to stick his head in a lion's mouth by debating Darrow - brought a volume of applause which almost amounted to an ovation. And from then until the moment, some thirty minutes later, when he brought his speech to a close, his remarks were punctuated by bursts of applause.⁵⁹

During his speech the rabbi also discussed his personal reasons for a belief in God. "My religion is a venture of faith," he said, "not an assumption of infinite knowledge..."

I do know there is something. The soul knows reasons that reason cannot prove."⁶⁰ One reason that Rabbi Israel gave for his belief in God was based upon this fact:

Men give up the comforts of the body for the sake of ideals. They defy cold reason and self-preservation and all the first laws of physical nature in striving to interpret spiritual powers in terms of reality.⁶¹

Throughout the Nineteen Thirties and early Forties, Edward Israel continued to write articles for various publications. Most were devoted to general subjects of Jewish-American concern. In 1935, for example, Israel wrote an article for the Baltimore News-Post paper on "The American Problem of Crime,"⁶² he also published an article entitled "The Jew and American Democracy" which traced carefully the fact that "the very essence of Jewish tradition and Judaism is democracy."⁶³ Israel delved into presidential politics when, in 1936, he wrote an article commenting on Felix Warburg's declaration of support for Landon, rather than Franklin Roosevelt in the 1936 presidential election. Rabbi Israel showed the folly of those anti-Semites who believed F.D.R. to have to be a tool of the Jews who were trying, they claimed, to "Communize" America. Israel wrote:

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It would appear to any even not so intelligent person that either something is wrong with this anti-Semitic propaganda or that the Jews have gotten their signals crossed. The former is, of course, the real fact of the situation, ...⁶⁴

Continuing with his argument, Rabbi Israel pointed out that

A rich Jew like Warburg, following his natural economic predilections, veers strongly to the right and comes out for the conservative policies of Republicanism. Another very prominent American Jew, Professor Felix Frankfurter of Harvard University, who from his youth has been identified with intelligent liberal movements, is the very champion of New Dealism... there never has been and never will be any political connection between the American Jew's Jewishness and his Americanism. It is only the dastardly lies of vicious Jew-baiters who try to represent this.⁶⁵

Edward Israel became even better known by Marylanders after he began his radio programs. Rabbi Israel eagerly applied the medium of radio so as to enlarge his ministry even further. In 1938 he delivered a series of four broadcasts on Saturday evenings in November. These talks were sponsored by the United Jewish Laymen's Committee of New York City, and were heard over the program "The Message of Israel." In these four broadcasts, Rabbi Israel's purpose

was to interpret Judaism and the Jew for his radio audience, stressing the Jewish message to other faiths, the modern Jew, the world, and to America. All four talks were powerful statements on Jewish belief aimed at undoing superstition and blind hatred which had been caused by ignorance of the facts. Israel denounced the Hitlerian party of Nazi Germany as being yet one more Babylon for modern Jewry to endure.

"The history of the Jew," he reminded his listeners, "is an affirmation that physical force must ultimately give way to moral courage, and that the triumph of wickedness is but for a day." 66

Many still remember how, during his Saturday evening broadcasts on "The Message of Israel" or, in 1941 on his own radio show, "Rabbi Israel Speaks," he rose to great heights of eloquence and strength in repeatedly opposing the tide of anti-Semitism and other fascist trends at home and abroad. Edward Israel had been among the very earliest rabbis to sound the alarm against the threat of Adolph Hitler. His 1933 Rosh Hasonah Eve Sermon had denounced the Nazi humiliations of the German Jews. Frequently, in his broadcasts, Israel likened villains of Jewish history such as Haman and Pharaoh, to Hitler and Mussolini. Time and

again he defended his people against the anti-Semite's accusations of Jewish financial conspiracy, or of Jewish leadership within Communist ranks. Vividly and articulately he portrayed the suffering and hardship of European Jewry under the Nazi tyranny. Israel sincerely believed that more than the Jewish future was at stake. The plight of the Jew, he insisted, was simply a symptom of the soul-sickness of a world gone astray. Clearly, the rabbi gained tremendous strength for his convictions from these radio shows as the public responded so favorably to his various messages.

Israel also made his presence felt in various municipal matters and concerns. He was most active in interfaith matters within the Baltimore community. Among his closest friends were such distinguished local churchmen as Dr. Harold Bosley, Reverend R.A. McGowan, and Dr. T. Guthrie Speers. These were the men who stood with Israel in protesting social inequalities such as racism, unemployment, and local anti-Semitism. Remembering Rabbi Israel, Reverend Speers commented:

I knew him very soon after I came to Baltimore in 1928. We had so many things in common - specially in the field of social justice. In that field I always compared him in my thoughts with the 8th century prophets. He was a worthy successor.

In the early part of 1932 Israel began a crusade to eliminate the Shakespearean play, "The Merchant of Venice" from the high school curriculum of Baltimore City. Israel insisted in his petition to the school board and its president, Raymond S. Williams, that the play should be reserved for college-age students rather than the impressionistic adolescent. "To the Jew," the rabbi insisted, "the play has meant misery, persecution and bigotry."⁶⁸ Joining Rabbi Israel in the petition were the Social Service Commission of the Baltimore Federation of Churches and several of Israel's close friends who happened to be the ministers of Baltimore's most prestigious churches. Following the rabbi's death in 1941 these same ministers and priests joined together on a radio program to eulogize their friend Ed and to call him "an apostle of justice" and a "modern Hebrew prophet."

III. Zionism

In his autobiography, My Life As An American Jew, Rabbi David Philipson described, what was probably one of his last meetings with Rabbi Israel. "Early in April, 1937, Philipson was invited to address the Har Sinai Congregation

which was celebrating its ninety-fifth anniversary.

I was startled at the change which had come over this congregation. Under the leadership of David Einhorn, its first accredited rabbi, this congregation was a stronghold of liberal Jewish universalism ... Its present rabbi, Edward L. Israel, had undermined the traditional position of the congregation and had made a volte face to political Zionism. He was playing the game to the limit. ... Israel still continues to feed the false fire of nationalism. Perhaps he, too, someday may see the error of his way.⁷⁰

Could Zionism have been as important issue to have caused such a rift between Edward Israel and "Dr. P." who had been of great help to his younger colleague in earlier years? To be sure, it could. Zionism and the cause of Jewish nationalism was the most hotly debated topic of that day. Reform Judaism, prior to the Columbus Platform of 1937 had always been opposed to Zionism. David Philipson had always been one of the leading opponents of Jewish nationalism and it was in such a classical Reform milieu that Edward Israel was raised.

Throughout his years as a student at the Hebrew Union College, and even in his first two pulpits in Springfield and Evansville, Israel was clearly still an anti-Zionist. While

rabbi of the Wahington Avenue Temple in Evansville, he preached a sermon which he called "The Problem of Palestine." Although the manuscript is not dated, it was probably preached sometime between 1920-1923, since it was typed on Evansville Temple stationery. Israel said in this message:

The Jew in America is by no means unanimous in the decision that Palestine be made the national home of a Jewish State. I, for one, refuse to admit that the Jew has any other loyalty than the land in which he now makes his home and the flag under whose folds he now enjoys his freedom.⁷¹

Universalism, claimed Israel, was one of the greatest strengths of the Jewish message. "To relegate it (Judaism) to the confines of a little spot in the orient," he said, "is to destroy the high ideal of the universality which is ours."⁷² He then continued:

We, the Americans of Jewish faith, love Palestine in the memory of all that it meant in the lives of our fathers. On the efforts of many of persecuted brethren from Central Europe to make it their home, we look with sympathy and if necessary with financial assistance at rehabilitation. But as a Jewish state with a Jewish government which shall be regarded as the center of the Jewish life of the world, we Jews of American allegiance reject the entire idea. There is no need for us to enlarge upon our Americanism and

our American devotion.⁷³

It is impossible to pinpoint any particular year or occasion when Edward Israel became a Zionist. Unfortunately he kept no diary which might have explained his feelings from year to year on the explosive issue of Jewish nationalism. His wife, Amelia Israel, when reflecting upon her late husband's transformation into a pro-Zionist confided that:

It seemed to me in the very early years he started having a feeling for it. It seemed to kind of hit him suddenly. I don't know whether it was as a result of his talking to someone, or hearing some speeches on the issue, but all of a sudden he had an ardor for the Zionist cause.⁷⁴

The question of Zionism must have posed a puzzle to Edward Israel for quite a while. A long time friend, James G. Heller, had this to say regarding Israel's Zionism:

Rabbi Israel had a long conflict within himself over Zionism. Rabbi Israel at the outset of his ministry was an anti-Zionist. However, after years of deliberation Dr. Israel joined the Zionist ranks and since had become one of its national leaders.⁷⁵

Indeed the record of Edward Israel's participation in Zionist matters indicates a very gradual increase of involvement throughout the early years in Baltimore. For example,

according to his annual report of 1924, he addressed the Zionist society of Johns Hopkins University. Far from being proof of Israel's Zionist leanings, he might well have debated the topic with more traditional Jewish students who were enthusiastic Zionists. One cannot be sure just what attitude his address reflected. A further examination of Israel's speaking and meeting schedule shows increased Zionist leanings between the years 1926 to 1929 when he became the State Chairman of the Zionist Organization of America. Clearly by 1929 Edward Israel was a confirmed Jewish nationalist. In 1930 he became the vice-president of the Seaboard Zionist Region, and from 1931 until 1935 served as president of that same organization. The Seaboard Zionist Region incorporated over forty communities from Maryland, Virginia, District of Columbia, North and South Carolina.

Rabbi Israel might have been attempting to explain his own turn-about in thought regarding Zionism when he said in 1932:

... although many of our people still share the traditional attitude of other generations of Reform Judaism against a nationalistic interpretation of Jewish life, all of us are coming to realize that it is possible to be

non-nationalistic and still not harbor that bitter attitude toward Zionism and modern Palestine which in the past characterized so many American Reform Jews.⁷⁶

In Evansville, Edward Israel had made the statement: "There is no need for us to enlarge upon our Americanism and our American devotion."⁷⁷ He may well have reconsidered this statement in the intervening years as he viewed the course of world conditions. The League of Nations had never realized its potential of promise. The Jews of Eastern and Central Europe suffered from their losses during the war and now began to feel rising anti-Semitic sentiment as nationalism began to blossom in the former Axis Power countries. Liberalism had been struck a cruel blow after the Great War. The Jew was once again becoming the scapegoat for desperate rulers and ambitious politicians. Anti-Semitism in the United States had also begun to fester. The gates of immigration were closed in 1924 by the Johnson Act as nativist feelings grew in this country. In 1920, Henry Ford began publishing his Dearborn Independent with its bitter attacks against the Jews. Also the 1920's marked the reincarnation of the Ku Klux Klan which preached its message of anti-Jewish, white Protestant supremacy. Clearly, the

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Twenties were not happy years for as fervent a liberal as Edward Israel. The Thirties brought no relief from this tension as Nazism took hold in Germany and Hitler prepared to profit by Germany's suffering from war losses and economic depression.

All of this may have motivated Edward Israel to align himself with the pro-Zionist faction of the American Jewish community. Zionism may well have represented for him the promise of a better and more secure future for his fellow Jews. It may have offered hope for the establishment, in Palestine, of a State built upon those principles of social justice which were so dear to him. What was the nature of this Zionism to which Edward Israel was allured? Let us examine Israel's writings and speeches on the topic of Jewish nationalism so as to discover how he viewed it and what promise it held for him. Rabbi Israel wrote on one occasion this definition of Zionism:

Zionism is much more than a mere nationalistic philosophy of Jewish life. It is something more than a simple statement that the Jews, having been once a nation and having preserved an historical national consciousness, must of inexorable necessity return to a national existence in order to achieve normality. For many other nations which at some

time in the past have known a national existence have been drawn from their native land and have perished... To the Zionist, the restoration of Jewish life in Palestine is simply a material manifestation of the embodiment of a spirit which thousands of years of ordeals have not been able to quench.⁷⁸

Rabbi Israel realized, all too well, the dangers of nationalism as made evident by the dictatorships in Germany and Italy. The Jewish religion, Israel felt, would prevent the Zionists from becoming shallow and entirely political. Because Zionism was an outgrowth of Judaism, with its universal concept of God and brotherhood, Edward Israel was convinced that Jewish nationalism would be guided by the spiritual and ethical truths of social justice for all mankind. Or as he himself phrased it:

... we Zionists must remember that the essence of our preservation and the extent of the yearning for rehabilitation in Zion has been fundamentally a spiritual and religious thing. Even though we have to concern ourselves with political reality and the need to aid our pioneers and redeem the wastelands, we know that those political realities pass away and change, and those waste places could become waste places once again unless there is a spirit that is beyond the transitory period.⁷⁹

Edward Israel also came to be a fierce advocate of the Histadrut movement in Palestine. For him, Histadrut came to

represent the fulfillment of the age old Jewish quest for an humane and effective social philosophy which would prudently, yet gently, blend the rights of the individual with those of the social group. Writing about the Histadrut, Rabbi Israel described the goals of that organization's founders:

... the Histadrut strove to set up in the new Jewish homeland a pattern of life where the individuals would have creative scope and opportunity, but where individualism would never be allowed to become the destructive anti-social force that it is today in most lands... These founders of labor Zionism - for such it was - therefore elevated the worker, whether a worker of hand or brain, to a significance of individual worth which seemingly paradoxically became the basis of an effective cooperative economic society.⁸⁰

Rabbi Israel was not one who supported an organization from a distance without becoming involved. Hence, in 1935 he enlisted the support of 241 fellow rabbis in signing a declaration of faith in the ideals and principles of the Palestine Labor Movement. Rabbi Israel explained this show of support for the Histadrut organization by pointing to the number of years in which the Central Conference of American Rabbis had been issuing statements of criticism regarding the inequalities of the economic structure in America. And,

Israel continued:

In our resolution we merely apply to Palestine the same ideals we cherish with regard to the economic order in general; but because there is still opportunity in Palestine to prevent the growth of the injustices which we attack elsewhere, and because the Histadrut is doing more than any other body to frustrate these injustices, we have endorsed, not its every specific act, but its basic philosophy.⁸¹

From late February until the end of April, 1937, Edward Israel wrote a series of articles on the topic "Are Jewish Nationalism and Nazi Nationalism Identical?" These weekly installments were published in the American Israelite of Cincinnati, Ohio. Each week Israel's article was printed in that newspaper beside a series of articles in opposition to Zionism, written by Rabbi Israel's Baltimore colleague, Rabbi Morris Lazon. Lazon, once a Zionist, had recanted his position and become a virulent anti-nationalist. Both rabbis' articles had originally been addresses delivered on previous occasions. Lazon had first spoken on "Judaism's Message to the World" before the 1937 Union of American Hebrew Congregations Convention in New Orleans. Israel's address was presented as a Sunday morning lecture from his own

pulpit in direct rebuttal of Rabbi Lazaron.

Lazaron had likened Jewish nationalism to that of Nazi Germany. He had warned that Jewish nationalism would weaken the position of the Jewish Americans in the United States and cause them to fall suspect to the charge of dual loyalties.

Edward Israel was unequivocally at variance with Lazaron's position. He wrote:

I cannot forbear from taking issue with him, because I feel very strongly that he had perverted in his presentation the whole concept of Jewish nationalism and that he has distorted the picture of its results.⁸²

He then traced the historical developments of modern nationalism. He cited leaders like Mazzini, the father of Italian nationalism, who held that nationalism might be a great instrument for the welfare of humanity. Rabbi Israel stressed how the Jews, emerging from their hellish experiences during the medieval period, were inheritors of Mazzini's enlightenment and hence enjoyed great freedom.

"The modern movement that certain people call 'nationalism'," explained Rabbi Israel, "is really a repudiation of the whole nationalistic philosophy of the 19th century."⁸³ Then in a later part of his address Israel stressed this fact:

The result of Nazism has been merely to emphasize the difference between the distortion of nationalistic ideas and Jewish nationalistic ideas. It has but served to point out the growing collapse of real nationalism in the world today.⁸⁴

Becoming increasingly bitter in his criticism of the anti-Zionist position, Rabbi Israel said this about their fears of dual loyalty accusations:

As to the charge of suspicions concerning our Americanism. It may interest you to know that the founder of the American Jewish Congress movement was one Louis D. Brandeis and that the present honorary president of the World Jewish Congress is Julian Mack. I'd be willing to guarantee that suspicions concerning the Americanism of these two men are fewer than those harbored regarding our pathetic Jewish amateur Gentiles. I'll even be willing to wager that a certain man named Stephen S. Wise has his Americanism less questioned than do some of the lesser lights who can not understand his attitude.⁸⁵

Once again, near the conclusion of his remarks, Israel reiterated the basic reason for his pro-Zionist position.

Modern nationalism, used rightly, is the basis, the only means that we have of preserving unique cultural and spiritual development. It is the nearest thing we have to the prophetic Jewish nationalism... The hope that some day life may indeed be throughout the world a true, harmonious symphony of cultures, creative each in their own nature and yet each complementing the other! When that day comes, then and

then alone, will men see God.⁸⁶

Rabbi Israel had seen Palestine first hand when he and Amelia had visited during the summer of 1935. During that visit they became quite friendly with Mr. and Mrs. David Ben-Gurion. Edward had been impressed with the promise of the Palestinian soil to become fruitful and fertile when properly irrigated and cultivated. He firmly believed that the Jewish-Arab problem could be solved in a peaceful manner if the Jews would meet their Palestinian neighbors as equals. Much of the blame for difficulties between the two groups Israel assigned to the British politicians who had made conflicting promises during the First World War. Both sides were promised a nation sometime in the future and, of course, this resulted in a growth of nationalistic fervor within both groups. Rabbi Israel also charged France with the responsibility for inciting Arabs against Jews so as to confuse conditions for Great Britain. Communist pamphlets also, said Edward Israel, helped incite Arab workers against the Jewish population. The Jewish nationalism was portrayed by the Communists, as being part of British imperialism.⁸⁷

Rabbi Israel was very cautious to avoid becoming "used" by any group or cause for their own benefit. He was always

fearful that such imprudent action on his part might prove to be injurious to either the Zionist or general Jewish welfare. Thus in 1936, Israel resigned his membership in the national executive committee of the American League Against War and Fascism because of the number of Communists among their ranks. Summing up his reasons for such a move Rabbi Israel stated:

Zionism is a means by which alone the cultural and spiritual life of the Jew can be preserved in the modern world. The vigorous attacks of the Communists on Zionism both in Russia and in Palestine and now in America represent an attempt to strike a death blow to the Jewish people. I cannot make any sort of common cause with those who are engaged in such a vicious undertaking.⁸⁸

Similarly, in 1938, when requested by The Jewish Chronicle of London to make a statement of the proposed partition of Palestine, Edward Israel responded as follows, revealing a keen insight into the workings of international politics.

It is my firm conviction that the ultimate decision regarding the question of the partition of Palestine at the present time is not going to rest with the Jewish people. Great Britain is going to decide this question on the basis of what is good for Great Britain and not primarily on the basis of what is good for the Jew or the Arab. In view of these obvious facts, it seems that the only end which could be

served by violent discussion of partition in Zionist and Jewish ranks is to destroy the unity which must obtain in behalf of Zionist work which must be undertaken and must go on, regardless of whether Palestine is partitioned or not. I therefore thank you for your kind invitation but do not care to contribute, for my part, to a futile discussion which can only serve to create disunity in Jewish and Zionist ranks.⁸⁹

By way of summary of Edward L. Israel's involvement in Zionism it seems fair for us to draw this conclusion. Given Edward Israel's mind-set, which gave priority to social justice as the essential message of prophetic Judaism, it appears more than likely that his ultimate decision to opt toward the Zionist cause was actually one more manifestation of his regard for the oppressed and of his burning desire to help assure Jewish survival by the establishment of a just and noble Jewish State in Palestine. Hence, Edward Israel, the fervent Zionist, was totally in consonance with Edward Israel the fierce advocate of human rights.

IV. Edward Israel, the Man

Before turning to examine Edward L. Israel's participation in the area of social justice, perhaps we should pause briefly to consider Edward Leopold Israel the man: Israel

as husband, father, and friend. The temptation is great, when writing the "life and works" of an individual, to emphasize too much the works, and to neglect the life.

Much of Edward Israel's charisma derived from his zestful life-style. Ask any of the former students of Rabbi Israel what they remember about him and they will likely overflow with details of how "Uncle Ed" affected their lives, taught them a meaningful lesson, or comforted them during trying times. Many remember his study, at the rear of the Bolton Street Temple which was always filled with life. Not only were there books and papers but, also birds, fish tanks, flowering plants, and at least one dog. Rabbi Israel loved animals and frequently took one of the family dogs with him when he left for the temple in the morning.

Said one former student of Rabbi Israel, Mr. Martin E. Dannenberg:

Despite the gloomy period in which he lived and worked, he was always optimistic and knew that things would work out if only people would forget their petty differences and work for the common good. I remember spending a week-end with him one summer He and I went out on the lake in a boat to fish and I remember sitting spellbound as he described his ideas for the future of mankind and for bringing a greater degree of social justice and awareness to the then oppressive and

disordered world.⁹⁰

Then, turning more toward Israel's effect upon his own life, Mr. Dannenberg wrote:

He dominated the scene wherever he was, whether in a living room, at a dinner party, at a civic meeting, at a Temple affair. He was a man of tremendously attractive personality and more often than not with a cheery smile lighting his round face. I was one of his bar mitzvah boys. He encouraged me and served as an inspiration through my growing up and teen-age years.⁹¹

The Israel's family life was warm but it suffered necessarily from Edward's busy schedule and frequent absences due to speaking engagements. He was especially close to his first born son, Chuck, since Chuck has been born early in Edward's career. In those days there had been more leisure time. Nevertheless, one needs only to read a few lines of the letters Rabbi Israel wrote to his newborn son, Ed Jr., to know how much Israel treasured his sons and family.

June 21, 1924

My dear son:

This is your third day on earth. I have been rather busy and excited and all that sort of thing or I would have started this letter sooner.... You were born at 1:50 p.m. Thursday, June 19th. You seemed to be in a terrible

hurry to get into this vale of tears, so called, because your mother had been in the hospital only a short time when you arrived. Keep up the good record and be on time always. It's a good habit.

We've had quite a time deciding upon a name for you. There have been many suggestions... I want you named Edward L. Israel, Jr. after me... It is possibly an awful thing to inflict on you but I'm sure you will forgive me. And you and I will sort of have to live up to each other. It makes me awfully proud to have a son bearing my full name.⁹²

The rabbi's oldest son, Charles had occasion to write a brief letter of memoir about his father in 1961 to a family friend. In that letter Charles had this to say about his late father.

He was an enormously complex person, with a great love for life, and a feeling for his work which drove him to a certain death. He knew that if he maintained the pace he had been keeping, he would die of a heart attack. But he often told me that this was the way he wanted it; he could not bear the thought of retiring to inactivity. And yet he loved the quiet, contemplative life. We spent many, many hours and days on Maine lakes together... He was a brilliant orator, with an incisive feeling for words and warmth and confidence of delivery, yet he told me that there was not one time when he got up to speak that he wasn't frightened. He was a deeply religious man, though not in the conventional sense... He was a man of quick and violent angers, and could be quite stubborn and unreasonable at times, but in the end he could admit his mistakes with grace. And so apparent and outgoing was his warmth that the moment he walked

into a room of little kids, they instinctively flocked around him jostling each other just to touch him.⁹³

Of course, Mrs. Edward Israel is the one who knew him best. She remembers the constant battle with him to slow down, lose weight, smoke less. She gave up on trying to teach him fiscal caution. "He never entered the rabbinate to become rich," she mused to herself.⁹⁴ She also remembered this, in particular, about her husband's ability to be at ease with his role of rabbi:

Ed never minded going out to night clubs. Sometimes there was a little risqué stuff going on. It never bothered Ed. He thought it was fun. Maybe someone would raise their eyebrows, but Ed never minded this, he wasn't that kind of person, he couldn't be.⁹⁵

Sickness frequently interfered with Rabbi Israel's many activities, causing him temporarily to slow down. He was hospitalized during the 1930's and 40's for flu, pneumonia, grippe, and most seriously, for severe heart attacks. Rabbi Ely Pilchik, who served for a short time as Israel's assistant Rabbi at Har Sinai, reflected upon the state of the rabbi's health in 1939 and 1940.

I would receive frequent calls both from Rabbi Israel and from the congregation because during that year Rabbi Israel spent a good deal of time in the hospital

with cardiac illness.... With the end of the academic year Rabbi Israel continuing to suffer illness, and with my having worked considerably with Har Sinai Temple, he suggested that I come on as his assistant for the following year. I welcomed the opportunity, and I worked with him very closely.⁹⁶

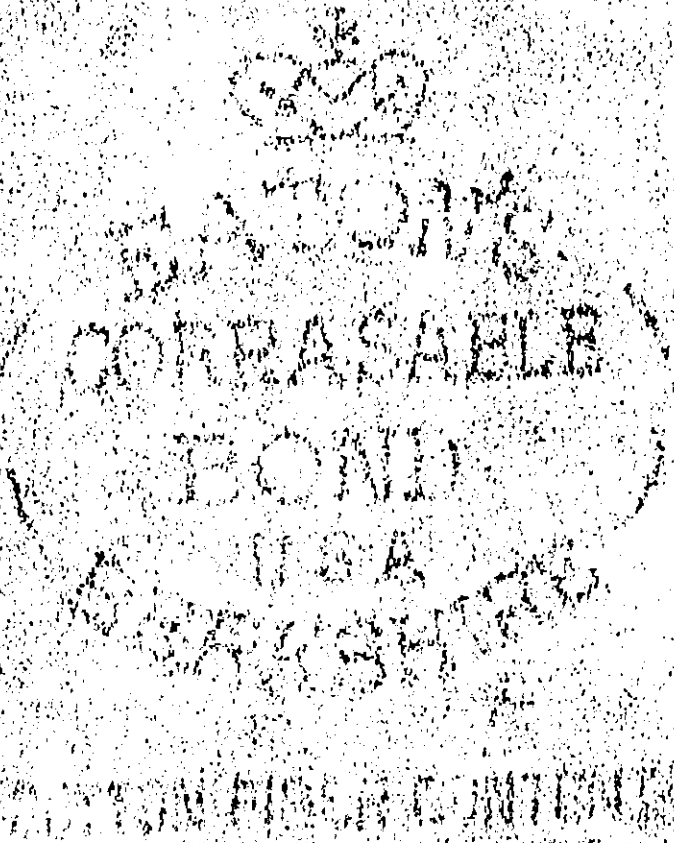
Rabbi Israel, in 1933 expressed his own view of his unsound health when during an address to the congregation he stated frankly:

I personally have often been asked why, in the face of various illnesses I have suffered in the last eighteen months, I persist in carrying as much as I do in the realms of Jewish and general interest. I assure you that it is not to flatter any personal vanity. I am by nature a rather lazy soul and would enjoy by preference a far less strenuous life. I feel, however, that my task as rabbi places on me the responsibility of making as much of a contribution as I can to these wider fields.... To the limit of my physical endurance, I shall continue such a course to the best of my ability.⁹⁷

Such was Edward L. Israel the man: outgoing and friendly, a good family man, but also a tireless champion of human rights as espoused by Reform prophetic Judaism. He was an eloquent minister to his congregants, a controversial social reformer but, he was also a human being who, having opted to run through life at a vigorous pace, never

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looked back nor expressed regret at having struggled to help realize a world of greater beauty and of more radiant hope.





WATONS FIBER DEATONT

Chapter 3

Edward L. Israel: The Social Justice Warrior

The Early Phase

Only nine short years after his ordination as rabbi from the Hebrew Union College, the Central Conference of American Rabbis turned to Edward Israel to lead them as chairman of its Social Justice Commission. As the leading exponent of social justice within Reform Judaism, Israel chaired the Commission from 1927 to 1933 and from 1939 to 1941, helping to make that committee the most active group in the Conference. Israel had always shown a keen interest in the rights of his fellow men. His ministry had, from the first, been "people" oriented and universalistic in appeal.

As a young rabbi of 23, Israel in 1919 before his Springfield, Illinois congregation, had set the record straight that it was his business to speak out on the social and moral issues. In one sermon he had insisted:

Almost every layman would stand with me when I say that I believe a minister has no right to dabble in partisan politics or to identify himself or his church with any political squabble as is often done. Yet I might find those who will differ with me when I say that in instances of moral problems, it is not only the minister's right but his duty, to enter the public questions. The qualification of the moral and religious must be carefully made, but the moral and religious is the

minister's sphere and he must follow where that leads, fearlessly and uncompromisingly.¹

On another occasion Israel phrased the challenge of the religious leader to respond to worldly problems in this way:

The task of the modern prophet and religious leader is not to raise the dead, but to raise the living - not to bring to the living a knowledge of death, but to bring to the living a knowledge of life.²

It seems rather certain that early in his career, Edward Israel became firmly committed to the belief that "the social justice ideal of Judaism is almost as integral a part of its historic traditions as its unique God concept."³ It is no wonder that Israel manifested such boundless zeal in the pursuit of social action programs. In one year alone he represented the Central Conference of American Rabbis four times before Senate investigatory committees in Washington.⁴ The industrial age, Rabbi Israel believed, posed a great challenge for organized religion. Life had been made mechanized to the extreme and only spiritual creativity and religious ethics could help modern man maintain an equilibrium in his struggle for meaningful existence. Religion, Israel insisted, must be the agent which would replace the quality of life which mechanistic life had taken away.

In the history of the American Reform Jewish Movement,

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Edward Israel was not without predecessors who were imbued with a desire to work for human betterment and who helped to draw the Reform rabbis toward the cause of social justice.

Born out of the influence of the Enlightenment, Reform Judaism replaced Messianic yearnings with an accentuated interest in social action. David Einhorn, a pioneer of Reform in both Germany and the United States, summarized this change of emphasis when he said: "Our views have entirely changed. We stand upon the ground of prophetic Judaism which aims at the universal worship of God by righteousness."⁵

As far back as 1885, Kaufman Kohler and Emil G. Hirsch emphasized the social idealism of Reform Judaism in matters of the rights of the underprivileged. Section VIII of the Pittsburgh Platform enunciated the necessity for active concern by Reform rabbis in social and economic problems.

The rabbis in 1885 were not prepared to confront immediate evils with a message of justice and righteousness. More and more they concerned themselves with social problems, but in a manner that was idealistic and utopian. Their approach represented a philosophical attitude rather than a dynamic call to action.⁶

With the exception of one case in 1908 when the Central Conference declared itself in favor of federal and state

legislation which would eliminate child labor, there was little in the way of a concrete social action program until 1918. That year marked the adoption by the Conference of its first clear-cut statement of social justice principles. This is that statement which had been authored by Rabbi Horace J. Wolf of Rochester, New York.

The next few decades will have as their chief concern the rectification of social and economic evils. The world will busy itself not only with the establishment of political, but also with the achievement of industrial democracy through social justice. The ideal of social justice has always been an integral part of Judaism. It is in accordance with tradition, therefore, that the Central Conference of American Rabbis submits the following declaration of principles as a program for the attainment of which followers of our faith should strive.

1. A more equitable distribution of the profits of industry.
2. A minimum wage which will insure for all a fair standard of living.
3. The legal enactment of an eight hour day as a maximum for all industrial workers.
4. A compulsory one day of rest in seven for all workers.
5. The regulation of industrial conditions to give all workers a safe and sanitary working environment, with particular reference to the special needs of women.

6. The abolition of child labor and raising the standard of age wherever the legal age limit is lower than is consistent with moral and physical health.

7. Adequate workmen's compensation for industrial accidents and occupational diseases.

8. Legislative provision for universal workmen's health insurance and careful study of social insurance methods for meeting the contingencies of unemployment and old age.

9. An adequate permanent national system of public employment bureaus to make possible the distribution of the labor forces of America.

10. The recognition of the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively.

11. The application of the principles of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration to industrial disputes.

12. Proper housing for working people, secured through government regulation when necessary.

13. The preservation and the integrity of the home by a system of mothers' pensions.

14. Constructive care of dependents, defectives, and criminals, with the aim of restoring them to normal life wherever possible.⁷

Beginning in 1922 the Central Conference joined with the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, and the National Catholic Welfare Conference in a dozen important

social justice projects. "In one of these it is possible that the religious forces were a factor in eliminating the twelve-hour day in the steel industry."⁸ Thus was begun a remarkable record of cooperative, direct action between the three major religious bodies in America. The Reform rabbis had taken a big step toward the development of their social action impulse which was to reach maturity in the years of Edward L. Israel's chairmanship of their Social Justice Commission. Israel "stimulated the Conference's interests in social ethics and spared no effort to make the pronouncement of the rabbis come to life in real situations on the national scene."⁹

In addition to his responsibilities in the Central Conference Social Justice Commission Rabbi Israel also was associated in an official way with a number of important social institutions within the Baltimore area. He was the official arbitrator in the men's clothing industry of Baltimore from 1935 to 1941, and was chairman of the Municipal Commission on Employment Stabilization of Baltimore. He also served as head of the Religious Board and a member of the Report Committee of the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy from 1939 to 1940. Rabbi Israel was also a member of the board of the National Public Housing Conference from

1933 until his death.

Those who knew Edward Israel have often remarked at how he seemed to have been especially adept in coping with the complicated matter of labor disputes. In fact, Israel seemed to discover himself and his real potential as a labor arbitrator quite by accident. True, he had always been interested in human rights and had never been one to define religion in a narrow, theological sense, but he had never become a leader or spokesman for any particular social cause or crusade.

Edward Israel, as has been mentioned earlier, frequently spoke out on social issues during his ministries in Springfield and Evansville, and he continued to do so in Baltimore. The files of the Baltimore Sun record several sermons preached during the years 1923 to 1926 which were addressed to the social problems of that day. Anti-Semitism and its roots of origin, the Ku Klux Klan, motion picture censorship, and American nativist tendencies were all denounced from the Har Sinai pulpit. Frequent letters of protest to the editors of the Baltimore Newspapers were published which attacked Rabbi Israel's views and labeled him as being both communistic and radical.

But, it was not until the Western Maryland Railroad

strike that Edward Israel came into his own as a social justice spokesman and leader. The year 1926 marked a turning point in Rabbi Israel's professional life. Israel himself, once confided, that it was from his appointment as representative of the Jewish faith in the Western Maryland Railroad strike, which he claimed was purely by accident, that his great interest in social welfare arose.¹⁰ In 1926 Edward Israel was a new comer to the Social Justice Commission of the Conference. It was his assigned task to serve as special investigator into the causes of the Western Maryland Railway strike. The Central Conference had been invited to participate with the Research Department of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, and the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference in investigating the strike.

In his report on the outcome of the investigation Rabbi Israel stressed that he and the other two investigators had not been asked into the controversy as mediators. "It was our province merely to investigate the findings in an impartial manner."¹¹ The causes of the strike, according to Edward Israel, arose from the fact that the -

Western Maryland is the only Class A Railroad with tracks wholly in the

United States that has failed to meet the standard wage rates now obtaining among all other Class A Railroads. We found that the strike was in reality a lockout and that the company was guilty of a violation of an existing agreement with its men, as well as a high handed, uncompromising, anti-labor policy.¹²

Rabbi Israel then continued in his explanation of the causes for the dispute:

In refusing to pay the standard wage, the company pleaded poverty. We have conducted a very detailed analysis of the finances of the Railroad. We find that the payment of the standard wage was not a barrier to the company's solvency or the payment of fixed charges. The real trouble was an excessively high bonded indebtedness and burdensome capital situation. Certain mistakes in management had occurred and the stockholders were endeavoring through the management to force the employees to divide their losses with them.¹³

Toward the end of his report, delivered at a special meeting of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in January, 1927, Rabbi Israel sounded what was to become the dominant thrust of his social justice philosophy:

The church cannot stand by, unaffected and disinterested, while the very anti-thesis of its highest aim is being spread, often within its very walls. This fact, combined with high moral responsibility derived from the prophets of Israel of old, to speak in the name of God on

every issue, ethical, political, economic, or social, makes the presence of religious bodies in industrial conflict not only feasible but imperative.¹⁴

In the course of their investigations, Rabbi Israel disclosed on one occasion, that the retired pensioners of the company had been ordered back to work on the engines as strikebreakers.¹⁵ Those who remained loyal to their fellow workers and refused to break the strike were denied their pension payments. Edward Israel took great pleasure in the knowledge that he and his fellow investigators had successfully persuaded the company to revoke the order by threats of adverse publicity for the Western Maryland Railroad Company. In 1927, after months of study, the three investigators published their hard-hitting report. Not an airy sermon of platitudes, it was heralded as a pioneering document in the area of industrial relations.

The report was not without its critics, however, as Maxwell C. Byers, president of the Western Maryland Railway Company, attacked both the published study and those who authored it. Byers attempted to discredit the report by charging that the investigation was incomplete and by attempting to cast doubts upon the ability of the investigators to understand the issues involved in the strike. Edward

Israel refused to allow such allegations to go unchallenged and responded to Byers with this scathing letter of rebuttal:

It is entirely natural that Mr. Maxwell C. Byers, president of the Western Maryland Railway, should issue a statement in opposition to the strike report.... If Mr. Byers had been of a type of mind that would not take issue with the report, the strike on the Western Maryland Railway would never have occurred and the company would have found it very easy to meet the just demands of its employees without danger to its solvency and with the advantage of a happy well-treated working force whose value the Western Maryland management has unfortunately failed to recognize.

It is also very natural that the accusations against the report attempt to discredit the ability of men of a religious calling to evaluate an economic situation. This has been the constant cry of those who are unwilling to apply to business methods the ethical foundations of religion. The time is now here when we must recognize that religion cannot consist of meaningless platitudes calculated to increase the smugness of those who in their daily lives refuse to make the practical application of ethical principles to industry.¹⁶

And again in response to Byer's criticism of ministers who interest themselves in more than religion per se, Israel insisted, in a sermon to the Har Sinai Congregation, which focused on the strike investigation: "As to the ministers leaving their pulpits; there can be no religion that hides its eyes from injustice wherever it may exist."¹⁷

Following Edward Israel's aggressive and effective representation of the Central Conference in the Western Maryland Railway investigation, the Conference elected him to the chairmanship of the Social Justice Commission. Edward had proven himself to be an articulate advocate of human rights. He had displayed that rare ability to ingest complicated charges and counter charges and then to respond in an orderly and logical manner so as to set forth a correct and equitable policy of future conduct. Edward Israel had clearly become the outstanding spokesman for social action within Reform Jewish ranks and it was largely his genius which enabled the Reform Social Justice Commission to become the most progressive and dynamic such organization within the American Jewish community.

Chapter 4

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Edward L. Israel: The Social Justice Warrior

The Late Phase

In 1928 Rabbi Israel found himself catapulted into the center of yet another fierce controversy. The Protestant, Catholic and Jewish religious bodies were once again invited to investigate a labor dispute, this time between the Real Silk Hosiery Company of Indianapolis and its employees. This investigation revealed that

the employers were paying wages in many instances far below a decent living standard and working their employees, especially the girls, far beyond the recognized eight-hour limit of our Social Creed.¹

The bitter controversy was only exacerbated when the employees were forced to submit to "yellow dog" contracts or risk losing their jobs. They were also obliged to join an "Employees' Mutual Benefit Association" rather than a legitimate union. "The investigators branded the Association a company union, with no semblance of real industrial democracy."²

The report which eventuated from this investigation was deemed to be "a distinct contribution in the realm of industrial relations."³ Edward Israel had spared no effort in securing the facts so as to write as realistic and hard-hitting report as possible. He acknowledged this thoroughness

when in his 1928 Report to the Central Conference he said:

The chairman of your Commission, in the investigation and preparation of the report, made three visits to Indianapolis, two to Philadelphia and several to New York.⁴

Before focusing our attention upon Rabbi Israel's extensive social justice participation in Maryland civil libertarian causes, let us continue our examination of his activities as national head of the Central Conference Committee on Social Justice during these years.

In 1928, Israel headed the C.C.A.R. investigation into the dispute between the American Federation of Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers in addition to that dispute mentioned just above. Rabbi Israel was also vocal in condemning the dreadful conditions of the miners in the bituminous coal regions of America. In March of 1928 Edward Israel arranged a dinner meeting which included many of the national Jewish labor leaders. In attendance was Fannie Cohn of the International Ladies Garment Workers, Israel Mufson of the Philadelphia Labor College and many of the editors of various labor magazines. Israel addressed the group, stressing to them his hopes that the Conference Social Justice Commission could be, in the future, of great assistance to their respective causes. The meeting was not without its successes since several labor

disputes were referred to the Commission from various people who had been in attendance. Israel desperately wanted the C.C.A.R. Commission to serve the Jewish workers as well as the general public.

At the conclusion of his 1928 Report to the Central Conference, the chairman chastised the Union of American Hebrew Congregations for its poor record of involvement in social action issues.⁵ Israel then proceeded to offer the convention delegates an extensive, new social justice platform. This platform contained seventeen major planks which may be summarized as follows:

I. The Duty of Social Mindedness

It is the duty of all men, regardless of their socio-economic level to apply themselves seriously toward the cure of such social ills as hunger, poverty, slums, and vice.

II. The Distribution and Responsibilities of Wealth

There can be no justification for the inequalities of wealth in a society where poverty and want exist because of exploitation.

III. Industrial Democracy

Our society's only hope rests in a finer industrial democracy.

IV. The Sacredness of the Industrial Personality

V. The Right of Organization

Workers may organize just as employers.

VI. The Fundamental Rights of Society

VII. Arbitration of Industrial Disputes

VIII. The Moral Right to a Living Wage

Every member of society must have the right to earn a living wage.

IX. Unemployment

We urge the adoption of unemployment insurance, national employment agencies and vocational guidance agencies.

X. Social Insurance

We approve of pensions for the old; of disability insurance and widows pensions.

XI. Hours of Labor and Days of Rest

Working hours should be reduced, with a maximum of eight hours per day and a five day week.

XII. Women in Industry

Women must not be exploited by lesser pay scales than men.

XIII. Child Labor

We oppose child labor unqualifiedly.

XIV. Prisons and Penal Laws

Punishment should be enlightened and corrective in nature, rather than retributive.

XV. Lynching

We oppose mob violence with all of our might.

XVI. Civil Liberties

XVII. Social Justice in International Relations⁶

Later, in 1930, this platform was augmented so as to place its strongest emphasis upon the issue of unemployment. The Central Conference failed to be impressed with the apparent prosperity of the late twenties. It focused attention upon the inequalities of wealth stemming from exploitation and private monopoly."⁷ Thus the C.C.A.R. shortly after the crash of Wall Street, urged the utilization of public works, the stabilization of labor, the adoption of the shorter working day and week, and the fairer distribution of the profits of industry. In 1929, largely at Edward Israel's urging, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations became the first American religious body to advocate birth control as a means of coping with overpopulation. This program of action was remarkably foresighted in that many of its provisions were later to become the basis of the Roosevelt New Deal.

Social Justice Activities on the Maryland Scene

From November of 1928, until April of 1929, Rabbi Israel proved himself to be an especially worthy heir of the eighth century prophets. Israel publicly demanded that the Governor of Maryland and the State Welfare Director launch an extensive investigation into the conditions in the Maryland State Penitentiary, and state parole procedures as well. In a sermon to his Har Sinai Congregation, which was widely reported by the press, Rabbi Israel responded to a recent riot by penitentiary inmates. "I do not approve of the tactics of the prisoners or of those who sympathize with them" said Israel in his address, however, he went on to call for a complete inquiry by trained penologists into the prison conditions.⁸ The rabbi criticized Maryland Governor Ritchie who had discredited the leader of a recent public meeting protesting prison conditions, by citing the man's former prison record. "Governor Ritchie," charged Israel, "tried to influence people against this man by reminding them of his prison record instead of dealing with the case on its merits."⁹

Turning his wrath upon prison contractors, Rabbi Israel pointed out the possibility of an economic motive, on their part, as explaining the forced withdrawal of Col. Claude B.

Sweezey as warden of the state prison. The rabbi gave little credence to the suggestion that it had been Col. Sweezey's alleged leniency and the escape of prisoners during his administration that were the principle causes for the change in wardens. Rabbi Israel stated:

I feel that the talk of rescuing men and too great leniency on the part of Colonel Sweezey as a reason for his removal may very well be a smoke screen put up by prison contractors for mercenary motives - which may be the real ones that forced him out.¹⁰

During his fiery sermon Rabbi Israel specified the following subjects as needing investigation by trained penologists at the Maryland Penitentiary: the segregation of hardened prisoners from young criminals, the application of the parole system, the qualification of the warden, a full-time welfare director, and the possibility of building a new penitentiary outside of the city. Regarding the new prison Edward Israel said

... whether it adds a few cents to our tax rate or not, what is really needed - what is essential - is widespread social sympathy that will not waver between the sentimentality of overindulgence and the sentimentality of overrepression. If there is anything in religion and the talk of human brotherhood, then those who so hold are bound to work for the welfare of our imprisoned brothers.¹¹

Governor Ritchie's reaction came swiftly from Annapolis. The rabbi, he charged, clearly lacked sufficient data on the "Pen" and sorely needed to view the conditions himself. In a letter of response to Edward Israel the governor wrote:

... I have always had the highest admiration and respect for you in every way, and your influence in the community is so great that I can hardly believe you would be willing to criticize conditions at any institution without first examining such data on the subject as may be readily available to everybody. You know, of course, that Colonel Janney conducted an investigation of conditions at the Penitentiary last summer. This took him six weeks or two months, and it was as thorough as anything could be. It went into every criticism which has recently been made and into every aspect of the situation. Colonel Janney's findings on that investigation and the stenographic report of all the testimony have been at the Board of Welfare's office for weeks, open to anybody who cared to examine them. The newspapers have stated this a number of times.

If you had taken the trouble to look over that testimony, or even to have so much as an hour's talk with Colonel Janney, I do not believe that you would have made the statements you did in your sermon. In any event, it does seem to me that with all this material as to actual present conditions available it would have been in accordance with your well-known spirit of fairness had you made some attempt to examine it and find out what was in it before making the very serious statements you did.¹²

The director of the Board of Welfare, Stuart S. Janney, also

sent a letter to Edward Israel answering the charges made in the sermon. Janney joined the governor in urging Israel to make a trip to inspect the penitentiary so as to receive "accurate first-hand information in the matter you recently discussed without such advantage."¹³

Israel quickly accepted the invitation to inspect the prison but renewed his appeal for an open investigation of the Maryland State penal system by professional penologists and a commission of outstanding citizens of the State. The rabbi wrote his requests in a letter to Governor Ritchie.

It is very kind and very fair of you and Colonel Janney to invite me to make a personal investigation of conditions and of the records of the situation. I am sure that a complete investigation on my part would be extremely enlightening to me, although I am not sure that it would convince me that everything is as it should be. This, however, is beside the point.

A personal investigation by me as merely another interested citizen means little or nothing. The only manner in which these issues can be decided to the satisfaction of the people of the State of Maryland is for an open investigation to be made by a joint committee of nationally recognized penologists and outstanding citizens of our State.¹⁴

Governor Ritchie refused to recognize any need for a further investigation.

After his tour of the State Prison, Israel renewed once again his demands for a professional investigation into prison conditions. He reported that it had been his impression from those inmates with whom he spoke that he was being shown only those areas of the facility which reflected favorably upon the officials. Rabbi Israel sensed an underlying crisis in prison morale, due to the inadequately nourishing food which inmates were fed, unreasonable commissary prices, and the exploitation of prisoners for private enterprise purposes.¹⁵

By March of 1929 the prison dispute between Edward Israel and the State officials had become much more bitter. Israel had received information from Claude B. Swezey, the former State Penitentiary warden, that the governor had ordered Swezey to cover up his deputy warden's responsibility for a recent prison escape. The entire state was aroused by these accusations by Rabbi Israel and the governor replied indignantly that Dr. Israel¹⁶ "knew damned well I told him I knew nothing about it."¹⁷ The Office of the Governor demanded that Rabbi Israel promise never to repeat such an outrageous charge against Ritchie. Israel refused.

The rabbi regretted having to make these charges, but

insisted that the only way in which the full truth could be found was to push ahead with a public and thorough investigation of the entire Penitentiary by a group of citizens in no way connected with the State administration.¹⁸ Israel admitted:

Governor Ritchie has many times commanded the respect of all of us, but there are many links in the past chain that are not at all clear. The Ritchie-Sweezey incident is only a small part of it. I did not advocate the probing of this incident. It just brought back to the mind that something was wrong somewhere, and there was a need for the investigation of the whole system. It is the inherent right of any citizen of Maryland to question any public act and there are a number of things that have never been cleared up.¹⁹

These "things" were never to be examined and resolved. Rabbi Israel's request was never heeded and the prison controversy became a forgotten issue which caused the average man on the street little concern in 1929. As for Rabbi Edward L. Israel, his attention was soon turned to other areas of social concern.

Edward Israel and the Depression Years

"The six years from 1933 through 1938 marked a greater upheaval in American Institutions than in any similar periods in our history, save perhaps for the impact on the South of

the Civil War."²⁰ By 1932, the unemployed numbered upward of thirteen million individuals. Faith in America and its institutions of government was brutally shaken. For many, the persistence of the depression seemed to bring into question not only American business leadership, but the very capitalist system itself. Something was fundamentally wrong when so many knew want amid so much plenty. "No longer did America seem a land bright with promise."²¹ Edward Israel was one of the many who refused to believe this.

In his report to the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1931, Edward Israel's major emphasis was on the problem of unemployment which he called "the most pressing social problem at the moment."²² He criticized President Hoover's inactivity in these words.

... despite all the efforts of socialized religion, not one socially or economically constructive and humanitarian move has been made, and the misery increases day by day.²³

Israel, in his address, called on the government to "act in a manner to stimulate industry and cause employment."²⁴ Rabbi Israel and his fellow Commission members seemed to anticipate the New Deal programs which were yet to be formed when they proceeded to call for billions of dollars in government spending for public works, unemployment insurance, and public

welfare.

In reminiscing about his father's activities during the early depression years, Charles Israel, the rabbi's oldest son, remembered how his father had helped those unfortunates who had marched on Washington, D.C. demanding food to eat.

When the hunger marchers were in Washington in the early thirties, they were finally --
penned up on a bridge by a U.S. Army unit (commanded, incidentally by MacArthur and captained by Eisenhower). The Army's strategy was to starve them out, and it was doing very well indeed. Dad commandeered a taxicab, loaded it with food and medical supplies, and when the driver refused to run the gauntlet, Dad drove through himself, and made it too, despite all four tires being punctured by bullets.²⁵

Rabbi Israel heartily endorsed Franklin D. Roosevelt and was an early supporter of his New Deal Program. Not long after Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933 Israel made these comments on behalf of the entire Central Conference of American Rabbis:

This conference rejoices at the courageous leadership and zeal for progressive ideals demonstrated by our President, Franklin --
Delano Roosevelt. We express to him our profound friendship and support in any far-visioned social program making for happiness for the masses of men and their release from the vicissitudes of unemployment or of economic exploitation... We believe in such legislation as will effectively manage production and distribution.

Throughout the busy and trying depression years, Edward Israel time and again echoed New Deal philosophies and views. Israel was every bit a religious New Dealer and Franklin Roosevelt was his kind of president.

Less than a year after the crash of the stock market, Edward Israel was busily engaged in pursuing jobs for the unemployed in the Baltimore Area. He was named, in 1930, to the chairmanship of the Municipal Commission on Stabilization of Employment for Baltimore City. One of his first projects as chairman was to publicly divorce the bureau from the dispensing of labor jobs in the city government. In that way, Israel hoped to give the bureau a non-political status. It was his aim that the city's employment bureau would then be expanded in scope so to become the active agency of the stabilization commission in providing private employers with workers of all kinds. In order to do this he had to first enlist the confidence of city employers in the ability of the bureau to supply their needs in an equitable and efficient manner. Israel was quick to point out the reasons for the changes he was going to implement. He insisted:

The present bureau functions in a dual capacity, being not only a job-finding

agency for men out of work but also the office through which men are employed on municipal jobs, where, as is only natural and perhaps under our present system permissible, political preference is likely to enter into the awarding of positions. It has been utterly unsuccessful in engaging the confidence and cooperation of the personnel managers of the larger industries of our city. It has no provision for transporting the engaged worker to a job which is awaiting him...²⁷

The bureau officially began functioning on January 1, 1931 and by April of that year Israel was proud to report that 700 jobs had been filled by the Employment Stabilization Commission. "There are more calls for men in the skilled-labor class than heretofore," Rabbi Israel announced, "indicating that conditions are getting better, particularly in the building trades."²⁸

By late summer, 1931, Edward Israel was not as optimistic as he had earlier been. The unemployment crisis would not be short term and limited enough for local government to cope with the city's needs. On the contrary, Rabbi Israel became convinced that immediate unemployment relief from the Federal Government would be imperative. Speaking at the world conference of the Young Men's Christian Association the rabbi called for a \$3,000,000,000 government program in public works. He also suggested that industry put its

workmen on shorter time schedules, with a greater distribution of the profits. Rabbi Israel urged the implementation by the Federal Government of unemployment insurance as well.

If we had joblessness and starvation because of a dearth of materials we could look upon it as an act of God and throw up our hands in despair... but when women and children starve because there is hopeless despair, I hear the cry of millions robbed of ambition, deprived of self-respect, becoming morose and suicidal. I see homes broken, divorces increasing, and crime expanding. I hear the cry of under-nourished children and the plaintive sobs of men who prefer to starve to death before becoming objects of charity.

Why is it, then, that society and business have stood by, allowing misery to grow, with not even a conservative effort at improvement? It is because we need more incentive to progress than mere economic analysis. We need a social conscience! It takes more to alleviate misery than a mere stating of a plan. It takes the moral courage to insist on certain social values and to demand that the plans for social betterment be put into effect.

'The religious approach' is an elusive and vague term. It is a significant fact that the speaker on our program who used most frequently the terms 'God' and 'religion' was the most anti-social person who came before us. We heard it stated that 'religion lives by charity and that the life and mission of the church depend upon the need for charity.' We had a speaker

who boasted of his religiousness admit that, even with millions out of jobs and himself the head of a great body of manufactures, he had not considered any private unemployment insurance plans, and that he believed 'there were worse things in life than being out of a job and hungry.' It is high time for the die to be cast. It is high time for us to serve notice that this type of conscience cannot dare to mouth sanctimonious words in the name of religion, and that we are not organized as churches to level, by charity, the ills of competition. Religion must declare unequivocally that an economic order, which, by its unbridled wastefulness and short sightedness under the guise of 'competition' and 'rugged individualism' brings misery to millions, cannot endure with our sanction and without our protection. ... religion is not a plaster to put on the festering sore caused by economic ills, ... religion is not a complacent handmaid of our competitive system which, by its wastefulness and improvidence, has caused the problems which have compelled the religious organizations to call this meeting into existence.³¹

Edward Israel continued to list his own program of priorities for religion in the national emergency:

First of all, we must serve notice that we cannot condone the easy forgetfulness by which society slips out of the worries of depression when times of prosperity again come. ... We must voice the need of thorough-going reforms based on human values... We must support the public employment agency because private agencies have too often meant the exploitation of misery. We must advocate an increase of public works in times of depression. We must fight for a more equitable distribution of the profits of industry.. We must serve

notice that the human values cherished by religious forces are the only really inviolable things of life, and that the economic order and social institutions and all government itself are subservient to these.³²

Clearly, one may say that Edward Israel was most concerned that religion have its say in the formulation of those measures necessary to ease the burden and suffering of those smitten by the depression. Israel firmly believed that God had created human beings as co-workers with Him. The solutions to the world's problems would have to come from human resources and it was largely dependent upon the religious conscience to become a catalyst for such solutions. Rabbi Israel wrote the following as a means of urging creative action on the part of organized religion:

I believe very devoutly in the mystical aspects of religious life, in that inner sense of godliness, and in the beauty of holiness, in its supernatural aesthetic aspects. Yet I cannot feel that this inner communion reaches its greatest religious significance merely in the transcendental experience. Religion must not be an anodyne but a stimulant... The revelation of divine realities of beauty must be translated into concrete terms of social action. The ties of beauty must be translated into concrete terms of social action. The sense it gives us of a mystically pure Oneness must lead us to strive to extirpate all disharmony, especially that born of economic and political oppression. The quality of godliness

must touch every human relationship and not only our smug inner selves.³³

And yet in reality, lamented Rabbi Israel:

Have we permanently deserted the concept of an all-pervading holiness which does not stop at the altar, but which strides into the market place and champions in concrete terms the cause of social justice? ... Dare we sit smugly satisfied at the thought of God's loving care over our own daughters, while hundreds of thousands of other young women toil unceasingly for miserable wages at nerve-wracking machines and find their only hope of a little bit of joy of life on the streets or in the cheap dance halls?

... Has religion the courage to make itself vital, to brace criticism and threat; the self-sacrifice to house itself, if necessary, in less magnificent churches, to clothe itself in simpler habiliments, but above all, the heroism to recreate for this day and age the spirit of its founders? Upon the answer to this challenge rests the outcome of a very real problem: Will organized religion, as we know it today, survive the batterings of an age of materialistic science and godless machines?³⁴

Once again, Rabbi Israel found himself at odds with government leadership when, in February of 1932, Baltimore's Mayor Jackson established at city hall an independent employment service directly under the control of the Mayor's office. Rabbi Israel feared that the new agency was politically motivated to give preference to those who had performed

"favors" for the Mayor and other influential officials.

Most importantly, the new agency would threaten to undercut the efficiency of the Municipal Commission on Employment Stabilization of which the rabbi was chairman. In a letter to Mayor Jackson, Israel wrote:

Knowing, as you do, my personal friendship for you, you will understand clearly with what regret it is that I find myself engaged in this controversy. I cannot, however, do anything but act according to what I feel to be the best interests of the community at large. If my actions along this line are to be impeded by certain policies emanating from the city government, I shall, of course, be forced to follow the only course that is open to me, and allow those who are in authority to run the situation as they see fit.³⁵

And then coming directly to the point, Rabbi Israel assured Mayor Jackson:

Our Employment Service has had a record of placements that, in the light of our present economic conditions, constitutes a record of which we need not be ashamed. The chief issue which you seem to have with us is that we do not give preference to men who are referred by the City Hall. We plead guilty to this charge. There are no preferences shown in the service as it is now constituted, except according to the number of dependents. A man coming in to us from the street has exactly the same opportunity to secure a job as a man recommended by you or anyone else.³⁶

By mid-March the public's confidence had been shaken in

the municipal employment agencies as rumors of political favoritism were heard more often. Finally in an action which marked the end of dispute, it was announced that all employment agencies would be run under the non-political aegis of the Baltimore Association of Commerce. This new plan was satisfactory to Edward Israel since it accomplished his purpose and ended the mayor's private control of an employment agency which gave job preference for political favors rendered.

Throughout the early depression years Rabbi Israel continued his crusade on behalf of organized labor. Israel believed that labor should adopt an aggressive policy of demanding shorter hours and higher wages. In speaking before the delegates to the 1931 convention of the American Federation of Labor, Rabbi Israel told the delegates that they

represent the stronger more fortunate representatives of labor. You should not forget the millions, especially in the South, who are working under conditions of poverty and squalor.³⁷

Israel pleaded for labor unity and solidarity. The onus of responsibility for the future of the American free-enterprise system was to be placed upon the conscience of the American businessman, said Israel.

It has been stated that one reason why Communism has made little headway in the United States is the fact that there is a large middle class. But in times like these large numbers of the lower fringe of this class are being forced down to the strata of hopeless. And if American business refuses to work out a solution of the current problems by dealing with decent, moderate and democratic organized labor, it may in a few years, find a less level-headed group to deal with.³⁸

It will come as no surprise to the reader that Edward Israel was an earnest and impatient man. In fact he had a red-hot temper. He believed with all sincerity that he knew the solutions to many of the problems which America was experiencing. By 1935 he was becoming painfully disillusioned with some aspects of the New Deal. There had simply not been sufficient relief from the distressing emergency to fulfill Israel's anticipations and hopes. The FHA was a particular target for Israel's discontent. Branded as being "absolutely worthless", the FHA, charged Israel, provided homes for those best able to pay and not for those in most need.

If we feel that they (those unable to pay for public housing) are not paid enough to entitle them to a decent home of this public house type, then there is only one answer and that is force an economic situation that will guarantee them a decent minimum wage...

In Baltimore we permit housing conditions to exist that are deliberately murdering hundreds of children every year. Public housing is not a matter that ought to be included under public works. We have a tendency to classify it with grade crossings and building roads and other things that are undertaken to stimulate work in the depression. The horrible effects of housing can be found most vividly demonstrated among the Negroes. Here we have a group where economic oppression allows them to have only the lowest paid and the least skilled jobs, and, where race prejudice forces them into neighborhoods most whites reject.³⁹

Testifying before the United States Senate Labor Committee in Washington, D.C., Rabbi Israel expressed his firm belief that only a publicly-owned housing program would be the real solution to the problem of slum clearance. The rabbi felt that it was impossible for private builders to provide adequate homes cheap enough for the former slum dwellers. Once again Edward Israel was years ahead of his time in urging that public housing should and must be under municipal control with Federal backing.

In addition Israel was critical of the Baltimore City relief program, placing the blame for cruel and ineffective relief squarely upon Governor Nice and Mayor Jackson. He characterized both men in one of his sermons as being "proud anti-New Dealers and States righters, insisting that the job

of meeting relief emergency is the responsibility of the Federal Government."⁴⁰ On another occasion the rabbi had this to say to his membership:

The fate of the relief program in Maryland is enough to make any socially minded person lose entire faith in the existence of any ethical sensibilities among our political and business leadership.⁴¹

As early as February, 1935, Dr. Samuel Schulman, the senior rabbi of Temple Emanu-El, of the city of New York, who was also the president of the Synagogue Council of America, began sounding out Edward Israel as to his chairing the Synagogue Council's Social Justice Commission. Edward Israel had earned a national reputation as a leader in social justice activities. He had already headed the Social Justice Commission of the Central Conference and, in doing so, had proven himself to be an extraordinarily effective leader and spokesman. In fact, Israel had been elected to that key position for two terms beyond the normal four term limit.

Two major stumbling blocks stood in the way of Israel's assuming the Synagogue Council position. The first was the temporary nomination of Rabbi Solomon Foster to head the Commission. Rabbi Israel had been very upset over the appointment of Foster, even as a temporary chairman. Israel had a

a great dislike for the Newark rabbi and admitted to Schulman that he regarded Foster as having "not the slightest appreciation of the problems with which we are trying to grapple."⁴² Eventually it became apparent that Rabbi Foster's appointment had been "temporary" and the way was paved, by Dr. Schulman, for Edward Israel to assume the position.

The second stumbling block was due to Rabbi Schulman himself. Schulman was a very conservative leader and he was afraid of Israel's radical reputation. Thus he wrote to Israel:

...I, therefore, believe that the Council as such, must keep out of any identification of itself with Socialism or Communism as such, in this country. I may add there is another reason. After all, the Council stands for the interests of Israel, and it is not good for Israel as a whole, no matter what many earnest and conscientious individuals may think to become known in this country as an agitator on behalf of radical revolutions in our industrial and economic system.⁴³

Schulman offered Israel the position on the condition that he promise that his own well publicized and liberal ministry in Baltimore could, and would, be separated from his public activities as Chairman of the Synagogue Council's Social Justice Commission.

Edward Israel responded to Dr. Schulman's offer with a

speedy acceptance of the honored position. In addition, Israel assured the New York rabbi that he well understood that any action of the Synagogue Council must necessarily be conservative.

I am not unmindful of the fact that the Synagogue Council includes laymen as well as rabbis, and very often we find that the more liberal laymen are far more conservative on economic and social issues than conservative rabbis.⁴⁴

Rabbi Israel also assured Dr. Schulman that:

Personally, I do not belong to any political party, either conservative or radical. I feel that religious social justice must be in a position to criticize radical as well as conservative thought when the occasion arises and should therefore keep itself strictly clear of any identification with formulated groups in the political realm. I am particularly insistent on this at the present time, when so many of our avowed panaceas are materialistic in their philosophy and devoid of a spiritual background.⁴⁵

Once again, Rabbi Edward L. Israel would labor on behalf of his people to make the voice of Judaism heard in a world of harsh realities. By 1936 it seems clear that Israel, the ardent soldier for human rights and social betterment, had become more than a little disheartened as to the future of mankind. The liberalism with which he had been

imbued during his student years at the Hebrew Union College, and during the early post-World War I years of his ministry had now succumbed to economic depression and the rise of totalitarianism. Communism, Fascism, and Naziism had taken root and once again, the world seemed hell-bent on self-destruction. Once again, the people of Israel were subjected to the nightmare of vicious hate. Although Edward Israel would die before the awesome truth of Auschwitz, and Treblinka would become known, he raised his urgent voice countless times in public outrage over the hateful Nazi regime of Adolph Hitler.

The arrival of the Nazi cruiser Emden at the port of Baltimore in the spring of 1936 occasioned yet another direct confrontation between Edward Israel and the Maryland politicians. Israel's activities are well documented in a letter, which he wrote shortly after the incident, to his good friend and fellow Zionist, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. Rabbi Israel was the president of the Baltimore Branch of the American Jewish Congress and he was insistent that the Emden should receive no official welcome or recognition from any Maryland official. Here is part of Israel's report to Dr. Wise:

Some months ago, without consulting any of us, the Governor and the Mayor said that they would welcome the Emden. When we found out, we protested, particularly to the Mayor. The Governor is a stuffed shirt, and our present Mayor, Jackson, will probably be the next Governor. We asked him that, while it was too late to turn the Emden aside, he should not give it an official welcome by visiting the boat. I led the delegation because no prominent gentile would do it. After conferring with the German leaders, the Mayor answered that he would go through with his plans. The American Legion announced that it would participate and that its fife and drum corp would serenade the Nazi cruiser. I made a public appeal to the Legion and got the support of certain officials so that the Legion withdrew. I denounced the Mayor from my pulpit, accusing him of lacking principle and simply playing politics, weighing how many votes he would lose on either side.

My public protest and my attack on the Mayor infuriated a lot of our local Jews, among them the richest members in my congregation, until these latter, who were afraid of the German community's boycotting Jewish business houses because of my activities, were on the point of resigning from the congregation and some of them may do so yet. However, at our annual congregational dinner last Sunday night I stated that as long as I was in this pulpit, the criterion of my expression in controversial matters was going to be 'what was good for the Jewish people, and not what was good for business.' The rank and file of my people gave me the finest ovation I have ever heard.⁴⁶

It was impossible for one who was as vocal and ardent a

social reformer as was Rabbi Edward L. Israel would not to be frequently misunderstood and become the subject of much controversy. None of this censure and, what frequently amounted to sheer fabrication of the truth, ever succeeding in halting the indomitable Edward Israel. In 1934, the Baltimore newspapers carried as headlines the accusation, by the American First organization, that Rabbi Israel had "a prominent part in the subversive activities of the American Civil Liberties Union."⁴⁷ Many times he was labeled a communist, a "nigger lover," a trouble-making Jew, a liar and any number of other uncomplimentary names. All of this, Israel seemed to take rather philosophically as one particular Har Sinai Bulletin column indicates.

My dear friends:

Many of you will recall the famous 'Yellow Shoes' episode. The essence of it was that I was definitely reported to have appeared on the pulpit during a Sabbath morning service in yellow shoes. The fact of the matter was that my sartorial equipment at that time did not boast of anything but solid black shoes. It is only in my middle age that I have become sartorially frivolous.

The moral of the incident is, of course, that these 'absolutely certain' reports are frequently manufactured out of the whole cloth and not out of any semblance of fact. Expose, however,

does not deter those who hold the truth lightly.

Just a few weeks ago, a prominent Sisterhood member, an ardent supporter and good personal friend, quakingly approached to tell me that going the rounds was a story that I was not only a Communist and a member of the Communist Party but actually a member of its executive board.

...There is a certain type of person who calls any liberal thought 'red' or 'Communistic.' These people are red-baiters. They are either consciously or unconsciously the aiders of Fascism and Naziism in America. I have no intention of changing my views on social and economic problems simply because some prejudiced or ignorant people erroneously call them Communist. Yellow shoes - 'red' ideas - Communist executive board membership - a sense of humor comes in very handy at times.

Sincerely,
Edward L. Israel⁴⁸

On another occasion Rabbi Israel confronted the Har Sinai members with the necessity of his being allowed an absolutely free pulpit. Some of the members had become unhappy with their rabbi's involvement in the Maryland Penitentiary debate. Israel wrote the following to his congregants:

You may sincerely feel that because of my official position, I have no right to interest myself in public controversies where I feel that a moral issue is at stake. If this is your point of view, I am sorry that I cannot follow you in it.

As I interpret religion it is the application of the individual conscious to the problems of life. It is the duty of a religious point of view to speak fearlessly on these problems of a public nature even when they are controversial.... I agree with you if you maintain that it is essential that it be understood that even from my pulpit in dealing with controversial subjects I express only a personal point of view. I have taken pains to maintain this fact.

Surely, however, outside the pulpit I cannot be expected to relinquish the right to give public expression to my opinions on public issues, because of my professional connections. ... the paramount issues as I see it is freedom of speech.⁴⁹

Such was the ministry of Edward L. Israel in the area of social justice. He was intense and uncompromising in his belief that mankind could improve itself if it would only make the effort. Edward Israel, the crusader for human rights explified so well the Jewish, rabbinic injunction:

The day is short, the work is much, the laborers are slothful, the reward is much and the Master is urgent... It is not incumbent upon thee to complete the work, but neither art thou free to desist from it altogether.⁵⁰

Rabbi Edward L. Israel had endeavored to meet the challenges of his troubled times. There was one more challenge to be met, however, In the summer of 1941, Israel made the fateful

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decision to accept the position of Executive Director of the
Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

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CONTENTS

Chapter 5

In 1903 the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was composed of 113 member congregations. 1903 marked the year in which Rabbi George Zepin became director of the Union's newly formed Department of Synagogue and School Extension. Beginning in 1910 Zepin became the director of the entire U.A.H.C. and during the next three decades proceeded to pervade that organization with his own personality, its strengths and its weaknesses.

Zepin was a model civil servant, wholly devoted to his duties, self-effacing, firm in his belief that it was his duty to guide and support his elected officers, and that the elected officers were entitled not only to take the decision, but to appear to the world as having taken them. He had many ideas, but lacked the ability to inspire his officers to take action on them.¹

There came a time when sheer administrative competence was not sufficient for years of challenge. The Depression had shaken the very foundations of faith in the American-way." Also deeply wounded was the heretofore uncontested claim of liberal religion that mankind was progressing with certainty toward the Messianic Age. The Reform laymen and rabbinate alike demanded new answers from the Union. Social justice, Zionism, and a new platform of beliefs were to become

the new agenda of the day. But still the Union, under Zepin's effective but loose leadership, appeared stagnant and lack-luster. The Reform movement anticipated new thrust and activity, and nothing short of complete revitalization would be acceptable. The Union, in 1941, appointed a survey committee comprised equally of rabbis and laymen. Their's was the task of suggesting new directions for the movement at the upcoming council meeting. Prior to that meeting, Rabbi Zepin, who was obviously aware of the desire for dynamic change, announced his intention to retire.

The council meeting led to an excoriation of the existing Union leadership and it was unanimously agreed that the new U.A.H.C. executive director be given carte blanche to employ a new staff. The new leader would be expected to raise sorely needed money for the movement, engage in extensive broadcasting, and participate in anti-defamation programs. The new leader must be charismatic enough to breathe new life into the fabric of Reform Jewish life.

On July 8, 1941, the Administrative Committee of the Executive Board of the Union met in Cincinnati and appointed Edward L. Israel, of Baltimore, as their new Executive Director. The Committee, in executive session, unanimously

chose Israel whom they knew was the right man for the job. Hence, they adopted this resolution which stipulated the duties of the new Executive Director.

Said Executive Director shall devote his full time and attention and best efforts to the business of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. He shall be in full charge of its administrative work, but his activities shall be subject at all times to control by the Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations or such officer or committee as it may designate for that purpose.²

When the news reached Baltimore that Edward Israel was soon to leave Har Sinai to accept the position of Executive Director of the U.A.H.C., many admitted that they had known that Israel was too important a figure to remain in one congregation forever. This knowledge did very little to lessen their dismay, however, at losing "Uncle Ed." Rabbi Israel was utterly adored by most of his congregants. They cherished his charm and the warmth of his personality. All of them respected the great measure of his achievement and stood in awe before the nobility of his aspiration. Hundreds of letters and cards were sent to Israel wishing him well and yet too, urging him not to leave their beloved Har Sinai.

One former student wrote the following letter addressed to "Uncle Ed and Aunt Amelia:"

I haven't heard such good news in years. I'm still not quite sure why you've taken the thing on, but for the sake of all concerned, I'm awfully darned glad you have. The Union deserves a good, healthy mazeltov. As for you, may I volunteer to supply aspirin? Doggonit, I'd give anything to be within earshot of you right now, to find out what plans you have, just how you're gonna resurrect the long-dormant Union and make it a functional, influential force in Jewish life. Because I have no doubt that you'll do it or die trying...³

Another congregant, Dr. John A. Askin wrote the following note to Israel.

Dear Ed,

I wish to add my little note of regret to your long list which you have undoubtedly received since you have decided to leave Baltimore. I understand however, that you are looking forward with a great deal of pleasure to your new duties. I certainly wish you lots of luck.

My little girls, Jackie and Jean, have threatened to refuse to go to Sunday School now that you aren't there, and it is going to take a lot of convincing to make them feel that the old Sunday School will be the same.

Very friendly yours,
John⁴

On the eve of his last service as Rabbi of Har Sinai Temple, Edward Israel delivered a farewell address to the congregation. Several thousand persons attended the service

and reception which followed. Among the participants were Rabbis William Rosenau, Abraham Shaw and Morris Lieberman, Rabbi Israel's Reform colleagues in Baltimore. Handsome gifts were presented to Rabbi and Mrs. Israel by each of Har Sinai's auxiliaries.

Prior to this service a gala testimonial banquet was held at the Lord Baltimore Hotel. The toastmaster, Judge Simon E. Sobeloff, commented that:

In the case of Rabbi Israel it would be unthinkable that he should leave this city without the community seeking an opportunity of telling him how significantly and enduringly he has impressed himself upon our minds and hearts in the nearly two decades of his identification with Baltimore.⁵

Also addressing the banquet assembly were Dr. Harry Friedenwald and Rabbi James G. Heller, the president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. So Baltimore ever reluctantly said goodbye and shalom to its beloved and crusading Rabbi Israel. The eighteen momentous Har Sinai years were now finished.

News of Rabbi Israel's election was warmly received throughout the entire nation. The Anglo-Jewish press applauded the Union's choice of Edward Israel, citing:

His fitness for leadership has become

demonstrated in many movements in American Jewry and it is hoped that his new office will permit him to continue the activities on behalf of the many causes which he cherishes.⁶

The fact that Edward Israel was a Zionist was also deemed by many to be a significant and welcome change of direction for the Union. Articles and telegrams, too numerous to cite, rejoiced at the day having arrived when both the U.A.H.C. and the Central Conference would have selected, in the same year, pro-Zion leaders.

It is impossible for anyone to know exactly what Edward Israel's full program for the Union's future was to be. It is doubtful whether even Israel had completely formulated his goals. Clearly he did have several immediate plans for the future growth and direction of the Reform movement, however. At the same meeting at which Rabbi Israel was elected to head the Union he suggested the advisability of moving the U.A.H.C. headquarters from Cincinnati to the nation's capital in Washington, D.C. There was simply too much of great importance to the future of American and world Jewry being decided in Washington everyday to allow the Reform movement's headquarters to languish any longer in the remote confines of Cincinnati, Ohio. Edward Israel insisted that the time was

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"now" for the U.A.H.C. to make its move.

The minutes of the Executive Board, meeting on October 19, 1941, also indicates Rabbi Israel's interest in establishing a Union camp program through its National Federation of Temple Youth. Israel may be viewed as the originator of the camping system which presently serves over 6,000 children and adults yearly in eight campsites throughout the United States. Edward Israel also advocated the Union's publishing of a Reform magazine.

Rabbi Israel's wife was not certain as to the full extent of her husband's plans for the Union. She was certain, as she spoke of her late husband some thirty years after his death, that he had many ideas although they had not been formally written down in any agenda. Mrs. Israel did say this with certainty:

I think he was disappointed and upset about what had been going on. I do not think he felt that there was enough activity in the movement.... He wanted to be near Washington... he dreamt of being the spokesman for Reform Judaism on Zionism.⁷

Rabbi Israel divulged some more of his position on the future direction of the Union in an article written for the October, 1941, Brotherhood Magazine entitled The Jewish Layman.

Rabbi Israel wrote the article while serving the Trinidad, Colorado Reform congregation for the High Holy Days. Israel saw great meaning in his service to that small group of isolated Jewry. He wrote:

Perhaps there is something interestingly symbolic in the fact that as October rolls around and I become the executive head of American Reform Jewish life, I find myself conducting a Yom Kippor service in a little town of less than a dozen Jewish families. Invitations have been piling in on me from splendidly cooperative colleagues in large congregations of the land. Yet I feel that there is something intensely significant in the fact that I began my labors to add to the vitalization of American Reform Judaism in this little city far away from the major centers of Jewish life. It will constantly remind me of the fact that while the greatest challenge to me in my work will be to make real inroads into the hitherto unclaimed masses, there are those stalwart and loyal Jewish souls back off the beaten track, courageously preserving the faith of our fathers amid terrific difficulties, and that they dare not be forgotten...⁸

In another article for the same periodical, Rabbi Israel stressed his hope that Reform congregants would become more aware of what he called the "spiritual dynamic of Reform Judaism."⁹

Our rabbis - and there isn't a more competent and outstanding group of men than the Reform rabbinate - try to tell us, but we either don't listen or we aren't there

to hear what they have to say. We're going to have to be there, and we are going to have to listen and understand, for our own sake of the world that struggles against tyranny, and that needs the spirit of an unbreakable morale to win that fight. ... I'll have more to say to you along this and kindred lines every now and then. And in the course of the next months, as I get around the country, to share with American Jewry my hopes for Reform Judaism and to receive their ideas, I hope to be able to shake hands and speak with you.¹⁰

Of course, central to any plan Edward L. Israel may have had for the future course of the Union, was the aspect of social justice. At the very essence of the man was the all prevading belief that -

The phrase, 'the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man' is not one of mere empty words. It is a concrete concept of human society, of fatherhood and brotherhood, a family concept, a concept in which individuals have certain inalienable rights merely by virtue of having been born into that group, the human family. It is not a question of who is the strongest. It is not a question of who is younger or older. It is not a question of who can grab more, of who is more powerful or wiser or shrewder. All those things play a part in human life, but there are certain fundamental and inalienable rights of human beings as such, that can not be violated merely because they were children of one Father.¹¹

Hence it seems most likely that at least a part of Edward Israel's program of new direction for the U.A.H.C.

would have included a firm commitment to Zionism, active participation in the realm of social justice leading, probably, to the Union's becoming the major voice within American Jewry. Moreover, Israel would have led the Union toward the mainstream of American Jewry by working to increase emphasis upon traditional ceremonial observances. There are those who would suggest that, to a large extent, Maurice Eisendrath, Israel's ultimate successor as head of the Union, later patterned his own goals for the Reform movement after Edward Israel's. Eisendrath was known to admire Israel and might well have viewed Israel as his spiritual mentor.

On October 19, 1941 at 10:00 a.m. the Executive Board of the Union met at the Netherland Plaza Hotel in Cincinnati. At this meeting of about forty rabbinic and lay leaders of the U.A.H.C., Mr. Adolph Rosenberg, the Board Chairman, officially introduced the new head of the Union. Edward Israel began his introductory remarks with this statement:

I have been in Baltimore for many years and I felt that that was to be the place I would spend the rest of my life, and yet after this invitation came to me from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, there seemed to be only one answer, and that was the answer - that in time of crisis, and certainly at no other time

for many and many a century has there been the crisis that we now face - if a group of distinguished Jewish laymen felt that I could render a service to the cause of American Israel through the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, I had to respond. In the short time that I have been in the work I have never found a moment to regret that answer.¹²

Rabbi Israel continued:

... The sole reason for the existence of the Jew in the world is his spiritual heritage and whatever aspect of Jewish life there may be, whatever direction it may take, in any form at all, be it philanthropy, social welfare, or anything else, it has to be rooted in the firm foundation of religious motivation or else it is meaningless. Any aspect of Jewish life that is not thus rooted I feel it my duty to challenge. That is what I have always felt and that is what I shall continue to feel as I am called upon to help lead this organization.... People do not respond merely on the basis of a fine statistical analysis of the work that you are doing. There is something deeper involved. They have to be emotionally in tune with the statistics that you give them or the statistics are merely another record. I am afraid that too much of that has been done, and I have determined that my primary function is going to bring the Reform Jewish community of America a sense of personal kinship, a feeling after all, that in American Jewish life today, there is a motivation of which their individual congregation is only a single expression, that they were part of a stream of which they were tributaries. It is our job as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to take hold

the mainstream, that spirit, and to interpret it to American Jewry and before the American public as a whole, in order that the whole philosophy of Jewish life may become impressed upon the environment of which we are part... With the collapse of Jewish centers throughout the world, what the Jew and Judaism do in America now is going to determine the course of Jewish history for the rest of all time. What we do is not going to affect just another community it is going to affect the whole course of Jewish history.¹³

Following a break for lunch, the meeting was again called to order and several topics were debated. At last, the major point of dispute was brought before the members of the Board. That topic was the controversial decision whether or not to move the Union offices from Cincinnati. The members were undecided not only about whether to move or not, but also where they should move, if it were decided to relocate. Great debate followed as each stepped forward to promote his personal plan. Finally M.D. Rosenberg, a Board member, arose and informed the group that he had received a call from Rabbi Norman Gerstenfeld, rabbi of Washington Hebrew Congregation in Washington, D.C. Gerstenfeld had advised Rosenberg that "a person - it was the name of one of the highest Government officials of our own faith - told him by all means stay out of Washington."¹⁴ Hence the

speaker was in favor of tabling Rabbi Israel's suggestion to move the headquarters to Washington "until we can get more light on the subject."¹⁵

With that, Edward Israel took the floor. As always, his charismatic presence and eloquence seized the attention of the entire Board.

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Executive Board. I probably have not risen on a matter that concerns me more deeply or on which I feel more strongly... A plea has been made for delay, on the ground that there has been difference of opinion... As I told you in this report, I have been thinking about the problems of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations long before I ever realized that I would be honored with this position, and when I was spoken to by the committee I told them many more of the things I had in mind. They said to me, we want you to take over the U.A.H.C. and we give you carte blanche... the first thing I said to them is that I felt the Union should come east. I gave them some of my reasons for it, and they pledged me their cooperation. The very notice that announced my appointment to this office announced that that was one of the projects that was to be discussed at this meeting... Now here is the situation. We have a problem...¹⁶

Suddenly he hesitated, raised his hand to his chest and slumped forward. Edward Israel died instantly.

Plans were made for both a Cincinnati funeral as well as one in Baltimore. Services were held on October 20, 1941

at the Rockdale Avenue Temple where Edward Israel had grown up and been both confirmed and married by Dr. David Philipson. The gray, steel casket rested before the huge marble Ark of the Law, surrounded by floral offerings, as well over a thousand admirers passed by to pay their last respects to the crusader for human rights. Rabbi James G. Heller, a close friend and Central Conference President delivered the eulogy. Following the service, the body was taken to the Union Terminal where it was accompanied to Baltimore by Charles Israel, the late rabbi's son who was then a student at Hebrew Union College.

The Baltimore service and interment was held on October 23, 1941. More than 1,700 persons representing every walk of life, attended the funeral service in Har Sinai's Bolton Street Temple. The service was conducted by Rabbi Abraham Shusterman, who succeeded Rabbi Israel at Har Sinai. Long before the service started the 1,200 seat sanctuary was filled and the vestry rooms were jammed with 500 who listened to the service through loud speakers. Several hundred were turned away due to a lack of space.

Among those attending the funeral were Maryland Governor O'Connor, Mayor Jackson, civic and social officials, repre-

representatives of the U.A.H.C., and virtually every major Jewish organization, as well as leaders of various Christian denominations. The eulogy was delivered by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. Dr. Wise said:

Edward Israel united in perfect measure the highest potentialities of American and Jew, not chiefly because he was a native American, but because his soul was attuned to the most authentic ideals of American life. Social justice was for him blending of democratic ideals and the prophetic way of life, and the simplicity, directness and immediacy of his touch upon problems of social justice had in it not a little of the prophetic mood and spirit..... Edward Israel was equal to the tradition of Har Sinai, a true liberal and yet a loyal conserver of all worthwhile Jewish values. When Israel came to Har Sinai, he faced the most challenging test. To that test he proved himself equal, and you helped him prepare himself for the second great service to which he was to give the rest of his years..... His service to a great cause in Jewish life, the cause of Zionism, can hardly be overestimated. Here, too, he was different - wholesomely, delightfully different - from the more or less professional Zionists. Zionism to him was a great social as well as spiritual adventure. He welcomed it because it meant for him that Jewish social genius was not dead, that the social capacity of the Jew was not exhausted.¹⁷

Edward L. Israel was then laid to rest in the Har Sinai congregational cemetery.

Testimony to the high esteem in which Rabbi Israel was

held by prominent Americans of every calling, as well as the organizations in which he had an active part, was evidenced in part by the hundreds of letters, Uniongrams, and resolutions which were received by Mrs. Edward L. Israel. In addition to letters from President Roosevelt, Governor O'Connor and Mayor Jackson, hundreds of tributes from prominent men all over America were received. Notable was a letter from Mayor LaGuardia of New York City, which said, in part:

Rabbi Israel was an outstanding example of all that is best in the liberal tradition in this country and in American Jewry. I think he, more than any other man I have known while in public office, exemplified for me the type of man with whom the preservation of our democratic form of government rests....¹⁸

And Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter wrote to Mrs. Israel saying of her late husband: "He had the character, courage and devotion that we so ill can spare."¹⁹

Concluding Thought

The sage of the life and works of Edward L. Israel; rabbi, husband, father and human being is now told. He died young. But, within the brief span allotted to him he taught us how much can be accomplished toward the ennoblement of mankind. Israel's life was a portrayal of heroic venture

in the affairs of men. Indeed, his death on the battlefield of human aspirations bore similarities to the Greek tragedy.

Edward L. Israel was not a mythical figure, however. He was very real and very great.

1974-1975

1976-1977

1978-1979

1980-1981

1982-1983

1984-1985

1986-1987

1988-1989

1990-1991

1992-1993

1994-1995

1996-1997

1998-1999

2000-2001

2002-2003

2004-2005

2006-2007

2008-2009

2010-2011

2012-2013

2014-2015

2016-2017

Footnotes

Footnotes-Chapter One

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¹⁹Edward L. Israel, sermon: "The World to Come,"
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²⁰Ibid.

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Footnotes-Chapter 5

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⁴Letter, Dr. John Askin to Edward L. Israel, July 24, 1941, Israel Collection, A.J.AR.

⁵Simon E. Sobeloff, September 14, 1941, Testimonial Address to Edward Israel, Israel Collection. A.J.AR.

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