



This photo of Freehof is taken from a scrapbook of Maurice L. Zigmund showing life at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, in the early 1920s.

(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

The Making of a Reform Rabbi: Solomon B. Freehof from Childhood to HUC

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Solomon Bennett Freehof (1892–1990), the son of a *sofer* (Torah scribe) from the Ukraine who traced his ancestry to the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, was born in London and raised in Baltimore. He entered Hebrew Union College (HUC) in 1911 and was ordained in 1915, a year after receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Cincinnati (UC). He immediately joined the HUC faculty and remained there until 1924, with time off in 1918–1919 for military chaplaincy service in Europe. While teaching at HUC he earned a Doctor of Divinity degree. In 1924 he went to Chicago as rabbi of Kehilath Anshe Mayriv Congregation, and in 1934 he became the senior rabbi of Rodef Shalom Congregation in Pittsburgh. He retired from Rodef Shalom in 1966 and remained in Pittsburgh for the rest of his life.

Freehof was a leading member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR). His long life spanned most of the existence of Reform Judaism as an organized movement in North America, and the enormous range of his rabbinic activity—and of his influence through many of his former students—meant that he left few aspects of the movement’s development in the mid-twentieth century untouched. He served on its Liturgy Committee for more than twenty years and was its chair during the 1930s, when it carried out a major revision of the *Union Prayer Book*. He served as vice-president of the CCAR in 1941–1943 and president from 1943–1945—years when the intense controversy over Zionism that led to the founding of the American Council for Judaism threatened to split the Reform rabbinate and the Reform movement. At the same time, Freehof chaired the CCAR’s Emergency Committee on Placement, which tried to balance the military’s need for chaplains with civilians’ need for rabbis. From 1942 until the mid-1950s, he also chaired the Responsa Committee of the Jewish Welfare Board’s (JWB) Committee on Army and Navy Religious Activities (later known as the Commission on Jewish Chaplaincy), a position that required him to work closely with Conservative and Orthodox rabbis to decide questions of Jewish ritual practice in a military context. Throughout his career he was an active member of the Reform movement’s Commission on Jewish Education, authoring a number of books on liturgy and Bible for youth and adults. After World War II he served for some years as president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, traveling extensively to Europe, Israel, and South Africa.

As senior rabbi of the largest and most prestigious synagogue in Pittsburgh, Freehof was a prominent figure in the local community. He excelled at fulfilling that rabbinic role so near and dear to earlier generations of American Jews: representing Judaism to the Christian community. Freehof was a dynamic and gifted preacher and public speaker and regularly drew an attendance of hundreds, by no means limited to the Jewish community. His Sunday morning lecture-sermons and his Wednesday morning book reviews were always popular. He was also a frequent speaker on radio and in various public forums.

Freehof's scholarly and rabbinic oeuvre has not been equally enduring or of equal value in all areas. His Bible commentaries, for example, are outdated. His work as editor of the revised *Union Prayer Book* was quite important, but those 1940s volumes were replaced with newer editions in the 1970s. Although he was a magnificent preacher and speaker, his sermon-lectures, book reviews, and adult education lectures on Shakespeare and on the Bible, which drew mass audiences in Chicago and Pittsburgh for more than forty years, are, for the most part, mere curiosities today.

Freehof's most enduring contribution to Reform Judaism came through his status as a scholar par excellence of the responsa literature, an endeavor that followed both from his service as chair of the Responsa Committee for Jewish chaplains in the U.S. military as well as from his 1944 book *Reform Jewish Practice and its Rabbinic Background*, which he intended as a comprehensive guide to Reform practice. Though he served briefly on the CCAR's Responsa Committee from 1922–1924, his real connection with its work began in 1947. Freehof chaired the committee from 1955 until 1978, and his unpublished responsa correspondence during that time includes more than seven hundred inquiries. Between 1960 and 1990, he published eight volumes of what he named "Reform responsa" drawn from queries he received. In the course of writing these responsa he also developed an original theoretical framework within which to discuss and decide questions of Jewish practice in a Reform context.

Solomon B. Freehof was a member of that cohort of east European immigrants whom Kaufmann Kohler attempted to transform into classical Reform Jews upon their admission to HUC's rabbinic program. While these men were, indeed, transformed by their training, they in turn helped bring about the "reorientation"¹ of Reform Judaism beginning in the interwar years. This study of Freehof's childhood and years as a student and faculty member at HUC offers both a portrait of a respected leader of American Reform Judaism and a window into HUC and the Reform rabbinate in the early years of the twentieth century.

Family Origins and Early Childhood

An admiring member of Chicago's Jewish community wrote this about Freehof in the 1930s, and it held true throughout his long life:

It is because of no inferiority complex that Dr. Freehof rarely speaks of himself. He discusses freely ideas and theories, philosophy and social science, ethics and esthetics, in fact all higher things in life, to which he applies a language all his own, a language rich and beautiful—but it is almost impossible to extract from him anything about himself.²

Details of Freehof's family background and early life are few and difficult to verify; he himself wrote only brief memoirs in personal letters and, in his eighties, recorded a few reminiscences in two interviews. A full portrait of his early years—especially the question of how he made the transition from Orthodox immigrant son, of a pious *sofer* and *mohel*, to cultured exemplar of the classical Reform rabbi—is impossible to reconstruct. The best we can do is portray the environments in which he came to maturity and place within those contexts the limited biographical information we possess.

Freehof's account of his family's origins and immigration to the United States is as follows. His father Isaac was born in Shklov, a small town in the province of Mohilev, White Russia (now Belarus), to Zalman Ber, a *sofer* and a Chabad hasid. This grandfather was, he claimed, the favorite scribe of the Chabad Hasidim in Shklov.³ Isaac, however, did not apprentice with his father to be a scribe; rather, he left Shklov and went to Chernigev, Ukraine, where he learned his craft.⁴ In Freehof's words:

The reason was the following (and this is a bit of Chabbad [sic] history not often recorded): The third in succession of the Old Rabbi, the founder, was Zemach Zedek, the author of about six volumes of responsa. When he died, his oldest son was not deemed worthy to succeed him and a younger son was selected as the fourth leader of the Chabbad. Thereupon, the older son left Shklov and traveled south to the large city in the Ukraine, Chernigev, which then became a Chabbad bastion. Father, to serve his apprenticeship in Sofres [sic], went to Chernigev. There he met mother and married.⁵

Freehof proudly claimed that “Freehof” was one of a number of surnames borne by his extended family, all of which indicated descent from Frieda, eldest daughter of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1745–1813, the “Alter Rebbe”), the founder of Chabad Hasidism. This claim of ancestry was definitely a family tradition; the author of the introduction to a 1938 collection of essays and articles by Freehof's brother, Morris, refers to Morris as “a descendant of the Lubavitcher Rebbes.”⁶ To date, however, this claim has proved impossible to verify.⁷ No reference of a scribe named Zalman Ber of Shklov exists, though there are several references in the hagiographical biography of the fifth Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Dov Baer Schneerson (1866–1920), to an assistant scribe named “Rabbi Shlomo Friedson” who was active in the Rebbe's entourage around the turn of the twentieth century.⁸ “Shlomo” is the Hebrew equivalent of the Yiddish “Zalman,” and “Friedson” could well indicate descent from

Frieda. It is tempting on this basis to conclude that two scribes with similar names—only a generation or two apart, both close to the leaders of Chabad, and one of whom was Freehof’s grandfather—must indicate a family of scribes descended from Frieda Schneersohn. However, if the claim of ancestry is true, the proof of it does not lie in the name “Freehof,” and Freehof himself knew that, for it was he who changed his surname from “Freilachoff” (also spelled Freilichoff, Freilacoff, and Frelechoff) to “Freehof” in 1911, sometime between the end of his first year at HUC and the beginning of his second.⁹ While the “ei” in Freilachoff could have been pronounced either like a long “i” or a long “a,” it would never have been pronounced like a long “e” and so could not have any connection to the name “Frieda.”

While it is possible that the young rabbinical student changed his name to indicate his transition to a new identity, it is likely that the change was not his idea or even his desire, particularly since he was proud of the name and its *yichus* (distinguished descent). It was a common practice at HUC in the earlier decades of the twentieth century to encourage and even to pressure students with odd-sounding, “unpronounceable” east European surnames to change them to something less foreign.¹⁰ In any case, Freehof never revealed why he made the change; he simply adopted it to the point that when corresponding from his office with his siblings who had retained the original family name, he addressed them also as “Freehof.”¹¹

Although Freehof told his old friend Jacob Rader Marcus that his father Isaac migrated three hundred miles and atypically chose to learn his craft from someone other than his father out of devotion to one or another of the claimants to the Chabad mantle, he told a 1978 interviewer that his father had left Shklov to break away from Hasidism, calling him “a *misnaged* (opponent of Hasidism) with Chabad memories” who, by the time he reached Baltimore, was simply a firm traditionalist.¹² In Baltimore, Freilichoff probably gravitated to the synagogue founded by immigrants from Chernigev, Agudas Achim, which eventually merged with the Anshe Nejin congregation to form the Lubawitz Nusach Ari Congregation, with which we know he was associated. We cannot say, however, whether he was drawn to it for its Chabad association or just because the people were his *landslayt* (fellow citizens).¹³

Certainly in at least one important respect the home in which Freehof grew up was at odds with its Hasidic origins: His father was an admirer of the Maggid of Kamenets, one of the more colorful figures in the Hibbat Zion movement and the most extreme of its critics of the rabbinic establishment.¹⁴ It is likely that the elder Freilichoff became a Zionist before he left Russia. Zionism had spread throughout the Pale in the 1880s, including in the Hasidic strongholds where he lived, despite the opposition of virtually all the rebbes.¹⁵

Isaac and Golda Freilichoff left Chernigev for London around 1890 with their young son Moshe (Morris, b. 1886/7), Golda’s father, Yehuda Leib

Blonstein, a Chabad hasid (the “*zeyde, olov hasholom,*” who was young Solomon’s first *melamed* [teacher of Torah]),¹⁶ and a number of other relatives. They settled just off of Whitechapel Road in the East End of London, the British equivalent of New York’s Lower East Side. There, they had a daughter, Jane; then a son, Solomon, born 8 August 1892; and then three more daughters, Ada, Esther, and Fannie.

One of the arguments Freehof would later advance for his approach to Reform responsa writing was his conviction that Reform was the natural result of the encounter between traditional Orthodoxy and modernity, and that Orthodoxy would inevitably moderate, if not disappear, as each successive body of traditional Jews experienced that encounter. As much as Freehof celebrated the emergence of Reform, he nevertheless evinced a deep affection, respect, and nostalgia for the traditional way of life within which he was raised. Nowhere does that emerge more clearly than in his reminiscences of his father. Thus he recalled that in London, Isaac Freilichoff

became a *Sofer*. He wrote many Sefer Torahs. He was the Torah reader, the balkorey [sic], in a shul, but his main occupation was proof reading [sic] Sefer Torahs, since it is required that a Torah be proofread every year.

Where we lived in London, at 27 Hanbury Street,¹⁸ the window of the ground floor was large, like a shop window, and Father had a table against his window and there he proofread Sefer Torahs. This was visible to any passersby, but that made no difference; there was hardly a Gentile in the neighborhood.

Sir Samuel Montagu,¹⁹ later Lord Swaythling, when he ran for Parliament, would ride through the Jewish neighborhood in his horse and carriage. When he would see Father in the window going over a Sefer Torah, he would get out of the carriage, go into the house and stand reverently by Father’s side for some time. I wish I had remembered to tell this to his daughter Lily Montagu when we met frequently under the auspices of the World Union.

I remember when I was a boy of about six or seven, Father went to Germany, I think to see a doctor about his health. He had with him a letter from the Chief Rabbi of England, attesting to the fact that he was a first rate *Sofer*.²⁰

Freehof left no other information about his own childhood in London, though he lived there until the age of eleven. He would have attended either the Spitalfields Jews’ Free School or a state school. The former, funded by the Rothschilds, offered a combination of Jewish and general elementary education and also provided free clothing to its students. The state schools in the East End were run “along Jewish lines,” i.e., they closed early on Fridays in winter, had many Jewish teachers and often a Jewish headmaster, and included about five hours of religious instruction per week. Thus, whichever school Freehof attended, we can be certain that it was in virtually a totally Jewish environment.²¹ The only other detail he recalled about his London childhood was that his older brother

Morris, a “typical English Jewish boy,” became a Zionist there as a member of the Jewish Lads’ Brigade²² and went to hear Theodor Herzl speak when he visited London.²³

Youth in Baltimore

Isaac and Morris Freilichoff emigrated from England to the United States in 1902, settling in Baltimore for reasons that remain unknown. For a year and a half, they worked to earn the money for passage for the rest of the family, who made the crossing in 1903. Freehof recalled that the voyage from Liverpool to Quebec took two weeks on the Red Star Line’s *Lake Erie* and that his mother had one baby in her arms and two by the hands. They spent their first week in America with his father’s brother Abraham in New York. Uncle Abe took Freehof to Coney Island, where he saw Ferris wheels for the first time. Freehof recalled:

But that’s nothing. He gave me my first hot dog. A Jewish hot dog. And if you can imagine a virgin palate, tasting for the first time a spicy Jewish hot dog, you will know what the *shor ha-bor* in *Gan Eden* will taste like!²⁴

Of his childhood in Baltimore, Freehof said only that he attended a “German-English” public school and the Baltimore Talmud Torah,²⁵ so again we must rely on other sources.

In 1880, Baltimore’s Jewish population was approximately ten thousand, the vast majority of German origin and still heavily German in culture. New arrivals from eastern Europe swelled that number to approximately forty thousand by 1907. They settled in the East Baltimore neighborhood, out of which the upwardly mobile German Jews began moving in the 1880s. By 1903, the year of Freehof’s arrival, the city’s German synagogues had all moved to the new neighborhood.²⁶ Many immigrants found employment in Baltimore’s largely German-Jewish-owned garment industry; others labored in sweatshops for Russian Jewish owners, who were almost destitute themselves. The vast majority of these sweatshops were located along East Baltimore Street, the neighborhood’s main street, just off from where the Freilichoffs lived. Like most children in the Jewish immigrant ghettos, Freehof saw significant labor unrest. From the late 1880s through 1920, Baltimore’s clothing industry was the venue for frequent strikes that pitted Russian Jewish immigrants against mostly German Jewish factory owners.²⁷

The Freilichoffs lived at 117 South Exeter Street, in the very heart of Jewish East Baltimore. Solomon had only a three-block walk to the Talmud Torah where he received his Jewish education, and eighteen of the twenty-five “Russian” congregations in Baltimore in 1907 were located within a four-block radius of the family home.²⁸ Compared to the immigrants who toiled in the sweatshops and garment factories, the Freilichoffs were well off: According to the 1910

census record, Isaac Freilichoff owned his own home, and all the school-aged Freilichoff children were in school.²⁹

Freehof's childhood differed from many Jewish immigrant childhoods in that he was exposed to Zionism, both at home and in the community. Baltimore was one of the seedbeds of Zionism in the United States. A branch of Hibbat Zion was established there in 1894; its members sent Rabbi Schepsel Shaffer of the Orthodox Shearith Israel Congregation to Basle three years later as the only American delegate to the First Zionist Congress. The first American Zionist convention was held in Baltimore in 1900 and led to the founding of the Federation of American Zionists, of which a Baltimorean, Dr. Harry Friedenwald, served as president from 1904–1918.³⁰ The first American “convention” of Labor Zionists also took place in Baltimore: Twenty-one delegates from ten different cities met for five days at Zionist headquarters at 5 North Front Street, only four blocks from Freehof's home.³¹ Although no record exists of the names of the participants in that first Poale Zion meeting, it is highly likely that Freehof's brother Morris, an early and lifelong Poale Zion activist, was among them.³²

Freehof later recalled that it was in Baltimore that his father became a *mohel*:

Then Father came to America. There were not enough Sefer Torahs to be written for him to make a living, so he was trained as a *Mohel* and became, perhaps, the best known *Mohel* in Baltimore.³³

In his eighties Freehof waxed nostalgic, recalling his home life as a child.

Both warmth and cold reason seemed to be the basis of our family life... In the old-fashioned Jewish family, there wasn't any chumminess, any baseball chumminess, you know. We did what [Father] told us and we admired him greatly and as the years went by I appreciated him more and more... Intimacy in our early years didn't exist in an old Jewish home, but I always loved him. But I learned to appreciate and admire him as the years went by.³⁴

He spoke of his father and his father's learning with great respect and reverence, calling him “a wonderful word man” who knew the Torah with a thoroughness that is now lost. When Freehof would visit him in Baltimore in his father's later years, his father would have him turn his back and open a *Humash* and read just the cantillation of a few words, and from humming the cantillation his father would then tell him the words and their location. In his taped interview he can be heard repeating admiringly and longingly, “This is the old-fashioned learning.” With that kind of an example before him, it is not surprising that he placed great value on learning by memory and on acquiring an encyclopedic range of knowledge, or that he had the ability to do so.

Freehof's recollections of his mother stressed her piety, devotion, and warmth. Once, he recalled, when he came home from HUC during his student years, he was telling his father about a midrash they had studied from Jellinek's collection *Bet ha-Midrash*, as they stood beside the bedside of his mother, who was ill. Isaac Freilichoff was not familiar with that midrash, but Golda interrupted her son to finish telling it, because she knew it from the *Tzena Urena*, which she read every Shabbat. Yet even while he praised her, he managed to make it sound both stereotypical and condescending:

[T]he pious women read that every Shabbes—my mother knew this rare midrash! Isn't it interesting, what the old-fashioned Jewish women knew, God knows.... They read piously, simply, sweet women, you know, without sophistication, with only a knowledge of life.³⁵

His parents, Freehof said, taught him to value family unity and Jewish unity, "a feeling it's normal and wonderful to be a Jew.... [This was] not taught verbally but environmentally." He grew up "deeply and automatically Jewish," as was equally true in many immigrant homes. In his home all of traditional Jewish life was piously observed,

though I must admit that outside of the home certain relaxations began to occur: observance of the Sabbath, putting on the *tefillin* when you could not do it sometimes ... not my father, God forbid, but the children.³⁶

At least some of their home life showed Chabad influence; many years later Freehof recalled that as a boy he used to receive five pennies on the fifth night of Hanukkah, a Chabad custom that celebrates the Alter Rebbe's release from prison in St. Petersburg on the fifth night of Hanukkah in 1819.³⁷ Despite those warm and rosy reminiscences, however, Freehof never doubted that he had made the right decision in leaving behind a life that he believed had no chance of survival in the modern world.

His siblings' Jewish paths varied. Ada married and had a family, and they affiliated with a Conservative congregation. Freehof's other sisters, who never wed, remained Orthodox. Jane became a teacher at the Isaac Davidson Hebrew School and a librarian at the Baltimore Hebrew College (now Baltimore Hebrew University). Fannie, who changed her first name to Faye, had a heart condition that left her somewhat frail; she did not hold a regular job but lived at home and wrote stories and plays of Jewish content. Esther was an elementary school teacher at Baltimore's P.S. 59 for many years. After their father's death they occasionally turned to their brother with halakhic questions, but while the tone of the answers is affectionate, it is clear from the content that the religious differences were significant.³⁸

The three sisters lived at home with their parents and then with their father after he was widowed, apparently remaining in the family house after his later

remarriage and death. After Faye's death, Jane and Esther moved to an apartment and then to a nursing home.³⁹

Freehof was closest to Louis, his youngest sibling, possibly because Louis was the only one who followed him into the Reform movement. Louis studied law and then worked as a government arbiter giving franchises to bus lines. During World War II he worked for the JWB serving Jewish soldiers on army bases. Afterward, he became the executive secretary of Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco and then head of San Francisco's Jewish funeral home. When Louis was a funeral director he sent numerous questions to Freehof, which accounts for a disproportionately large number of Freehof's published Reform responsa dealing with the handling of bodies, conduct of funerals, or inquiries concerning funeral and burial customs.

Upon arriving in America, eleven-year-old Solomon was presumably immediately enrolled in the local public school and in the Talmud Torah, the east Europeans' premier achievement in Baltimore.⁴⁰ In 1889, some unknown individuals in East Baltimore had founded the Hebrew Free School Society to educate immigrant boys whose parents were too poor to pay a *melamed*. By 1898, 270 boys were enrolled in the school, which had become known simply as the Talmud Torah, a supplementary school at which students attended classes Sunday mornings and Monday through Thursday afternoons or evenings. Although strictly Orthodox, the school was progressive in its outlook and pedagogy, with a six-year curriculum including classes in Jewish history and Hebrew grammar. Boys in the upper classes attained sufficient fluency to study Mishnah, Talmud, and Shulhan Arukh. By the time Freehof was a student there, the language of instruction was English, not Yiddish. Extracurricular activities included a Hebrew club, Young Judea clubs, dramatics, and more. Shabbat evening and morning services drew a large number of students and their families; the better students led the services. Following the Shabbat morning service there was a story hour for the younger children and a Talmud *shiur* (lesson) for the older ones. From time to time the board of directors held public examinations at which a few students, selected by the teachers, would answer questions based on their classes in Bible, Jewish history, or Hebrew grammar. Although none of the available literature on the Talmud Torah states explicitly what the age range of its students was, the fact that its first graduating class, in 1914, consisted of twelve eighth-grade boys suggests that students generally graduated at around age fourteen or fifteen. Assuming that there was not much change in the school's structure over the previous decade, Solomon Freilichoff was probably a student at the Talmud Torah from his arrival in 1903 through 1907 or 1908.

Uptown Jews assisted the Talmud Torah with both funding and personal effort. Rabbi Schepsel Schaffer supervised its curriculum, and Rabbi William Rosenau of the moderate Reform Oheb Shalom Congregation served on its

board. Schaffer, born in Russian Kurland in 1862, was the perfect bridge between the uptown and downtown Jews of Baltimore. A native German speaker from the Pale of Settlement, he had been educated at both the finest universities and the finest yeshivot. He held a doctorate from the University of Leipzig and rabbinic ordination from both the Berlin Rabbinerseminar and from Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Spector of Kovno.⁴¹ Rosenau had grown up amid what he later termed “intelligent Orthodox influences” in Europe and America; as an adolescent in Philadelphia he had the opportunity to know Samuel Hirsch, Marcus Jastrow, and Sabato Morais, all of whom contributed to his education.⁴² He was ordained in 1889 at HUC and, after three years in Omaha, Nebraska, he succeeded Benjamin Szold at Oheb Shalom Congregation, remaining until his death in 1943.⁴³ Though solidly in the Reform camp, Rosenau firmly resisted radical trends in both thought and praxis, as did his congregation. In the early years of the twentieth century, when Solomon Freilichoff first encountered Reform Judaism at Oheb Shalom, the congregation was still more traditionally observant than most Reform congregations. Men still covered their heads at services (with hats, of course, not skullcaps), most members of the congregation observed the dietary laws, and many walked to synagogue on the Sabbath.⁴⁴

Rosenau was deeply concerned for the welfare of the east European Jews of East Baltimore. Indeed, in 1909, he told his congregation that one of the reasons he had decided to stay with them and not accept a pulpit elsewhere was his desire to deal with the problems of a coastal city like Baltimore, especially its immigrant community.⁴⁵ His involvement with the Talmud Torah was part of that concern, but it also had another motivation: He recruited candidates for HUC from among its graduates. As Hymen Saye, a Talmud Torah alumnus, later recalled,

At graduation time some of the best Talmud students and their parents were persuaded by Rabbi William Rosenau, the dean of the Baltimore Reform rabbinate, to leave Baltimore and enroll in the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati to prepare for a career in the Reform rabbinate. The prospect of their sons receiving a free college education and an honorable calling was a deciding factor in the parents’ answer to Rabbi Rosenau.⁴⁶

Ironically, although Freehof had the most distinguished career of the Talmud Torah alumni whom Rosenau sent off to HUC, he was not among those whom Rosenau actively recruited. The initiative was Freehof’s. He later recalled that he and his friend Jacob Tarshish, whose father taught at the Talmud Torah, approached the Reform rabbi about the possibility of studying for the rabbinate:

If I will tell you [how I came to be a Reform rabbi], you’ll think that the psalmist was right when he said, *shegios mi yovin*, “How can you account for

accidents?”⁴⁷ Tarshish and I wanted perhaps to be engineers, and we went to register, after we graduated from public school, went to register in high school. We went first to the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. And there was such a long line of registrants that we lost heart, and went instead to the Baltimore Civic College, the general college, and enrolled there. So thereupon we decided we would not be engineers. And then, how we came to Rosenau— The Talmud Torah that we went to was rather modern; perhaps that was it. It was a jump.... In fact, Rosenau said, why don't we go to the Jewish Theological Seminary. He knew the kind of background we came from. And why we went to him—Look, I can't recover that anymore....⁴⁸

In another interview, Freehof explained that he and Tarshish thought that since they were going to go to Baltimore City College, they should obtain a classical education by adding to it studies with Rosenau.⁴⁹ Still, there is a vast chasm between studying with Rosenau and deciding to enter HUC, and how Freehof crossed it remained a mystery, even to his widow Lillian. One is left with the impression that he had so thoroughly closed the door on his own traditional upbringing that he made himself forget his process of transition away from it. It is possible that the incentive of a subsidized college education was a factor in his decision; under Solomon Schechter, the Jewish Theological Seminary's (JTS) rabbinical school had become a graduate program, admitting students without a Bachelor of Arts degree only under exceptional circumstances,⁵⁰ while HUC still sent its rabbinic students to UC to obtain the bachelor's.

Freehof recalled that the two youths were surprised when Rosenau replied to them, “Come next Monday and I'll begin to teach you.”⁵¹ They studied with him for two years and then entered the Collegiate Department of HUC in the fall of 1910.⁵² Freehof remembered Rosenau, “the first non-Eastern Jew in our life,” as “a real Germanic taskmaster” who taught him how to study thoroughly and who examined him on what he had learned in Cincinnati when he came home to Baltimore every summer.

One may certainly wonder what Isaac and Golda Freilichoff thought of their son's preference for this alien thing called Reform Judaism. Freehof insisted that his father was open-minded and allowed his children to pursue their Jewish commitments in their own ways, and that the transition from Orthodoxy to Reform was not difficult for him because Rosenau, like his father, was a scholar and loved learning. He claimed that his father had no expectations or preferences as to what he should be, never expressed any doubts about his son's chosen path as a Reform rabbi, and once even came to hear him when he preached at Oheb Shalom. “I don't think that father was too much enamored of Orthodox *rabbonim*,” Freehof recalled. “I think he had certain dubieties about them, particularly in America.... They wanted me to be a good Jewish boy, that's all.”⁵³

HUC Student Days

In August 1910 Dr. Kaufmann Kohler, president of HUC, received the following letter from an eager candidate for admission:

Dear Sir,

I have been taking lessons for some time from Dr. William Rosenau of Baltimore, Md. I think Dr. Rosenau has communicated with you, and informed you what ground we have covered in Hebrew. I will arrive in Cincinnati on the evening of Monday September 5, 1910. Please inform me whether the Hebrew Union College building will then be open.

Yours very truly

Solomon B. Frelechhoff
117 S. Exeter St
Baltimore Md.⁵⁴

HUC, Isaac Mayer Wise's dream of a seminary to train rabbis for "American Israel," had opened in the fall of 1875 in a synagogue basement with a staff of two—Wise and an assistant—and a student body of fourteen adolescent boys, most of whom had little interest in learning. Wise designed an ambitious eight-year curriculum: four years in the Preparatory Department while the students studied at a Cincinnati high school, and then four years of study for ordination in the Collegiate Department while they simultaneously obtained their bachelor's degrees from UC.⁵⁵ Most of the students at the College prior to 1900 came with little Jewish education; they were largely

from poor families of German origin in the Midwest and South or ... the wards of Jewish orphanages. Well-to-do Jewish parents would not hear of their sons entering a profession which was for the most part poorly paid and lacking in prestige.... For serious students, Wise was forced to turn to those families for whom the tuition-free education offered by the Hebrew Union College in conjunction with high school and university studies provided an opportunity they could not otherwise afford.⁵⁶

By 1900, although numerous prosperous Reform congregations needed rabbis whose salary and prestige had risen commensurate with the social status of the laity, only a small number of students of German Jewish background were attracted to the rabbinate. From 1900 on, the HUC student body became largely "Russian," as it was recognized that the College was an excellent vehicle of upward mobility for a Jewishly committed son of the ghetto.

Kaufmann Kohler had become HUC's president in 1903. For most of his eighteen-year administration he ruled the College and its faculty with an iron hand, until age and illness enfeebled him. His mandate was to rebuild the

school's faculty, student body, and reputation, all of which had greatly fallen off in the three years since Wise's death. Kohler's challenge was that New York's JTS had just acquired a great scholar and dynamic leader, Dr. Solomon Schechter, as its head, and even many leading Reform Jews on the East Coast were inclined to support JTS rather than HUC. With the support of the board, Kohler set about placing HUC on firm financial footing and expanding the faculty.⁵⁷

In Kohler, HUC acquired a leader with a far more narrowly sectarian viewpoint than Wise. The Cincinnati Reform laity who dominated the Board of Governors were pleased with his intention to revamp the curriculum to make it reflect much more clearly a Reform perspective. The board also supported his vision of the College as an institution to train rabbis for Reform pulpits, not scholars of Judaica or rabbis for more traditional settings. In addition to extending the Collegiate Department to five years, adding a year of rabbinical study after the Bachelor of Arts degree to upgrade the quality of the students and their education, he also eliminated Modern Hebrew from the curriculum and reduced the amount of Talmud.⁵⁸ Ironically, however, by the time he had reformed the College to his satisfaction, his vision was already outdated; though his younger contemporaries largely held fast to his version of Reform, the very students who were most consistently and rigidly exposed to it were the ones who, as rabbis, moved away from classical Reform and sent the movement heading back toward a greater identification with Jewish tradition and the rest of the Jewish community.

By 1903, HUC desperately needed a new facility. The mansion in an elegant German Jewish neighborhood that had served as the College's home since 1880 was now an inadequate, decaying structure in an increasingly run-down, semi-industrial area populated by poor African-Americans and east European Jews.⁵⁹ Middle- and upperclass Cincinnatians had moved to suburbs such as Avondale, on the heights north of the central city basin; UC, too, had recently moved to a spacious campus near Burnet Woods. In 1903, the College's Board of Governors bought a tract of land near UC but then had to struggle for several years to raise sufficient funds for construction. In the fall of 1912, at the beginning of Freehof's third year, the College finally relocated to its new buildings on Clifton Avenue, "the promised land on the hill," as Tarshish wrote, only half-jokingly.⁶⁰

The move added enormously to the morale of students and faculty alike and imparted to the school an atmosphere of gravitas that apparently had been lacking. The students had been a high-spirited bunch prone to playing practical jokes, especially the younger boys in the Preparatory Department.⁶¹ In the old building, noted Tarshish, study was "irregular" because "to get a book from the library one had to hunt into the inner recesses of the building."⁶² Simon Cohen, one of Freehof's contemporaries, wrote that as a result of the move,

the care-free, easy-going life that was characteristic of my first year gradually changed to a more studious discipline. The merry parties downtown gradually diminished and were finally succeeded by other festivities.⁶³

Cohen recalled that one local establishment where rabbinic students had gathered near the old building offered a free lunch but, he reassured his readers, the students never had much money so they managed to eat more than they drank.⁶⁴ After the move, “the institution became more of a real college, and everyone gained, because of it, greater prestige and respect.” Additionally, the move eased student life by eliminating the two hours they spent daily commuting downtown from and to their Avondale boardinghouses.

Jerome Mark, who entered HUC in 1913, a year after the new campus’s opening, later recalled that

Solomon B. Freehof, who ... was just beginning his Junior year at the College, assumed the *mitzvah* of introducing several freshmen to the institution. We walked up the long flight of stone steps leading to the campus on the hill, stood in awe before the two structures, and then had these words spoken to us by one who was destined for rare prominence as professor, scholar, and leader: “This is the Hebrew Union College. Sura and Pumbeditha in all their glory did not have anything to equal these buildings.”⁶⁵

We should treat Freehof’s grandiloquence with forbearance. His enthusiasm reflected not merely the enormous contrast between the old facility and the new but also a consciousness of the students’ status. The sheer bourgeois, Midwestern American comfort of the institution must have been a lesson in and of itself to him and many of his fellow students who had come there from the lower-class immigrant neighborhoods. But beyond the experience of moving to a higher social class was the sense of self these students acquired as members of the Reform movement. In Freehof’s student years, Reform had not yet resigned itself to being merely one branch of Judaism among several. The movement’s leaders still considered “Reform Judaism” and “American Judaism” to be synonymous. As America was, in its own estimation, the vanguard of progress and civilization, so Reform leaders from Wise onward considered their community as “American Israel,” the vanguard of Judaism, the world’s most progressive religion. The students of HUC were the future leaders of the vanguard of Judaism in the modern world, and their new buildings, therefore, were not merely the modern equivalent of the Babylonian academies; they were their superior, simply *because* they were modern.

When Freehof entered HUC in the fall of 1910, its newly expanded full-time faculty consisted of Ephraim Feldman, an east-European-born autodidact who taught philosophy and Talmud; history and philosophy professor Gotthard Deutsch, a native of Moravia who had been ordained at the *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar* in Breslau and held a doctorate from the University of Vienna; Bible

professor Moses Buttenwieser, who had received his doctorate in Bible at Heidelberg; philosophy professor David Neumark, a Galician with ordination from the Berlin *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* and a doctorate from the University of Berlin; Bible professor Julian Morgenstern, a 1902 HUC ordinee who had then earned a doctorate in Semitics at Heidelberg; and Henry Englander, a 1901 HUC ordinee with a doctorate in Semitics from Brown University, who taught biblical exegesis and history in the Preparatory Department.⁶⁶ In addition, President Kohler taught the students “catechism,” i.e., Reform Judaism as he understood it; homiletics; and apocryphal and Hellenistic literature, not because it was vital to the rabbi but because it was an interest of his.⁶⁷ Louis Grossmann, rabbi of Cincinnati’s Bene Yeshurun Temple, taught courses in pedagogy for junior and senior rabbinic students, and Boris Bogen, Superintendent of Cincinnati’s United Jewish Charities, taught a course on “sociology” (i.e., Jewish philanthropic organizations). Adolph Oko was the school’s librarian. David Philipson, a member of the College’s first graduating class and rabbi of Bene Israel, Cincinnati’s other large Reform temple, had earlier given up his part-time role as instructor of homiletics in favor of a seat on the College’s Board of Governors, from where he exercised considerable power over the school.⁶⁸

Freehof later praised Ephraim Feldman, with whom he studied Talmud in his first year at the College, as “a remarkable man” and “a very careful translator.”⁶⁹ Sadly, Feldman died at the end of that academic year, on the very day he was to have received an honorary doctorate in recognition of his twenty-five years of service on the faculty. To replace him, Kohler hired Jacob Zallel Lauterbach as professor of Talmud. Lauterbach, a native of Galicia, had been ordained at Esriel Hildesheimer’s *Rabbiner Seminar für das Orthodoxe Judentum* in Berlin and held a doctorate from the University of Göttingen. He had come to New York in 1903 as a staff member of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, in which capacity he authored numerous articles. After serving as rabbi of two traditional congregations, he became rabbi of a Reform congregation, a move reflective of his own evolution. From there Kohler brought him to HUC.

By all accounts, the European professors were terrible pedagogues. Deutsch, recollected Jacob Rader Marcus, was “a miserable teacher,”⁷⁰ and Freehof, too, asserted that there were student complaints about these men. Rabbi Nathan Perilman later recalled:

Dr. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, of blessed memory, loved the Talmud, and he loved the Student Body of the Hebrew Union College. It cannot be said, however, that one of the great compulsions of his life was to bring the two together. He early began to suspect the natural incompatibility in the relationship. He attended class with almost the same degree of enthusiasm as did the students.⁷¹

Freehof, however, put the blame for the problems in Lauterbach's class on the students' lack of background:

A man who studied, who knew the Talmud as Lauterbach—American boys who could hardly struggle from one line to another—he couldn't believe it, to have such pupils who didn't know much about it.⁷²

Despite their poor pedagogical skills, the faculty nevertheless made deep impressions on the students, and many close relationships were formed between them. As Freehof recalled,

It was not so much the instruction, because these Europeans, I want you to know, were not good teachers. Not one of them. But for some reason they were tremendously able to inspire us. Lauterbach awakened me to rabbinic studies. And Buttenwieser awakened those who were moved by him to a study of the prophets....⁷³

David Neumark was known to be sympathetic to Zionism, despite Kohler's strenuous opposition to it; he had the affection of similarly inclined students, though he carefully kept his sympathies out of the classroom. Henry Englander—American-born and not so much older than his students—was described as “a friendly and worthy help to all the students”;⁷⁴ Rabbi Victor Reichert later referred to Englander's “beauty of spirit,” and Freehof asserted that he was “universally beloved.”⁷⁵ Despite their difficulties in his class, the students were also fond of Lauterbach, who was younger than the other Europeans and apparently related more easily to the students. He and Neumark, both Galician born, had retained an east European *Yiddishkeit*, despite their German training, which gave them more of a rapport with the increasingly east European student body. The same was true of Freehof when he in turn joined the faculty.⁷⁶ Morgenstern was also popular as an instructor, though that popularity vanished when he became president.

Kohler, by contrast, was a distant figure of whom the students stood in awe, though they were inspired and moved by his dynamic preaching.⁷⁷ Unlike Neumark, Englander, and Morgenstern, he rarely invited students to his home. Board of Governors member Philipson did invite students to his home, but apparently the invitations did not make up for the fact that the students disliked him because of his “huge ego” and general pretentiousness.⁷⁸

In addition to the faculty and the Cincinnati rabbis, the students were privileged to hear many of the distinguished personalities of their day who came to lecture. Sixty years after the fact, Freehof still recalled the excitement when Stephen S. Wise spoke on campus “and there were some dubieties on the part of Dr. Kohler,”⁷⁹ which, given Freehof's penchant for understatement and dislike of controversy, may well mean that there was a heated exchange between the two. Other Jewish figures who spoke at the campus or in the city during

Freehof's years there were Solomon Schechter, Louis Brandeis, Israel Abrahams, Nahum Sokolow, Boris Schatz, Emil G. Hirsch, and Aharon Aaronson.

Classes met in the afternoons from three o'clock until six o'clock, since earlier in the day most students were in class either at a local high school or at UC. On Fridays at five o'clock there was a fifteen-minute chapel service, after which the school day ended.⁸⁰ On Saturday mornings the students usually attended services at either Philipson's or Grossmann's congregation; in the afternoon they returned to the College for one additional class hour, a Saturday afternoon chapel service at which an upperclass student or a faculty member preached, and student body meetings.

Kohler intended to create a genuinely religious atmosphere at the College and to mold the students' personalities into suitable rabbinic character. It was he who instituted daily and Kabbalat Shabbat services at the College, in addition to the existing Shabbat afternoon service. At chapel services he frequently spoke to the College body on the issues of the day. As for sermons, he allowed only those that he had seen and approved of in advance. His criteria were not merely homiletical quality but also "the degree of adherence to his own version of Reform." He prohibited the wearing of head coverings and prayer shawls. Students and faculty were required to attend these services, and attendance was taken.⁸¹ Surprisingly, however, it appears that provisions were not necessarily made for the students on Jewish holidays: Marcus's diary reveals the sad fact that he and his fellow boarders had no seder to attend on Passover of 1912.⁸²

Kohler's version of Reform was more radical than what Freehof had been exposed to at Oheb Shalom. We can only guess at the culture shock Freehof must have experienced, for there is only one recorded instance in which he himself referred to it. In a 1974 interview he said:

It was a great shock to us, the first time in the chapel when we had to worship without a hat. I don't know why that's such a—to this day I don't know why. I think because our mothers always warned us, put on your hat when you make a *brokhe* before eating, you know.⁸³

Although he found it amusing sixty-three years later, it strains credibility to think that it was an easy change at the time.

We may assume that Freehof arrived safely in Cincinnati on 5 September 1910. He had a week to get settled into his new surroundings, and then on Tuesday and Wednesday of the following week he and the other new students took their placement exams. Although entering students applied for entrance to a given level of the program, the faculty tested them to make sure they were actually up to standard. Graduates of Baltimore Civic College and veterans of two years of study with Rosenau, Freehof and Tarshish applied for admission to the First Collegiate class. They were tested on their ability to translate almost any passage from the Bible on sight and on their knowledge of Mishnah

and of Jewish history. All members of the faculty examined them. Rosenau's preparation sufficed; both young men were admitted unconditionally to the First Collegiate level, though Tarshish was told to brush up on his Hebrew and Aramaic grammar. Since Freehof's entering class was a small group, the students were combined with the Collegiate II class for all coursework over the next four years.

Freehof appears to have kept the same sort of profile as a rabbinic student as he did throughout his later career: a superb scholar and a popular and well-liked individual who steered clear of controversy. According to Abraham Franzblau's calculations, only Marcus and Abraham H. Silver—a "tall and gaunt youth from New York City" who joined Freehof's class in September 1911 and who, by the time he was ordained, had begun calling himself Abba Hillel Silver⁸⁴—compiled higher academic averages among the students who were present in those days.⁸⁵ All three were among the senior students who served as instructors in the Preparatory Department in their junior and senior years. As a top student, Freehof had no problem receiving financial aid, for which students were required to maintain a certain grade average. He and Silver dominated their years academically, capturing virtually all of the academic honors. In 1915 Silver won the Alumni Prize (a set of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*) for his essay on "The Am-Ha-aretz in Sopheric and Tannaitic Times," while in 1914 Freehof had won the Kaufmann Kohler Prize, worth \$100, for his essay, "The Origin and History of the Haftarah." Neither of these were papers written for classes; rather, they were extensive pieces of research done beyond the ordinary course load. In the case of the Kohler Prize, at least, the faculty had selected the topic. Silver was named valedictorian of their graduating class; Freehof was elected to Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Cincinnati.⁸⁶

Like all HUC students, Freehof conducted High Holy Day services in small congregations, beginning in 1912 in Saginaw, Michigan. The congregation was pleased with him and sent a letter of commendation to the College; later that year they asked that he be sent to them again the following year, a request to which the College acceded.⁸⁷ Apparently he distinguished himself as a preacher from the start. After two years in Saginaw he was assigned to Cairo, Illinois, in 1913, when that congregation specifically complained that the 1912 student rabbi had been a poor preacher and they wanted a good one.⁸⁸

In 1914–1915, his senior year, Freehof served the congregation in Portsmouth, Ohio. Beginning in the previous academic year, the faculty had limited student pulpits to students already possessing a bachelor's degree (i.e., mostly seniors) and limited the students to no more than biweekly visits to give them more time for their studies.⁸⁹ The congregation in Portsmouth, like many student pulpits through the years, had a history of taking up more of a student rabbi's time than the College wanted its students to give.⁹⁰ Freehof, like many

rabbinic students through the years, was eager to comply and tried his best to convince the faculty to make an exception for him. He was not successful.⁹¹

In addition to compiling a superb academic record, Freehof was active in student affairs. As a UC sophomore in 1911–1912, he captained the school's debating team. At HUC he played a prominent role in the student organization and was elected student body president in his senior year. As president he officiated over the students' opening banquet, which was marked by the sort of rituals typical of colleges and universities in that era. The *HUC Monthly*, a student literary journal founded in 1914, reported that the senior class representative formally welcomed the freshman class, the freshman representative responded, someone sang "the traditional Etz Chaim" with the accompaniment of the freshmen, and then

the chairman [Freehof] declared that the Freshmen are now part and parcel of the student body... Praised be the chairman! He surely knew how to keep our interest throughout, for he kept two of the guests of the evening, Rabbi Lee Levinger [14] of Paducah, Ky., and Prof. Julian Morgenstern of the Hebrew Union College, unto the very last.⁹²

Freehof also took an active part in the Literary Society, the students' chief venue for discussing the political, cultural, and intellectual trends of the day. An average of twenty-five students (out of a student body of eighty to ninety) met every other Friday night to discuss contemporary issues. Founded in 1911 by Morris Lazaron (class of 1914), it was originally a Friday night gathering at the Lazaron family's home, but it became such an important part of student life that the following year it became an official College activity, meeting in the student room at HUC. In the beginning the society was a haphazard group that would sometimes feature a speaker or a student paper, but by its third year of existence it had grown into a well-organized program of speakers, papers delivered by students, formal debates between students, and holiday events. Freehof served as president of the Literary Society during the 1913–1914 academic year. In that year the group heard papers on ritual murder,⁹³ modern homiletics, and Hasidism; hosted a guest speaker on "Jews and Medicine;" held a Hanukkah celebration; and sponsored debates on "The Sunday Sabbath Question," "That the Problems of the Jews in Russia Can Best Be Solved in Russia," and "The Synagogue as Social Center."⁹⁴ The first issue of the *HUC Monthly* noted,

If there is any subject of current Jewish interest, be it the question of teaching Hebrew in our Sabbath-schools or the question of Sunday services, or the like, the boys expect to hear it discussed in the Literary Society and to help discuss it.⁹⁵

Freehof's extracurricular life had a lighter side as well, of which we can catch glimpses in the diaries of Jacob Rader Marcus. Four years younger than

Freehof, Marcus entered the College's Preparatory Department in 1911. His diary begins with his second semester at HUC in January 1912; one day the following month he noted that he "went with Sol Freehof and got some cakes."⁹⁶ A love of sports was clearly part of what drew these two together. Apparently neither of them possessed great athletic prowess; rather, they were loyal fans of the College's baseball and basketball teams. Freehof's dedication extended to being elected manager of the baseball team in the student body elections of spring 1912. They also shared outstanding academic ability and a wide-ranging intellectual curiosity but could behave like more ordinary students as well: Marcus's diary notes that in March 1914 he "[g]ot up 7.10. Cut German with Sol Freehof and went to gym.... First deliberate cut I ever made."⁹⁷

Because Freehof saved no personal correspondence, we must rely on other people's testimony to know who his friends were at HUC. The personal correspondence of Elkan Voorsanger (class of 1914) shows that he and Freehof were close friends, at least through the 1930s. Because of the College's practice of combining small classes, they would have taken all of their courses together for four years. Sports probably also drew them together: Voorsanger pitched for the HUC baseball team. In many ways, however, they must have made an unlikely pair. Voorsanger was the son of a distinguished Reform rabbi of Dutch origin in San Francisco, his academic record was quite mediocre, he was known on campus as a practical joker, and he was an activist, not a scholar.⁹⁸ The evidence of their friendship lies in a collection of letters from the 1930s by Freehof to Voorsanger and his wife, Henrietta. The correspondence reveals that the Voorsangers were apparently the only nonfamily members invited to Freehof's wedding to Lillian Simon in 1934 and also that Freehof gave the Voorsangers a substantial amount of money in the early years of the Depression, which they accepted as a loan and eventually repaid. At that time Freehof, still a bachelor, received a handsome salary as rabbi of Kehilath Anshe Mayriv Congregation in Chicago, while Voorsanger was struggling in an organizational position.⁹⁹

Barnett Brickner (class of 1919) and James G. Heller (class of 1916) were also friends of Freehof from their student days on. In later years Freehof and Brickner exchanged pulpits regularly; on visits the two men would sit together for hours, smoking Havana cigars, drinking brandy, and telling stories.¹⁰⁰ In addition to these fellow students, Professor Jacob Z. Lauterbach, Freehof's mentor, became a lifelong friend.¹⁰¹ In their later years, Freehof and Silver enjoyed a collegial friendship, but there is no evidence that they were friends as students or young rabbis. During World War II and afterward they worked together closely in the CCAR; Freehof was Silver's vice-president in 1941–1943 and then succeeded him as president, and they collaborated at other times as well. The two also exchanged pulpits annually in the postwar years. Silver was the guest preacher at Freehof's seventieth birthday celebration, and Freehof did the same for Silver. Silver, unlike Freehof, had few, if any, real friends. As his

biographer documents and others confirm, he was an extraordinarily gifted but quite egotistical individual.¹⁰² Freehof's recollections emphasized Silver's differences from the rest of the student body, including himself.

Age of Controversy

The hot issue of the day during Freehof's student and early faculty years at the College was Zionism. It was discussed in the Literary Society and everywhere else on campus. During the 1911–1912 academic year, Silver and Professor Neumark had founded a Hebrew-speaking club, *Ibriah*, of which Marcus was a member, though he does not mention whether Freehof was also.¹⁰³

The CCAR had taken a firm stance against Zionism as early as 1897, although individual rabbis were outspoken Zionists.¹⁰⁴ Kohler was a committed anti-Zionist.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, despite his best efforts, between 1910 and 1920 the student body gradually shifted to an overwhelmingly pro-Zionist perspective as its demographics changed, world events furthered the Zionist cause, and Louis Brandeis popularized a nonideological Zionism acceptable to American Jews, including many Reform Jews.¹⁰⁶

During Freehof's senior year, controversy erupted between the students and Kohler when the latter rescinded the Literary Society's invitation to Horace Kallen to speak at the College. Kallen, a secular cultural Zionist remembered today chiefly as the originator of the term "cultural pluralism," had been publicly critical of the Reform movement's position on Zionism.¹⁰⁷ Kohler's triumph was a pyrrhic victory, however. Although the Board of Governors supported his actions in this matter, some powerful rabbis did not. Max Heller, Stephen S. Wise, and others were able to prevail on the Board of Governors to force Kohler to agree that henceforward he could not prohibit sermons and speeches on Zionism.¹⁰⁸

For a few years during the 1910s, controversy also swirled around a Zionist fraternity at HUC. Information about this group is incomplete and contradictory, but it appears that its leaders were Heller and Brickner and that it had some connection to Nathan Isaacs, professor of law at UC. Isaacs, the son of a distinguished Cincinnati family, was a Zionist and was committed to restoring aspects of traditional practice to Reform Judaism. The fraternity was known among the students by the Hebrew letters *יכת* which, using the *at-bash* method,¹⁰⁹ signified the letters *מלא*, the acronym of *מי לוי ארי*, "Whoever is for the Eternal, to me! (Ex. 32:26)." Moses's rallying cry at the time of the sin of the Golden Calf became the motto of this group, whose members pledged themselves to abstain from pork and shellfish, to marry within the faith, and "positively to observe holidays and the Sabbath in appropriate ways."¹¹⁰ The group met biweekly; members would sometimes present papers for discussion. Balfour Brickner, Barnett Brickner's son, confirmed that the fraternity was Zionist in orientation and committed to strengthening traditional observance in Reform Judaism.¹¹¹

According to Brickner, the leading Zionists at HUC in those days were his father, Heller, Silver, and Freehof, all of whom were members of the fraternity. However, Marcus's diary, which contains several references to the fraternity, makes no mention of either Silver or Freehof in connection with it and, in fact, indicates conclusively that Freehof was not a member. He first mentions the group in March 1914:

There is a Jewish Frat organized at college which is trying to run everything; they have about fifteen fellows who are becoming snobbish. Ed Israel & Davis were just admitted. I bet you they won't run the HUC elections. We are forming a strong opposition.¹¹²

The next day Marcus noted that another student had just joined the fraternity and again opined that its goal was to control the student elections. "Jim Heller, I believe, is the main Macher." Then in May 1914 came the election. "Student body elections. We all thot [sic] that **יכת** would fight. They did till they saw they were beaten. Freehof was [elected] President."¹¹³

It is not surprising that Freehof was not a member of the **יכת**. There is no doubt that his sympathies were with the Zionists, but it was simply not his nature to be an activist—neither as a student nor in later life. While his close friends—Voorsanger, Heller, Brickner, and even Marcus in his own way—were men who relished taking a strong stand, Freehof was a conciliator. He preferred consensus and compromise to controversy, no matter what the issue and who the disputants. That is not to say that he shirked controversy; he could express himself quite strongly when he felt that key issues were at stake. But by temperament he was not an activist, and he much preferred to find ways for people of disparate views to work together.

Thus, it is not surprising that, while his friends preached their sermons in the College chapel on the issues of the day, he did not.¹¹⁴ Students delivered sermons in their junior year at the Shabbat afternoon service. Freehof's sermon, on 10 January 1914, was "on the qualities for leader: modesty, toleration, education, idealism" and, noted Marcus, was "not so good as I expected."¹¹⁵ The sermon has not survived, but even from Marcus's brief note it fits the mold of Freehof's later sermons: solidly rooted in Scripture, appropriate to its context, uplifting, noncontroversial, and sometimes straying into gross platitude. The Torah reading for that Shabbat afternoon, at least according to the traditional lectionary, would have been the opening verses of Exodus, from the weekly portion, Shemot. That portion (Ex. 1:1–6:1) includes the story of Moses's birth, upbringing, flight to Midian, and selection by God as messenger to Pharaoh and agent of liberation. The theme of leadership is such an obvious one for a rabbinical student preaching to other rabbinical students that Freehof would have been hard pressed to avoid clichés. Perhaps he did not avoid them, and that is why his friend Marcus was disappointed.

Freehof took a leading role in one other student endeavor, serving in his senior year as associate editor of the *HUC Monthly*, the student literary journal founded by Silver. Silver was the journal's first editor-in-chief; in addition to Freehof, his other two associate editors for the 1914–1915 year were Heller and Samuel Abrams (class of 1916).¹¹⁶ The monthly periodical was both an in-house student magazine and a journal of Reform Jewish thought, with subscribers around the country. Its contributors were students, faculty, alumni, and occasionally other figures in the Jewish community.

While most of the journal's first-year issues were unremarkable and free of controversy, one issue contained an article that went to the heart of contemporary discontent among members of the CCAR as to the direction of their movement. In November 1914, the *HUC Monthly* printed an article by Rabbi Max Heller titled "Casuistry in Reform Judaism," in which he called for greater guidance in Reform Judaism on matters of praxis, especially Sabbath observance, and praised the Responsa Committee as a step in the right direction.¹¹⁷ The article was preceded by an enthusiastically supportive but unsigned editorial:

Ceremonies are the rhythmic echoes of the inner life of the group. Symbols are ideograms of social activities. The habitual reactions of a people to its environment crystallize themselves into customs. Hence customs must vary with the change in a people's environment and ceremonies must keep pace with the ever-evolving life of the group. This psychological fact underlies the attitude of Reform Judaism to Orthodox insistence upon traditional observances. . . . But while Reform Judaism has been consistent in the application of this standard to religious practices, it has in many cases been guilty of indifference to practices which can still serve beneficent ends. There has been a decided lack of insistence upon such observances as are still potent to arouse spiritual emotion and enhance communal life and solidarity. . . .

Reform Judaism seems still to be under the influence of the rationalistic philosophy which attended its birth. We are still too coldly intellectualistic. . . .

[But we are evolving a] constructive system of religious practice and discipline for both the individual and the community. . . . Dr. Heller argues for detailed guidance in matters of religious practice, which should be given with the authority of the whole body of Reform Jewish Rabbis. . . . This is a solution worthy of earnest consideration, for the problem is very real and very pressing.¹¹⁸

This editorial foreshadows the interwar discussions of observance in Reform Jewish life, insisting that classical Reform was too quick to abandon practices that could still be meaningful and raising the question of a code or guide to practice. Significantly, it defines ceremonies as "the rhythmic echoes of the inner life of the group" and emphasizes the role of ritual observance in "enhanc[ing] communal life and solidarity." This linkage of ritual observance and group life is quite different from the conception of ceremonies students would have

learned from President Kohler. While not unmindful of the collective aspect of ceremonies, Kohler emphasized their didactic function in deepening the religious life of the individual. Without a doubt, the editorial use of this language reveals the influence of the new social sciences, which affected so many young Jewish intellectuals of Freehof's generation, most notably Mordecai Kaplan and Horace Kallen.

Which of the journal's editors penned the editorial? Silver may well have agreed with it, but it is not likely that he wrote it. Though he served on the Responsa Committee for a number of years and did criticize Reform's abandonment of Jewish practice on several occasions, the reappropriation of ritual was not a major concern of his, and he never advocated a Reform code of observance.¹¹⁹ Freehof later advocated collecting all Reform responsa and making them available as a guide but was passionately opposed to the creation of an authoritative code of Reform Jewish practice.¹²⁰ Almost assuredly the editorial was penned by James Heller, Max Heller's son and a member of the *יבת* fraternity.

We may safely assume that Freehof, who throughout his long life was a great bibliophile and generously supported the publication of scholarly Judaica, penned at least one editorial that year, "For A College Press." This editorial argued that especially because of the current European war, the United States was becoming the new center of world Jewry. After the war that would mean not only caring for a flood of Jewish immigrants but also becoming the new center of Jewish scholarship and publishing. HUC would have a special task as the main American source for propagating *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. While the Jewish Publication Society was doing an excellent job of popularizing Jewish classics, the College should take upon itself the responsibility of supporting and facilitating scholarship and should, therefore, have its own press, like all major universities. Freehof further noted perspicaciously that the College should have been publishing a "Sabbath School Journal ... to crystalize [sic] some of the conflicting theories and to organize some of the contradictory methods of our religious education."¹²¹

The June 1915 issue of the *HUC Monthly* carried a précis of Freehof's rabbinic thesis, "The Institution of Ordination." The thesis discussed

the subject of the ordination of Rabbi, setting forth the history of ordination, the manner in which ordination was carried out, the classes of ordination, the laws governing ordination, and the privileges that ordination bestowed."¹²²

The thesis is a solid piece of work that demonstrates Freehof's ability to handle rabbinic texts and to evaluate critically the relevant scholarship of the day, most of which was in German.



Freehof in his chaplain's uniform, c. 1918–1919.

(Courtesy Dr. Freehof's niece, Teresa Schwartz)

Rabbi Freehof, Chaplain Freehof

Freehof received his rabbinic ordination in June 1915 and was the first of the College's east European ordines to join the faculty. As an Instructor in Rabbis, he was assigned to teach fifteen hours per week in the Preparatory Department. For the D grade (beginning students) he taught two hours each of Pirkei Avot, Exodus, and Mishnah; for the C grade (including the College's future president, Nelson Glueck) two hours of Mishnah; for the B grade two hours of Mishnah and two of Commentaries; and for A grade, one hour per week of Midrash. He was also appointed to some minor faculty committees. In November 1917 he was promoted to Assistant Professor and named faculty adviser to the A grade. By the spring of 1918 he was taking on more weighty faculty roles: serving as co-referee for two rabbinic theses, one with Lauterbach and one with Neumark, and serving as a member of the Committee on Academic Standing. In the fall of 1918 he and Julian Morgenstern examined candidates for admission.

Judging from a letter from Voorsanger to him, Freehof was very happy as a member of the faculty.

13 January 1916

Dear Professor:—

I wish you to know that I am not used to having people write me on common yellow paper. I expect at least bankers' bond or something equally inexpensive, but yellow paper is too rich for my blood, especially since that kind of paper only costs a dollar a thousand.

I am glad to know that you are working hard. Its [sic] good for a lazy loafer like you. I am only sorry that I am not in Cincinnati to sit and laugh at you or make faces at you from the distance.

Young Man, I am going to quote you. You say faculty meetings are fun but I can't write about them to you. Don't you try to put on any high and mighty airs with me, or I will come right over to Cincinnati and give you a poch and a good old fashioned mackkes...¹²³

In 1916 Freehof began to keep a record of marriages he performed. He labeled and dated the opening page in Hebrew in elegant traditional style:

Record book of marriages performed by the youth Zalman Dov son of Reb Yitzhak Tzvi, called Freehof, from today, the first day of the week of the weekly portion *Tetzaveh*, the 9th day of the month of Adar I in the year 5676.

He then added in English the date Sunday, February 13, 1916.¹²⁴ Most of the first fifteen entries, spanning his HUC years and his first year in Chicago, include the Hebrew date; after 1925 he listed only the common date. The format of each entry remained consistent: numbered entries by date listed in English *Bride's Name of City and State* (sometimes age in parentheses) married to *Groom's Name of City and State at Location*. He also noted in Hebrew whether the bride or groom was divorced or a convert. The first four entries, all in 1916, were women from his student pulpit in Portsmouth.

While the faculty minutes from Freehof's first two years on staff reveal little out of the ordinary in the day-to-day life of the College, in fact faculty and students alike were increasingly consumed by news of the European war, particularly its negative impact on the Jews of Russia and on the Yishuv, who were subject to harsh measures by the Ottoman rulers. A half-page notice in the January 1915 *HUC Monthly* proclaimed starkly:

More than a quarter of a million Jews are in the ranks of the various European armies.

More than half of all the Jews in the world are in the war zone.

Five million Jews are in the so-called Pale of Settlement along the Prussian and Austrian frontier. Their industries are paralyzed; their homes devastated; families are starving.

At Nickelsburg, Moravia, seven hundred local Jews, though poor themselves, are caring for six thousand Jewish refugees.

One hundred thousand Jews in Palestine are entirely cut off from the world. Their fruit and wine crops, excluded from European markets, remain to rot.

Tens of thousands of babies have been born and will be born under these direful conditions. How many of them will die this winter depends on us in America.¹²⁵

American Reform Jews generally favored President Wilson's early policy of neutrality, but, like the majority of their fellow citizens, they supported his declaration of war in April 1917 "to make the world safe for democracy" and were eager to demonstrate their loyalty by fighting for their country.¹²⁶ Cincinnati's weekly Jewish newspaper, *The American Israelite*, which at that time was still essentially the house organ of the Reform movement, reveals a Jewish community caught up in the patriotic fervor of the day. From April 1917, for example, the paper featured articles on what the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) was doing around the country for the war effort and published the

names of local enlistees. Many members of the College community who were of military age responded with enthusiasm, including Freehof, who was one of the first rabbis to volunteer for chaplaincy duty. In January 1918 the *HUC Monthly* noted with pride that ten students, the equivalent of 39 percent of the student body of military age, had now enlisted and that students from the upper classes were holding services for Jewish soldiers at a nearby military base.¹²⁷

Although by one estimate Jews constituted 6 percent of the military in the years just prior to the United States' entry into the war,¹²⁸ the military had no provision for Jewish chaplains. Chaplains were assigned based on the majority faith in each regiment, meaning Jews and small Protestant denominations were not served. When the United States entered the war, representatives of various Jewish organizations, religious and secular, met in New York and established the JWB to provide for the needs of Jews in the military. They recruited civilian rabbis and laypeople for immediate work in military camps and lobbied Congress to allow for Jewish military chaplains. When Jewish chaplains were finally authorized six months after the outbreak of war, the JWB created a Committee on Chaplains, representing the entire spectrum of American Judaism, to "receive, consider, and make recommendations in regard to all applications on the part of Rabbis for Chaplaincies."¹²⁹ There were at the time approximately 400 English-speaking rabbis in the United States, 150 of whom volunteered to serve. Of those 150, the JWB endorsed 34, and 23 were eventually commissioned. However, 100,000 Jewish soldiers were in France, and only 12 Jewish chaplains were actually sent over.¹³⁰

Freehof was called up in October 1918, a year after he volunteered, and received his commission on 1 November 1918.¹³¹ He and James Heller, the last two Jewish chaplains to arrive in France, shipped out of New York on 12 November, the day after the Armistice.¹³² The details of Freehof's military career are lost because his service record was among those destroyed in a fire at a military records center in the 1970s, but we can compile a fairly good picture of what his responsibilities were. Chaplains were sent to a training school before receiving their commissions. In addition to conducting religious services and performing pastoral duties, they were commonly expected to assist in a variety of tasks: planning entertainment to maintain troop morale, registering graves, visiting the wounded, censoring mail, helping soldiers to write letters home, participating in General Pershing's campaign to stop the spread of sexually transmitted diseases in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF),¹³³ and more. We know that upon arrival in France he was assigned to First Army Headquarters, which was getting ready to receive thousands of destitute individuals, including released prisoners of war. Freehof may well have been asked to assist in processing these men. We also know from his marriage record book that in March 1919 he officiated at a soldier's wedding in Paris.¹³⁴

At some point during the winter of 1919, Freehof was transferred to the Army of Occupation in Germany, as was Chaplain Israel Bettan. The two men's friendship probably dates from this period. The occupying soldiers had far too much time on their hands and far too little to do, so in January 1919 the Army launched a massive educational program for the troops, including basic literacy, vocational training, academic classes, and the arts. Chaplains were frequently a part of this program, though it is possible that because there were so few Jewish chaplains, serving such a scattered constituency, they were already busy enough to be exempt from such duties.¹³⁵

On 28 May 1919, Chaplains Bettan and Freehof received orders to report to St. Aignan, France, for return to the United States, though neither of them actually embarked until early July. Bettan used the time to visit England, but Freehof was otherwise occupied. Dr. Walter Jacob, Freehof's assistant and successor at Rodef Shalom Congregation in Pittsburgh, recalls that Freehof used to tell a story about that time. In the racially segregated military, African-Americans were largely limited to service as enlisted men in supply units. For some weeks while waiting to embark, Chaplain (First Lieutenant) Freehof was assigned command of an African-American unit that was without officers for some reason. He preached for these troops at their church services each Sunday morning and learned a number of spirituals from them, which he remembered and sang for the rest of his life.¹³⁶



Original studio photo of Freehof taken by J.D. Toloff.

(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

Professor Freehof

Discharged from the Army on 5 July 1919 after less than a year of active duty,¹³⁸ Freehof returned that fall to an appreciative student body at HUC. *HUC Monthly* wrote,

We hail with joy and pleasure the return of Sol Freehof to the halls and walls of our Alma Mater. "Sol," as we upper classmen love to call him (cavette [sic], Freshmen) just got back from France, where he was a chaplain with the AEF. We all missed Sol during the past year, but we are tickled to death to have him back with us. Boruch Habo Beshem Adonoi. A year of joy and peace, of good fellowship to you, Sol, our colleague and our teacher.¹³⁷

Back at HUC, emotions were running high as an aging President Kohler's control of the institution was slipping and students and faculty were caught up in the issues of the day. Morgenstern had written to Bettan the previous spring that it had been "a negative and dissatisfying year" at the College. The school had been closed for eight weeks in the fall semester due to the influenza epidemic. Most of the students who went into the service were now back, "but an unfortunate spirit of unrest, bordering on Bolshevism has gotten hold of the boys, due undoubtedly largely to the war, and social reaction thereto."¹³⁹ Zionist sentiment among the students was stronger than ever, reflecting the movement's phenomenal growth among American Jews during and immediately following the war.

Freehof was a popular instructor at HUC. The students liked him and appreciated his presence not only for his *Yiddishkeit* but also because he was close to their own age and shared many of their interests and amusements. The tone of comments about him in the *HUC Monthly* was always one of affectionate teasing, as in, "Dr. Freehof toured the West in addition to delivering a course of lectures in San Francisco. Even his vocabulary fails him when he attempts to speak of the wonders of the sights he saw."¹⁴⁰ He continued to be a loyal attendee at HUC basketball and baseball games and in 1920 was named faculty adviser on all matters pertaining to athletics, including expenditures. Regular and amusing notes in 1923–1924 issues of *HUC Monthly* reveal that he became an avid ping pong player when the College acquired the equipment.¹⁴¹

Jacob Rader Marcus and Freehof dined together regularly and attended sports events; Freehof tutored Marcus in Talmud and liturgy and taught him to play chess. Marcus's occasional notes of their conversations reveal that the two were confidantes. A conversation he recorded about marriage sheds light on how the German—east European split affected young men like Freehof and Marcus, who had crossed the cultural and class divide by coming to HUC:

Saw Jerry and Sol Freehof at Sol's rooms and we talked marriage. Sol wants to marry a girl who is cultured, educated and good looking and will not wince when a Yiddish word is spoken or when his mother speaks her English brogue. The German Jewish girls have the culture but dislike Russian Jewish boys. We all came to the conclusion that if a boy of Russian descent married a girl of German descent the chances are that she would look down upon him and his family and the marriage would not be successful. Morale [sic]: marry a girl of Russian Jewish descent who may be less cultured but will make your life happier. Sol met a brilliant girl this summer of German descent. She told him she had a wonderful girl for him. Sol ironically asked if she was of Russian descent and his informant answered yes and Sol then murmured maliciously: Good. Is it sour grapes with us. The war did some good with those whose German descent was their obsession.¹⁴²

Like Freehof, Marcus was hired as an instructor in the Preparatory Department immediately after ordination. In 1920–1921, Marcus's first year as a fellow faculty member, a controversy arose at HUC that would give him occasion to be highly critical of Freehof's conduct. The war years' "100 percent Americanism" had paved the way for the postwar Red Scare, culminating in the infamous Palmer Raids of winter 1919–1920. In a pattern that would be repeated after World War II, liberals, including Reform Jews, felt the need to distance themselves from radicals, real or imagined.¹⁴³

In November 1920, Professors Deutsch, Lauterbach, and Freehof were charged by the faculty to form a special committee to investigate two students, Samuel Rosenberg and Ferdinand Isserman, for material they had published in that month's issue of the *HUC Monthly*. Rosenberg, the editor, had written an editorial lampooning Rabbis David Philipson and Louis Grossmann. The committee spoke with the two students and reported back to the faculty. They reminded the faculty that at Philipson's instigation the Board of Governors had already investigated Rosenberg for distributing *The New Age*, a banned Socialist newspaper, on campus. Despite the board's complaint, the faculty had defended Rosenberg, only warning him to desist from such activity because of the harm it could do to the College. The young man apologized and complied, but he continued to be vocal in his own views. When the faculty committee then questioned him concerning the *HUC Monthly*, he offered to resign as editor.

Concerning the charge against Isserman—also known to be a leftist—the committee further reported that, as president of the Literary Society, he had deliberately published in the *HUC Monthly* a list of controversial speakers that the students wished to invite as a way of showing that President Kohler intended to restrict the students' freedom.¹⁴⁴ Isserman denied the charge to the committee, insisting that he had merely put it in as a news item and had tried to take it out but was too late. The faculty committee's comment on this was,

Your Committee is of the opinion that while from the point of view of Talmudic psychology נכרים דברים שלא אמת, the statement of Isserman does not appear to have been made in good faith, there is no tangible evidence of his having acted in bad faith.¹⁴⁵

The committee then tabled until the next meeting a motion to have Rosenberg resign or be expelled, and no action was taken concerning Isserman.

At the next faculty meeting, it was moved to expel the two students; votes were taken separately and each failed, four to five. With the exception of Marcus, all present attached explanations of their votes to the minutes. Englander explained that he thought Rosenberg a better character than Isserman, so after Isserman was retained he would not vote to expel Rosenberg. Deutsch, Neumark, and Buttenwieser appended a statement explaining that in the absence of any real evidence against the students, they could not justify such a harsh penalty.

Grossmann stated kindly that in his opinion these were just boys, and they would grow and change.¹⁴⁶

Lauterbach, Morgenstern, and Freehof were the three strong negatives. It was Lauterbach who moved that Isserman should be expelled, explaining that a number of little incidents had added up to his being unfit for the rabbinate. He charged that all Isserman cared about were “certain modern ideas of a new social order.”¹⁴⁷ Specifically, Lauterbach accused Isserman of offending numerous congregants by criticizing the Palmer Raids in his student High Holy Day sermon; further, when asked about the sermon, Isserman said he had done nothing wrong, but nothing could be proved because he had destroyed the text of the sermon. In addition, Lauterbach accused Isserman of using his position as Literary Society president to embarrass the college by inviting speakers who were advocates of radical ideas and hostile to religion, knowing the College would never consent; and of holding a Society meeting at a church with the pastor as the evening’s speaker.

Freehof and Morgenstern supplied quite a harsh statement explaining their votes to expel the two:

Without going into detail, we state our conviction that these two students have consciously and ceaselessly attempted to undermine the teachings and the work of the Faculty and have been consequently a destructive influence upon other students, especially the younger boys.

We have been kind and patient with these two students through many scrapes. We have done our best to win their friendship and confidence in order to be helpful to them and to arouse in them an interest in Judaism and to develop in them that fine character which is indispensable for a Rabbi. We have failed.

Our duty is first to the College and to Judaism, and only secondarily to individual students. We have given these men a fine education, which should have fitted them well for other work. We wish them well, but we cannot in conscience consent to the ordination as Rabbis of men who have no love for Judaism, no interest in Jewish study, and no confidence in the character and usefulness of the Rabbinate.¹⁴⁸

The faculty then voted to require all material for the *HUC Monthly* to be submitted first to a faculty advisory committee, a decision that only Marcus and Freehof, both former *HUC Monthly* editors, opposed.

This was not the end of the matter, however, because the Board of Governors stepped in. In January 1921 they notified the faculty that they disapproved of their action concerning the two students and ordered them to suspend the students pending action at a joint board-faculty meeting. The faculty demonstrated a bit of independence by refusing to suspend them, though they explained that this was only because suspension would not remove the two students’ presence

from campus, and so there was no point in such an action when definitive action was to be decided soon.¹⁴⁹

Marcus's account of the joint meeting criticized Freehof in particular:

[1/22/21:] If [Grossmann] had been present he might have saved the day for the boys.... Neumark and Buttsy fought like tigers for the boys. Lauterbach, Morgenstern and Freehof against.... Freehof made a mistake in my opinion of appealing to anti-socialistic views of board by condemning them as anti-capitalists and the like. Freehof is weak in some respects. He claims to be a socialist yet gives the Board the impression that they are dangerous because economic radicals.... Freehof also made some derogatory statement that he could not prove. I'm a little afraid of that boy.... In final motion that men should be allowed three weeks to resign and then be expelled automatically the ayes were: Englander; J Walter Freiberg; Lauterbach; Freehof; Morgy; (Mack had left) Cohen the Chairman Kohler, Westheimer. Nos: Deutsch and Neumark. Marcus, Seasongood, and Buttenwieser refused to vote altogether because the men had not chance to offer a defense before the Board which was trying them on the word of the faculty.¹⁵⁰

The controversy created an enormous amount of tension on campus; Freehof's stand apparently brought him some unaccustomed hostility from students. Another entry from Marcus's diary states,

[1/24/21:] Isserman and I had a chat for a few minutes and he tells me that Seasongood wants to resign from the Board and that he will fight case in the courts and that the boys are not to resign, etc. Freehof goes around with a hang-dog expression. The faculty are nervous. Hell's bells what are they afraid of. They didn't do him an injustice. Freehof is afraid they [the students] will go on a sympathy strike. There isn't enough guts [sic] in that gang to do anything. There is meeting of the student body tonight but I feel sure that they won't accomplish anything. No courage in that gang. I don't think so. I may be mistaken. Peiser [a student in Freehof's Collegiate I Mishnah class] baited Freehof about the affair. I'd like to hear them say anything to me.¹⁵¹

On 25 January a student delegation met with the Board of Governors to plead with them not to expel the two students. Isserman also sent a letter to the board stating that he had been raised from childhood with the idea that he was to go into the rabbinate in memory of his grandfather and that it was all he had ever wanted to do with his life. He begged the board to take no action against him without giving him a hearing. The letter and visit persuaded at least one board member to ask the faculty to suspend the expulsion and to give the two students a hearing. The student association also asked the faculty at their 26 January meeting not to dismiss the two without giving them a chance to face their judges directly. Those faculty members who were present

voted. Lauterbach, Freehof, Englander, and Marcus voted for postponement of further action against the two pending another joint board-faculty meeting; Morgenstern and Buttenwieser voted against. Marcus's diary for that day noted that

Isserman wrote a letter which I did not read but understood to be a very fine piece of work.... Went to Freehof for the evening and studied Liturgy and Talmud and played a little chess. Freehof said he was very much influenced by what Isserman wrote and may change his whole attitude on the whole affair.

In the end, Rosenberg resigned, but Isserman was allowed to continue.¹⁵²

Freehof's behavior in this affair is uncharacteristically harsh and does not resemble his conduct in any other incident later in his life, even in his conflicts with the American Council for Judaism in the 1940s and 1950s. His initial judgment of Isserman, who had been one of his D Grade students in 1914–1915, was more severe than anything he was later willing to put on paper about the most errant of colleagues. It appears that he was influenced by his mentor Lauterbach and by Morgenstern in this affair; the statement that he and Morgenstern coauthored reveals that the two men shared a sense of what was or was not good for the College.

We should probably see these events as part of the politics leading up to Morgenstern's accession as acting president. In March 1921, just after the conclusion of this incident. Kohler announced his anticipated retirement as president of the College. The question of a successor had been a common topic of gossip for months. In addition to Morgenstern, both Philipson and Rosenau wanted the position.¹⁵³ Morgenstern was very popular among the students as well as among the College's many recent alumni. In 1917 he was elected president of the Alumni Association (and Freehof was elected its secretary).¹⁵⁴ His ability to defeat Philipson and Rosenau was due to the strong support and intervention of the alumni, who actively campaigned for him. Morgenstern's supporters on the faculty, according to Marcus, were himself, Freehof, and Lauterbach, though only Lauterbach's support carried any weight.¹⁵⁵ It is possible that the confluence of votes by Lauterbach, Morgenstern, and Freehof in the Rosenberg-Isserman affair reflects that the three shared a common vision of what sort of institution they wanted the College to be and whom they envisioned as its next leader. (Marcus's dissent appears to be a reflection of his own orneriness and a certain cynicism about the College.)¹⁵⁶ From his student days onward Freehof cared deeply about the good name and welfare of the Reform rabbinate and of the institution that produced it. He remained involved in the College's affairs, fending off what he perceived as challenges to its identity or to its supremacy as the institution of Reform rabbinical education.¹⁵⁷ His actions here may be understood as consistent with that record, but it is equally possible that he

was unduly influenced by Morgenstern and/or Lauterbach in this matter and consequently reversed himself after hearing what Isserman had to say.

There is no reason to doubt Marcus's statement that Freehof considered himself to be a socialist. He was close to at least two people who were committed socialists—his brother Morris and Elkan Voorsanger. However, like many American Jews of that era, he must have lost his enthusiasm for it as he moved up the economic ladder. Although he later preached a great many sermons on contemporary affairs, he never betrayed the slightest sympathy for socialism in any of them; they generally appear to be conventionally liberal.

Freehof recorded a momentous vote on one other issue during his faculty years. Professor Neumark's daughter, Martha, was enrolled as a student in the Preparatory Department; in fact, for three years Freehof was one of her instructors, and in 1920–1921 he was her alternative choice for academic advisor. In the spring of 1921 Ms. Neumark petitioned the faculty to allow her to have a High Holy Day pulpit the following fall. The matter went back and forth between the faculty and the Board of Governors, with the faculty voting twice on the question. Deutsch, Lauterbach, Morgenstern, and Freehof were opposed both times. Lauterbach and Freehof specifically stated that “the reason for their negative vote [was] the ground that they are opposed to women officiating as rabbis.”¹⁵⁸

One other excerpt from Marcus's diary sheds light on Freehof's personal relationships during his years on the faculty: He recorded that it was himself and Freehof to whom Mrs. Deutsch turned at the time of her husband's death, serving as the *shomrim* (keepers) of the body and as pallbearers, and then to take charge of concluding his literary affairs.¹⁵⁹

Last Years at HUC

In January 1921 Freehof submitted his doctoral proposal to the faculty:

Gentlemen:—

I beg to submit for your approval the following subject for a D.D. thesis:—“Private Prayers in the Talmud.” The thesis will deal primarily with the private prayers of the Rabbis in b. Berahot 16b–17a & the corresponding prayers in J. Berahot 7d. It will endeavor through these prayers to contribute to the understanding of the liturgy in Amoraic times. It will deal with the theology of the prayers, their literary style, their place in the growth of the liturgy and so forth. The major will be Talmud & the two minors Medieval Jewish Commentaries, & Midrash.¹⁶⁰

He completed his degree a little over a year later, passing his examination with honors, and was thereupon promoted to Professor of Liturgy. He was also honored at that time with preaching the chapel sermon on Founders' Day.¹⁶¹

Upon Kohler's resignation in March 1921, the Board of Governors appointed Professor Julian Morgenstern as HUC's interim president and a year later named him president. In the early years of his presidency, the College was under pressure to turn out as many rabbis as possible to meet the needs of the growing number of pulpits. More students meant a need for more faculty. In his first three years as president, Morgenstern appointed ten new faculty members, eight of whom remained at the College until their retirement or death: Jacob Mann and Jacob Rader Marcus, history; Israel Bettan, Midrash and homiletics; Abraham Cronbach, Jewish social studies; Samuel S. Cohon, theology; Abraham Z. Idelsohn, Jewish music; and Sheldon Blank and Nelson Glueck, Hebrew language and Bible. During this same period, three faculty members left the College: new appointee Louis B. Wolfenson for lack of competence and new appointee Henry Slonimsky because he preferred Stephen Wise's new Jewish Institute of Religion;¹⁶² and, at the close of the 1923–1924 academic year, Professor Solomon B. Freehof, who accepted the position of rabbi of Kehilath Anshe Mayriv Congregation in Chicago.

Why should one of the College's full professors, a former student and longtime associate of the new president, a promising young scholar and popular teacher, leave just when the College was entering a period of unparalleled expansion? The answer is not clear. In his later years Freehof would answer only that he had a great desire to preach. He once said that there were thousands of sermons in him waiting to come out.¹⁶³ Asked about it in 1973, Freehof steadfastly refused to acknowledge that there were any difficulties whatsoever in the College's transition to Morgenstern's leadership. When asked if the Morgenstern presidency brought changes, Freehof replied, "I can't think of any. The College went along.... I'll tell you something. We were not attuned to awareness of change...."¹⁶⁴ Asked about changes in the curriculum, he blandly noted only that when Lauterbach came there were stronger rabbinics, and when Neumark came there was stronger philosophy. Both of these men, however, were Kohler appointees and among Freehof's own teachers. Either age was blurring his recollection or he did not want to think back to the early years of Morgenstern's administration. When asked what determined his decision to leave, he replied,

Well, I had been there for ten years. I was also, I had a fair amount of public speaking skill, and that part of my life and self-expression had no opportunity. Sometimes the College would send me around to lecture ... and when this offer came from Chicago from KAM temple, I was glad to take it.¹⁶⁵

He denied that he was at all dissatisfied:

People told me that there was, people said there was some tension between Morgenstern and—Morgenstern and I were friends. There was no tension at all.... To me the College was a great pleasure but it became a very fine point of departure. It allowed me to enter the rabbinate with a resolution not to be an *amoretz* (ignoramus). The rabbinate is such a busy career that any man may be excused for not studying.¹⁶⁶

There is, however, contradictory testimony. Rabbi Victor Reichert was certain that there was a strong disagreement between Morgenstern and Freehof:

Q: Why do you think Freehof left?

A: There again, I think a real sharp clash with Julian Morgenstern. Very sharp. I think so. Freehof's still alive, you ought to —

Q: Yes, I did. He denies it.

A. Does he deny that he used to characterize Julian Morgenstern as one of a, there's a kind of a fish that emits all kinds of smoke? Wordy, you know.... I'm interested that Freehof said that he did not [have any quarrel with Morgenstern].¹⁶⁷

Given Freehof's lifelong tendency to minimize disagreements it is likely that there is some substance in Reichert's comments, but they shed no light on the precise nature of the conflict between the two men. Balfour Brickner reported hearing from his father that Morgenstern "hated" what Freehof was doing with *responsa*, because he did not like seeing the emphasis in Reform go back to rabbinics as opposed to Bible.¹⁶⁸ It is true that Morgenstern was uncomfortable with both traditional Jewish observance and the study of rabbinic literature; however, while this may describe relations between the two men at a later date, there is no evidence that Freehof was at all interested in *responsa* while he was still on the HUC faculty, so Brickner's comment is unpersuasive as a possible reason for Freehof's departure. Perhaps the answer is more personal. Morgenstern's great supporter on the faculty before his rise to the presidency was Lauterbach. Lauterbach was also Freehof's mentor, and a strong friendship developed between the two. Perhaps Morgenstern, who needed to be in control of everything at the College down to the smallest detail, felt threatened by the growing closeness between Lauterbach and Freehof, who shared both a personal background and an academic expertise that excluded him. Or perhaps Freehof was flattered and tempted by the opportunity to serve a large, prestigious congregation and to receive a commensurately handsome salary. Perhaps it was some combination of all of these factors that led to his departure from the College. The reality is unknowable; all we can say is that it may not have been as simple a decision as he made it out to be later in life.¹⁶⁹

In February 1924 Freehof delivered what was apparently his final sermon in the HUC Chapel as a faculty member. The sermon, "First Fruits," bears all of the hallmarks of a mature Freehof sermon: apt use of Scripture, obvious

familiarity with the rabbinic commentaries, an eloquence that sweeps the listener along, and a restatement of some aspect of human experience with an end to providing spiritual comfort and insight. As the years passed, many of his later sermons became so conventional in sentiment that it must have been only the preacher's eloquence that prevented the original listeners from noticing that what was being said was actually rather trite. "First Fruits," by contrast, is imbued with the passion of his own experience.¹⁷⁰

The sermon opens with an eloquent and romantic portrait of the ancient Israelites bringing their harvest offerings to the Temple. Freehof notes that the offering of first fruits required more courage and determination on the part of the worshiper than did the later offerings, since the harvest's outcome was still in doubt. Having stated his *marshal* (parable), Freehof then goes on to give his *nimshal* (lesson): Young rabbis should offer their "first fruits," i.e., the gifts of their younger years, with enthusiasm and not feel that they need wait until they are mature men who have harvested their lives' experience. Yet, he continues, young rabbis are often uncertain and confused as to what their message should be, particularly in these troubled times when traditional religion appears so much less compelling than do modern intellectual currents. How, then, is a young rabbi to overcome this confusion and uncertainty? Just as the first fruits were brought not from any species but only from the seven species that grew in the Land of Israel, so young rabbis have merely to ground themselves in their own biblical inheritance. It is not only unnecessary but positively unnatural for them to adopt any of the fashionable intellectual perspectives available to them. The prophets and the rabbis have already articulated for them a vision of the world that is completely sufficient upon which to base their lives and their rabbinates.

The message of Freehof's valedictory sermon reflects the reality that the postwar decade was a difficult period for adherents of traditional religions. The disillusionment that set in after the failure of Wilsonian idealism, the collapse of the Victorian social order and its replacement by a new mass culture of consumption, the spread of new ideas such as those of Freud, the passing of the Progressive impulse, the cynicism generated by the widespread flouting of Prohibition—all of these combined with an unprecedented material prosperity to send many in 1920s America, especially its youth, off into the pursuit of pleasure or, if they were of an inquiring mind, into the exploration of "alternative" systems of meaning, religious or secular.¹⁷¹ Even rabbis and rabbinic students were not immune to the temper of the times. To many of Freehof's students, remaining committed to entering the rabbinate must have seemed like an uphill struggle. Freehof himself, however, seems to have been immune from these doubts. In the succeeding sixty-six years of his life he never wavered, either in his preaching or his writing, in his commitment to what he understood to be a simple and straightforward faith in the God of the Bible and of the rabbis.

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Notes

¹The term is Michael A. Meyer's; it is the title of Chapter Eight of *Response to Modernity*, the chapter in which he discusses the interwar changes in Reform. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

²Philip P. Bregstone, *Chicago and Its Jews: A Cultural History* (Chicago, 1933), 258.

³Solomon B. Freehof to Sidney Akselrad, 12 Sept. 1980, Freehof Papers, 435/7/2 American Jewish Archives (AJA), Cincinnati, Ohio. In this letter Freehof also claims that Zalman Ber was a direct descendant of the first Lubavitcher Rebbe.

⁴Shklov was a center of Chabad Hasidism by the second decade of the nineteenth century. (David Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov* [New York: New York University Press, 1995], 7–15.) Chernigev, in northern Ukraine, also became a Chabad center after two sons of the third Rebbe, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson (1789–1866, known as the "Zemach Zedek,") established their own courts in towns in the Chernigev district: Israel Noah (1816–1883) in Nezhin (or Nejin), and Yosef Yitzhak (1819–1876) in Ovrutsh.

⁵Freehof to Jacob Rader Marcus, 8 October 1982, 435/1/1, AJA. All of Freehof's extant family and childhood reminiscences are either in this letter, an undated biographical questionnaire that he completed for the American Jewish Archives (435/1/1) or in Kenneth J. Weiss's interview with him (Freehof, Solomon B., interview by Kenneth J. Weiss, 23 June 1978, C-72, AJA).

⁶"An opshtam fun di Lubavitsher rebeyim, a produkt fun der idisher un algemayner kultureler velt, fun Abaye un Rava un Marx un Kropotkin, eyner fun di ershte kempfer in di shuros fun dem sotziyalistish-tziyonistishen gedank..." Dovid Pinsky, "Bimkom forvort—a par verter fun Dovid Pinsky." Moshe [Morris] Freilacoff, *Geklibene Shriftn* (Atlanta, 1938), 5.

Perhaps Freehof himself tried to trace his ancestry, for he owned a copy of the Yiddish translation of *Beit Rabi*, an account of the Lubavitcher dynasty, published by Z. Sh. Shereberg (Vilna, 1904). The volume today is in the stacks of the Klau Library of HUC in Cincinnati. At the top of the title page is the signature "Solomon B. Freehof August 1915" and below it is another: "J.R. Marcus April 1921."

⁷In a letter to Jacob Rader Marcus, Freehof wrote that he had, for example, a cousin named Boris Fridkin, "who was (don't jump) the manager of a Cossack Dancing Team!" Telling his old friend Jake Marcus "don't jump" when mentioning a Cossack dance troupe is typical of Freehof's humor. Freehof to Jacob Rader Marcus, 8 October 1982, 435/1/1, AJA.

⁸Avraham Hanokh Glitzenshtein, *Sefer Ha-Toldot Admor MHRSh*^B (Brooklyn: Otzar Ha-Hasidim, 1976), *passim*.

⁹HUC Faculty minutes of 12 September 1910 reveal that among the new students admitted is a "Solomon Frelikoff," but by October 1911 College records refer to him as "Freehof." Hebrew Union College Papers, 5/6/3, B-3, AJA. Of the siblings, only his brother Morris and sister Esther retained the old name; the rest also went by Freehof.

¹⁰Telephone conversation with Rabbi A. Stanley Dreyfus, 25 March 2002. I am grateful to Rabbi Dreyfus for informing me of the College's actions in this regard and giving me several examples.

¹¹A 1954 letter to his brother Morris Freilacoff was addressed to "Maurice Freehof," and a letter to his sister went to "Esther Freehof." Freehof to Maurice Freehof, Washington, DC, 29 November 1954, Freehof Files, F Miscellaneous 1954-55, Rodef Shalom Congregation, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Freehof to Miss Esther Freehof, Baltimore, Maryland, 12 September 1978, 435/2/7, AJA.

¹²Freehof to Jacob Rader Marcus, 8 October 1982, 435/1/1, AJA; Kenneth J. Weiss, “Solomon B. Freehof—Reforging the Links: An Approach to the Authenticity of the Reform Rabbi in the Modern World,” D.H.L. dissertation (Los Angeles: HUC-JIR, 1980), 10.

¹³The Baltimore City Directories for 1936, 1937, and 1940 list him as “Reverend Isaac Freilachoff, rabbi Lubawitz Nusach Ari Congregation.” Photocopies from Baltimore City Directories, courtesy of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland.

¹⁴For details on the life and career of Rabbi Hayim Zundel Maccoby (1856–1916), known as the Maggid of Kamenets after a two-year stint as that community’s preacher, see Hayim Reuven Rabinowitz, *Diyok’na’ot shel Darshanim* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 1967), 297ff.; *Entziklopedia shel haTziyonit Hadatit*, ed. Yitzhak Raphael, Vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1965), 501ff.; and Ehud Luz, *Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 110.

¹⁵For example, the second group of BILU pioneers to immigrate to Palestine included a young man from Shklov only five years older than Isaac Freilichoff, and among the signers of a letter from another BILU group waiting to leave Kharkov in February 1882 there is listed one Ya’akov Barukh of Chernigov. A Hibbat Zion society was established in Chernigov in 1887, the year of Freilichoff’s marriage in that city. A year later there was also a Hibbat Zion society in Nezhin. Shulamit Laskov, ed., *Documents on the History of Hibbat-Zion and the Settlement of Eretz Israel*, (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University/Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Me’uchad Publishing House Ltd., 1982), Vol. I, 262 and 150–151; Vol. V, 220–221; Vol. VI, 160.

¹⁶One of his British-born cousins, he reminisced, was Dr. J. Louis Blonstein, O.B.E. (named for the same *zeyde* Yehuda Leib as Freehof’s brother Louis, the grandfather who was Freehof’s first teacher as a child), who bore a close physical resemblance to Freehof. He was knighted, continued Freehof, “not for being a good doctor—a *nekhigte tog!*” — but for being the head of the British amateur boxing association. He had been a boxer and had pioneered specialized medicine for the care of boxers. C-72, AJA.

¹⁷Solomon B. Freehof, *Reform Jewish Practice and its Rabbinic Background*, Vols. I & II (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1963), 10–11; Solomon B. Freehof, *Modern Reform Responsa* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1971), 5–8.

¹⁸The quality of this neighborhood may be judged by the fact that in 1888, only four years before Solomon Freehof’s birth, Jack the Ripper murdered Annie Chapman in the yard of 25 Hanbury Street.

¹⁹Sir Samuel Montagu, father of Lily Montagu, was the Member of Parliament for the East End from 1885–1900 and a fierce advocate for the east European Jews within the native Jewish community, of which he was a leading member.

²⁰In his 1978 interview Freehof said that he was born and grew up at 5 Black Lion Yard, a one-block street that runs from Whitechapel Road to Montague Street. On this occasion he also talked about visiting his childhood home in the decades after World War II. The formerly Jewish immigrant neighborhood was now all Pakistani, though some Jewish jewelers remained there. In the 1950s, he recalled, he was eating in a kosher restaurant there and met an Orthodox rabbi who wore a Roman collar. This led him to remark that J. Leonard Levy, his predecessor at Rodef Shalom, also wore one when he first came to his pulpit in Stockton, California. The English rabbis thought nothing of it “but to us it looks so goyish.” C-72, AJA.

²¹Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870–1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960), 221–229.

²²The Jewish Working Lads’ Brigade was the brainchild of the eccentric and colorful Colonel Albert Michael Goldsmid. Goldsmid, born Albert Edward Goldsmid in India in 1846, was the son of a high-ranking British military officer of German Jewish origins who had converted to Christianity. In 1866, the young Goldsmid received his officer’s commission; in 1870, he returned formally to Judaism and from then on created quite a stir as a Jewishly observant officer in the British Army. He was an early and active adherent of Hibbat Zion in Britain and was the model for the title character of George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*. In 1895 he convinced

the Maccabees, a Jewish intellectual society of which he was a member, to establish the Jewish Working Lads' Brigade, which promoted physical fitness and camping skills among the boys of the East End. Taking off from the "muscular Christianity" model of the Church Lads' Brigade, it was a sort of proto-Scouting movement that emphasized quasi-military training combined with a Zionist outlook. At its height it enrolled perhaps 1,500 boys. Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 174, and Elhanan Oren, *Hibbat Tziyon Bi-Britannia 1878–1898* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University/Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Me'uchad, 1974), 28ff., 96.

²³Amos Elon describes the scene as follows: "On July 12 [1896] Herzl addressed an excited crowd at the Jewish Workingmen's Club of Whitechapel; the meeting had been called by its young organizers in defiance of the existing communal leadership. Only a fraction of the huge, sweltering crowd gained admission to the hall. As in Sofia, the sheer glamour of Herzl's presence and the magic appeal of his message—"We are a *people, one people*"—electrified an audience already excited by their exuberant leaders." Amos Elon, *Herzl* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 207.

²⁴At this point in the interview Freehof interrupted his reminiscences to tell the old joke: Why will God serve both the *shor ha-bor* and the *liyatan* (Behemoth and Leviathan, the legendary one-of-a-kind land and sea animals) in *Gan Eden* (paradise)? Because there are Jews so *frum* (pious) that they won't trust even God's *shehitah* (kosher slaughtering) and so He has to supply them with fish. C-72, AJA.

²⁵C-72; 435/1/1, AJA.

²⁶Gerald Sorin, "A Time for Building: The Third Migration 1880–1920," in *The Jewish People in America*, ed. Henry L. Feingold, Vol. 3 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 137–142.

²⁷Philip Kahn, Jr., *A Stitch in Time: The Four Seasons of Baltimore's Needle Trades* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1989), 79 and Appendix 11.

²⁸See "Directory of Local Jewish Organizations in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book 1907–1908* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1907), 192–200.

²⁹1910 U.S. Census, National Archives microfilm series T624, reel 553, courtesy of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland. Like many immigrants, however, the Freilichoffs rented space to relatives to make ends meet. The record reveals that in addition to Isaac and Goldie [sic] Freilachhoff [sic] and six of their children, the house was occupied by renters Morris Freilachhoff, age forty-two, a ladies' tailor; his wife Bessie, age thirty; and their children Hyman, age seven, and Nathan, age four.

In April 1910, when the census worker recorded the particulars of the Freilichoff family, Isaac and Goldie [Golda] were respectively forty-three and forty-one years old and had been married for twenty-three years. He was self-employed; his occupation was "Jewish Rabbi" and his place of employment was "Church." He and all of his children were listed as able to speak English; Goldie was listed as speaking "Hebrew." All were literate. Isaac had immigrated in 1902; Goldie and all the children arrived in 1903. The children were: Jeanne (or Jane), age nineteen, employed as a "Vest Baster" in a factory, unemployed for a total of eight weeks in 1909; Solomon, age eighteen, employed as a teacher in a "Hebrew school" and a school attendee at least part time since September 1909; Ada, age fifteen, neither employed nor enrolled in school; Esther, age twelve, and Fannie, age eight, both in school; and Louis, age six and not yet enrolled in school.

The "Hebrew school" at which Solomon was a teacher at that time must have been the new Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA), where he volunteered his services, according to a news article. ("Good Old Days' of J.E.A. Clubs To Be Recalled At Reunion," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, 27 September 1955, n.p.). The JEA was formed in 1910 out of the merger of the Maccabean Society and the Daughters of Israel, two uptown organizations that provided educational and recreational activities for East Baltimore's immigrant Jewish children. It also conducted night classes for adults in English language and other subjects. I am grateful to Mendy Gunter of the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore for sending me a photocopy of this article.

³⁰A.D. Glushakow, “Baltimore—The Cradle of American Zionism,” in *Pictorial History of Maryland Jewry* (Baltimore: Jewish Voice Publishing Company, 1955), 143.

³¹Dr. Herman Seidel, “Baltimore: Corner Stone of Labor Zionism,” in Glushakow, *Pictorial History*, 148.

³²When the 1910 census was taken, Morris was already living in Washington, DC, where he was active in Poale Zion (*Jewish Comment*, 12 November 1909, 92; and 10 December 1909, 156). Morris became a Yiddishist because the proletariat was Yiddish-speaking. According to his niece, Teresa Schwartz, Morris “moved in very different circles” from the rest of the family, though relations among them were always warm. He had “a very Jewish home” but did not attend synagogue. Although he went to law school in Washington, DC, he never practiced law; instead, he wrote for the Yiddish socialist newspaper *Der Tog* and was its circulation manager for the southern United States, which entailed a great deal of travel. He and his wife had four children, so he had to work hard to support the family. (Teresa [Mrs. Efre] Schwartz, daughter of Ada Freehof Klein, Monroeville, Pennsylvania. Telephone interview with Joan S. Friedman, 12 December 2000). He is the author of a Yiddish-language biography of the Italian republican hero Giuseppe Mazzini.

When Yitzhak Ben Zvi came to the United States during the World War I, he lived with Morris in Washington, DC. Freehof wrote to Jacob Rader Marcus: “You know Ben Zvi, who later became President of Israel, and Ben Gurion both left Palestine during the English war and came to America for security. Ben Zvi lived with my brother Morris in Washington for a whole year and Father looked upon him as another son. Later on, when Father moved to live out his old age in Israel, Ben Zvi had become President of Israel, and Father visited him so often that he married Father off, and that is the way I happened to get a stepmother!” Solomon B. Freehof to Jacob Rader Marcus, 8 October 1982, 435/1/1, AJA.

³³A questionnaire circulated by Jacob Rader Marcus asked the question, “How ‘Jewish’ were your ancestors? What was their relation to the synagogue and to religious life?” Freehof’s response was, “Oy! We are descendants of Snear [sic] Zalman founder of Chabad. & father was a Sofer & a Mohel. How Jewish!!!” (Undated questionnaire, 435/1/1, AJA). Isaac Freilichoff advertised his skills in the *Baltimore Amerikaner*, a Yiddish-language weekly that was published between 1908 and 1910. Almost every week’s edition for those two years carried a prominent bilingual box advertisement for the ritual circumcision services of “Rev. I. Freilichoff, 117 S. Exeter St.” The advertisement warned people, “*Makht keyn misteyk ven ir broikht a moyl* [Don’t make a mistake if you need a *mohel*].” *Baltimore Amerikaner* (6 March 1908): 4.

³⁴C-72, AJA. The following information on Freehof’s parents comes from the same source.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷In responding to a congregant’s inquiry concerning the origins of Hanukkah gelt, he explained this, adding, “As a boy I used to receive five pennies, but by now Mrs. Freehof has gotten me up to five dollar bills!” Freehof to Miss Henrietta Chotiner, 28 December 1981, 435/2/7, AJA.

³⁸For example, in 1978 Freehof wrote to his sister Esther: “You realize that this is the second question in Jewish religious law and custom which you have asked me. Both of them deal with questions of *milchig* and *fleischig*. . . . Even though I found some Orthodox authority justifying my decision, you were still a little uneasy about it because you suspected my Reform tendency of being too liberal.

“That explains why in asking me your second question . . . last week, you prefaced it with a warning that you wanted an *Orthodox* opinion. . . .

“Since this decision is so logical that you will be suspicious of it, there is a definite decision by a leading American Orthodox authority, Moshe Feinstein, which . . . is about a related situation which can well apply to yours.” Freehof to Miss Esther Freehof [sic], Baltimore, Maryland, 12 September 1978, 435/2/7, AJA.

³⁹Teresa (Mrs. Efre) Schwartz, daughter of Ada Freehof Klein, Monroeville, Pennsylvania, telephone interview by Joan S. Friedman, 12 December 2000; Baltimore City Directories 1936, 1937, 1940, 1942, 1956, 1958, 1961, 1964. Faye Freehof was the author of “Forever and —,” 1929, and “The Little Lost Tree,” 1945. Directory of American Women Playwrights, www.geocities.com/Broadway/Alley/5379/1900FoFy.html (accessed 15 December 2000). She died in the mid-1970s. Freehof, *Reform Responsa for Our Time* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1977), v. This page bears the dedication “To the dear and unforgettable memory of my beloved sister Faye Evelyn Freehof.”

⁴⁰The following history of the Baltimore Talmud Torah is from Raymond Bloom, “History of Jewish Education in Baltimore During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” doctoral dissertation (Dropsie University, 1972) unless otherwise noted.

⁴¹*American Jewish Year Book* 7 (1905–1906): 222.

⁴²William Rosenau, “Reminiscences,” *HUC Monthly* 8 (December 1921): 54–59 and (January 1922): 83–86.

⁴³Allan Schwartzman, “William Rosenau: His Life and Work,” Rabbinic Thesis (HUC-JIR, 1955), 6.

⁴⁴Louis F. Cahn, *History of Oheb Shalom 1853–1953* (Baltimore: Oheb Shalom Congregation, 1953), 42; Isidore Blum, *The Jews of Baltimore* (Historical Review Publishing Co., 1910), 20; Isaac Fein, *The Making of a Jewish Community: The History of Baltimore Jewry from 1773 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1971), 117.

⁴⁵Sermon, 9 January 1909, William Rosenau Papers, 41/4/1, AJA.

⁴⁶Hymen Saye, “The Baltimore Talmud Torah,” *Generations: Jewish Historical Society of Maryland* 2, n. 1 (June 1981): 14–15.

⁴⁷Ps. 19:13: “Who can be aware of errors?” Freehof’s translation is tongue-in-cheek.

⁴⁸C-72, AJA.

⁴⁹Solomon Bennett Freehof, interview by Michael A. Meyer, 9 March 1973, Tape 1203, AJA.

⁵⁰Mel Scult, “Schechter’s Seminary,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, Vol. I (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 76.

⁵¹C-72, AJA.

⁵²While Freehof did not indicate what he studied with Rosenau, the latter has provided posterity with an explicit description of his recruiting and training procedures. In April 1921 the College’s Board of Governors, concerned about declining enrollments, sent a letter to all CCAR members urging them to be aggressive in recruiting suitable candidates for the rabbinate. The letter included a written statement by William Rosenau describing his method:

“Before I prepare anyone I endeavor to find out by an examination of the young man’s antecedents and his ideals as to whether he is fit to enter the calling of the Rabbi. Again I should like to observe that in preparing boys I ignore entirely previous attainments and follow the curriculum of the Hebrew Union College as published in the latest catalogue of the Institution, advancing from grade to grade in my instruction. Moreover, I prefer to train such men who have gone thru [sic] or are about to complete the high school, inasmuch as I would rather send students of more matured minds to the Hebrew Union College than boys of 14 or 15 years of age. The reasons are certainly apparent to you without specification on my part.” Abba Hillel Silver Papers, Microfilm Roll #28, folder 661, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

⁵³C-72, AJA.

⁵⁴5/6/3, AJA.

⁵⁵Michael A. Meyer, “A Centennial History,” in *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, ed. Samuel E. Karff (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1976), 20.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁷Ibid., 51ff.

⁵⁸Ibid., 60.

⁵⁹Jacob Tarshish wrote of its “droning, sooty neighborhood windows” and Jacob Rader Marcus noted that the College was located at “724 Sixth St. Negro district. Awful odor.” Jacob Tarshish, “History of the Class of ’15,” *HUC Monthly* 2 (June 1915): 46; Diary entry, 15 May 1912, Jacob Rader Marcus Papers, 210/13/1, AJA.

⁶⁰Tarshish, “History,” 46.

⁶¹A favorite student trick was to go into the bathroom stalls, lock them, crawl out, and then wait as the professors rushed to use them between classes. Stanley Brav, ed., *Telling Tales Out of School* (Cincinnati: HUC-JIR Alumni Association, 1965), 13.

⁶²Tarshish, “History”: 47.

⁶³Simon Cohen, “Reminiscences,” *HUC Monthly* 8 (June 1922): 230–231.

⁶⁴This is not a non sequitur on Simon Cohen’s part. He is describing a typical urban saloon of the type that infuriated Prohibitionists. Such establishments customarily served free meals to their clientele while making their money from the alcohol they consumed. Establishments such as these in ethnic and immigrant neighborhoods also frequently served as informal gathering places for machine politicians and their supporters, thus making them a target for Progressives, as well. No wonder the students lacked a certain prestige before their move uptown!

⁶⁵Brav, *Telling Tales*, 15.

⁶⁶*HUC Monthly* 2 (June 1915): 8–11.

⁶⁷Ibid., 61.

⁶⁸Meyer, “A Centennial History,” 60, 73, 82.

⁶⁹Tape 1203, AJA.

⁷⁰Jacob Rader Marcus, interview by Michael A. Meyer, 27 February 1974, Tape 1204, AJA.

⁷¹Nathan Perilman quoted in Brav, *Telling Tales*, 112.

⁷²Tape 1203, AJA.

⁷³Tape 1203, AJA.

⁷⁴Tarshish, “History”: 46.

⁷⁵Victor Reichert, interview by Michael A. Meyer, 15 February 1974, Tape 1203 and 1205, AJA.

⁷⁶Tape 1205, AJA.

⁷⁷Reichert, who entered the College in 1920 when Kohler was already old and growing feeble, nevertheless recalled being moved by the power of his preaching, and Freehof said of his preaching, “He was a blazing fire.” Tapes 1203 and 1205, AJA.

⁷⁸Tape 1205, AJA. Jacob Rader Marcus’s diary contains several disparaging references to David Philipson, such as this from Saturday, 30 March 1912: “Founders Day ... Kohler spoke 40 min ... Philipson benedicted. (Crowed 4 times.)” As a senior student he was invited to dine at the Philipsons’ and commented acidly that “the meal was good but portions were small. They don’t overeat.” (Diary entry, 30 March 1912, 210/13/1,4, AJA). In later years Marcus’s opinion of Philipson must have softened; the two eventually established a good relationship, and after Philipson’s death Marcus honored him by wearing his robe at graduation. (Email communication from Jonathan Sarna to Frederic Krome, forwarded to Joan S. Friedman, 1 November 2005.)

⁷⁹Tape 1203, AJA.

⁸⁰210/13/1, AJA.

⁸¹Meyer, “A Centennial History,” 57–58.

⁸²“ [Monday 1 April 1912:] Went to school. All quite. [sic] No College erev Passover. Returned home. Studied very little—4: Walked to Dr. Grossman [sic]. Very rainy weather. Met J. Bloch there. Rode back. First Seder— No service, no ceremony— nothing. Retired 9:30.”

“ [Tuesday 2 April 1912:] Rode to Temple. Today is **חמ"א**. Dr. Grossman [sic] spoke. O.K. Rode home. Read Camille & M. Wolfenstein. Eat nuts. Talked to Rosen & Rosenberg. Did not study at night. Same seder. I drank no wine. Retire 9:30.” 210/13/1, AJA.

⁸³Tape 1203, AJA. Meyer then asked, “A student was not allowed to worship with a hat?” and Freehof replied, “No, absolutely not.”

⁸⁴5/B-3, AJA. Freehof later recalled, “Dr. Deutsch almost threw me out because I spelled ‘Mendelssohn’ with ... one s.” Tape 1203, AJA. See also Tarshish, “History,” 46–48.

⁸⁵Professor of Education Franzblau was commissioned to do a survey of the rabbinic student body for the years 1904–1929, which was published as Abraham Franzblau, *A Quarter Century of Rabbinical Training at the HUC* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1931). He had his own obscure system for determining cumulative averages. His notations can be seen on the transcripts of the students in his study, including Silver, Freehof, and Marcus. The only classes in which Freehof earned less than a ninety were two semesters of Buttenwieser’s Biblical Exegesis, and then he received G+, meaning eighty-five to ninety. HUC Student Transcripts, Microfilm #118, AJA.

⁸⁶Minutes of faculty meetings, 23 January 1914, 20 June 1914, 5/B-3; *HUC Monthly* 2 (June 1915): 6–7, 58.

⁸⁷Minutes of faculty meeting, 17 October 1911, 5/B-3, AJA. On 19 April 1912 Max Heavenrich of Saginaw wrote to Isaac Bloom, Secretary of the HUC Board of Governors: “For the Holidays we would like to receive the services of Solomon Freehof, as he has given us excelent [sic] satisfaction and the congregation would be most pleased to have him with us again. Would you kindly request Dr. Kohler to assign him to Saginaw?” Bloom responded that he saw no reason why Dr. Kohler would not comply with this request. Max Heavenrich to Isaac Bloom, 19 April 1912, and Isaac Bloom to Max Heavenrich, 23 April 1912, 5/8/1, AJA.

⁸⁸S.J. Michelson to Kaufmann Kohler, 22 April 1913, 5/8/1: “Now, Dr. Koehler [sic], in strict confidence, we do not want the student you sent us last year, as he was not at all satisfactory in more ways than one. Firstly, he could not deliver a lecture at all, and, secondly, he was not personally liked. We want a student who can deliver a lecture without having to continually refer to his notes. In fact, we prefer one who could deliver a sermon without the aid of notes.” Bloom replied that they would keep this in mind when assignments were made. On the carbon of this letter someone penciled in “Freehof.” A subsequent letter from June 1913 informs them that Dr. Kohler has assigned Solomon Freehof to Cairo and assures them that “Mr. Freehof has given satisfaction in all that he has undertaken and you will no doubt be pleased with his services.” Isaac Bloom to S.J. Michelson, 29 April 1913 and 3 June 1913, 5/8/1, AJA.

The College was, of course, advertising itself through the students it sent to these small congregations, so President Kohler was quite concerned that the students reflected well on the institution. Although he himself spoke with a heavy German accent that the students mocked, he was very reluctant to assign High Holy Day pulpits to students who spoke with east European accents. In July 1915 he wrote from his vacation home to Henry Englander: “[A]s to Linfield I can not change my opinion and jeopardize the interests of the College by sending him anywhere as *reader* or *preacher* unless the Congregation is *directly* informed that he has a *strong foreign accent* and if this *not be considered* an obstacle we would send him. Otherwise I am decidedly against it.” Kaufmann Kohler to Henry Englander, 17 July 1915, 5/2/7, AJA.

⁸⁹Henry Englander to I. Isaacson, 3 June 1914, 5/B-8, AJA.

⁹⁰Correspondence between Samuel Horchow, Portsmouth, Ohio, and Henry Englander, April 1914, 5/8/1, AJA.

⁹¹Freehof to Henry Englander, [September?] 1914, 5/6/6; Freehof to Englander, 5/6/4; Freehof to Englander, 5/12/3; Minutes of faculty meetings, 6 October 1914, 29 May 1915, 5/B-3, AJA.

⁹²“Amongst Ourselves,” *HUC Monthly* 1 (December 1914): 29.

⁹³As the first program of the fall 1913 semester, this topic was definitely chosen for its timeliness. In March 1911 the mutilated body of a Ukrainian boy had been found in a cave outside Kiev; four months later the police had arrested a Jew, Mendel Beilis, and charged him with ritual murder. Despite worldwide protests from governments, scientists, clergymen, and other persons of distinction, Beilis was imprisoned for two years before being put on trial in September and October of 1913. The czarist government’s anti-Semitic case fell apart in the courtroom and a jury composed of Russian peasants acquitted Beilis, who promptly left the country with his family.

⁹⁴Biographies of new ordinees, *HUC Monthly* 2 (June 1915): 6; Simon Cohen, “Reminiscences,” *HUC Monthly* 8 (June 1922): 228.

⁹⁵“The Literary Society,” *HUC Monthly* 1 (June 1914): 28–29.

⁹⁶Diary entry, 6 February 1912, 210/13/1, AJA.

⁹⁷Diary entry, 23 March 1914, 210/13/1, AJA.

⁹⁸AJA Microfilm #118; Brav, *Telling Tales*, 13. Voorsanger was so upset by the United States’ entry into World War I that he resigned his pulpit and enlisted in a military hospital unit. Elkan Cohn Voorsanger Papers, 256/1/2, AJA.

⁹⁹256/1/4, AJA.

¹⁰⁰Brickner, born in 1892, grew up on New York’s Lower East Side and was a member of the Dr. Herzl Zion Club established by Abba Hillel Silver. Brickner served as rabbi of Cleveland’s Euclid Avenue Temple for almost forty years and worked closely with Freehof during World War II on military chaplaincy matters. After his untimely death in an automobile accident, his widow wrote Freehof: “I don’t know whether you know it, but you are my rabbi.” Rebecca Brickner, Cleveland, Ohio, to Freehof, 11 June 1958, RS “Condolence Calls & Letters 1957–58”; Rabbi Balfour Brickner, telephone interview by Joan S. Friedman, 18 January 2001.

¹⁰¹Rabbi Malcolm Stern related that Lauterbach used to visit the Freehofs annually. “Each year Laudy would browse through the Freehof library. If he found a current work that he wanted, Laudy would announce, ‘Dis I take!’ If his choice fell on a rare volume of medieval responsa which he knew was close to Sol Freehof’s heart, Laudy’s announcement would be, ‘Dis I borrow!’ After Laudy’s demise, Dr. Morgenstern wrote Dr. Freehof that he found a book with Sol’s name in it among Laudy’s effects and inquired as to its ownership. Sol’s reply was, ‘I don’t know whether the volume in question was in the category of “Dis I take” or “Dis I borrow,” but I can assure you, it’s mine!’” Brav, *Telling Tales*, 117.

¹⁰²Marc Lee Raphael, *Abba Hillel Silver: A Profile in American Judaism* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1989), 75; Rabbi Balfour Brickner, telephone interview by Joan S. Friedman, 18 January 2001.

¹⁰³Diary entries, 2 March 1912, 14 April 1912, 1 June 1912, 210/13/1, AJA.

¹⁰⁴See Isaac Mayer Wise’s President’s Message and the CCAR resolution condemning Zionism, *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook (CCARY)* 8 (1897): x–xii, xli.

¹⁰⁵For a different view of Kohler see Ya’akov Ariel, “Kaufmann Kohler and His Attitude Toward Zionism: A Reexamination,” *American Jewish Archives* 43, n. 2 (1991): 207–223. However, I believe he fails to make his case. He can demonstrate only that Kohler supported efforts to settle persecuted Russian Jews in Palestine—something that many committed Reform anti-Zionists supported on humanitarian grounds. Kohler frequently and vehemently expressed his opposition to both political and cultural Zionism. For example, Jacob Rader Marcus recorded that at the 1912 Founder’s Day commemoration Kohler “roasted Zionism & Ahad Ha’am.” (diary entry, 30 March 1912, 210/13/1, AJA). Less than three years later, at the formal opening exercises of the 1915–1916 academic year, he bemoaned the rise of Zionism and the decline of Jewish religiosity in an address that was reprinted in the *HUC Monthly*. Kaufmann Kohler, “The Views and Principles of American Reform Judaism and Its Outlook in These Critical Times,” *HUC Monthly* 2 (November 1915): 71–75.

- ¹⁰⁶See Melvin Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), chs. 4–6.
- ¹⁰⁷Undated written account of the incident by one of the students involved, James Heller Papers, 147/1/3, AJA.
- ¹⁰⁸Meyer, “A Centennial History,” 78.
- ¹⁰⁹*At-bash*, a form of Hebrew wordplay that kabbalists used frequently to derive additional meanings from a text, substitutes for the letters *alef* through *taf* their counterparts from *taf* to *alef*. *Alef* becomes *taf*, *bet* becomes *shin*, and so forth. Hence the name *at-bash*: א"ת ב"ש.
- ¹¹⁰Rabbi Harvey E. Wessel to Edward P. Cohn, Tyler, Texas, 26 July 1973, SC-5477, AJA.
- ¹¹¹Rabbi Balfour Brickner, telephone interview by Joan S. Friedman, 18 January 2001.
- ¹¹²Diary entries, 23 March 1914, 24 March 1914, 9 May 1914, 210/13/1, AJA. Jacob Rader Marcus’s diary further indicates that the fraternity was still active in 1920 and that he was still opposed to their attempts to control student body politics. Unfortunately for us, he never articulated the reasons for his opposition.
- ¹¹³Ibid.
- ¹¹⁴Jacob Rader Marcus “heard a dandy sermon by Abe Silver, on Social Service” in January 1914 (diary entry, 24 January 1914, 210/13/1, AJA) and Heller’s sermon on Zionism, delivered 29 May 1915, was reprinted in the *HUC Monthly* 2 (March 1916): 188–205.
- ¹¹⁵Diary entry, 10 January 1914, 210/13/1, AJA.
- ¹¹⁶A photograph of the 1914–1915 *HUC Monthly* Executive Committee shows Silver and Freehof seated with three other students standing behind them, but there is no way to know whether this reflects Freehof’s actual place in the journal’s hierarchy or merely the fact that he and Silver were both seniors. *HUC Monthly* 2 (June 1915): n.p.
- ¹¹⁷Max Heller, “Casuistry in Reform Judaism,” *HUC Monthly* 1 (November 1914): 17–21.
- ¹¹⁸Editorial: “Responsa,” *HUC Monthly* 1, n. 2 (November 1914): 2–3.
- ¹¹⁹Abba Hillel Silver, “Sermon,” 22 January 1923, *Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (PUAHC)* 10 (1921–1925): 9228; “The Democratic Impulse in Jewish History,” *CCARY* 38 (1928): 199–216; and “Israel,” *CCARY* 45 (1935): 312–342, especially 332–338.
- ¹²⁰Joan S. Friedman, “The Writing of Reform Jewish Practice and Its Rabbinic Background,” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal* 51, n. 3 (Summer 2004): 31–71.
- ¹²¹“For A College Press,” *HUC Monthly* 1 (February 1915): 17.
- ¹²²Solomon B. Freehof, “The Institution of Ordination,” Rabbinic Thesis (HUC, 1915), title page.
- ¹²³Elkan Voorsanger to Freehof, 256/1/4, AJA. For some reason the letter was never sent.
- ¹²⁴The extant record book is a loose-leaf notebook with photocopied pages. The outside cover bears Freehof’s hand lettered label: “1054 Weddings by S.B.F.” Inside, the title page reads: רשימת קדושין שנדרו על ידי \ הצעיר זלמן דוב בר' יצחק צבי \ המכונה פריהאף \ מהיום א' בשבת פרשת תצוה יום ט' בחודש \ אדר ראשון בשנת תרעו לפ"קספר 435/2/2, AJA.
- ¹²⁵*HUC Monthly* 1 (January 1915): 15.
- ¹²⁶The gradual shift in opinion from neutrality to support for Wilson’s ultimate entry into the war is evident in the records of the CCAR conventions during the war years. In the summer of 1915 the rabbis still maintained a neutral stance and condemned jingoism; by 1918 it was clear that they had adopted the Wilsonian view of a war to make the world safe for democracy. See “Report of the Committee on Contemporaneous History” and “President’s Message,” *CCARY* 25 (1915): 65ff., 145, and “President’s Message,” *CCARY* 28 (1918): 159–162.
- ¹²⁷*HUC Monthly* 4 (1918): 33. War sentiment was not unanimous, however. See G.A. Dobbert, “The Ordeal of Gotthard Deutsch,” *American Jewish Archives* 20 (1968): 129–155.

¹²⁸Earl Stover, *Up From Handymen: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1865–1920* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977), 150 and footnote ad loc.

¹²⁹Cyrus Adler, “An Account of the Origins of the Jewish Welfare Board,” in *Lectures, Selected Papers, Addresses* (Philadelphia: privately printed, 1933), 219–220.

¹³⁰Louis Barish, “The American Jewish Chaplaincy,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 52 (September 1962): 12; Lee Levinger, *A Jewish Chaplain in France* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 82.

¹³¹Minutes of faculty meeting, 15 October 1918, 5/B-3, AJA; Certificate of Military Service, issued by National Personnel Records Center, National Archives and Records Administration, St. Louis, Missouri, 30 April 1998, sent to Joan S. Friedman.

¹³²Adler, “Origins,” 227; Julian Morgenstern to Israel Bettan, 19 April 1919, Israel Bettan Papers, 618/5/3, AJA; Benjamin Friedman to Jacob Rader Marcus, 22 January 1985, SC-3775, AJA.

¹³³One of the reasons Pershing was so insistent on recruiting chaplains was for this express purpose, about which he was a “fanatic.” Stover, *Handymen*, 201.

¹³⁴“On Saturday [night], 1 March 1919 Nathan Levine of Brooklyn, New York, Troop M, 3rd Cavalry, married Fortunée Karsenty of Paris (originally of Algiers), daughter of Maklouf Karsenty and Dju—a [illegible] Ben Danon at Bourbon les Bains, France,” 435/7/7, AJA. Of his training, Freehof noted humorously many years later that it “did not teach me much, but I never expected too much from schools and I was satisfied that it did not do me harm.” Freehof to Walter Jacob, 20 September 1955, “Dr. Freehof Personal,” Rodef Shalom Congregation Archives, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹³⁵Stover, *Handymen*, 196ff.; Levinger, *Jewish Chaplain*, passim; Gen. John J. Pershing and Lt. Gen. Hunter Liggett, *Report of the First Army American Expeditionary Forces: Organization and Operations* (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: The General Services Press, 1923), 91. Chaplain Israel Bettan was stationed at Third Army Headquarters at Coblenz for four months in the winter of 1919. His commanding officer wrote in his Officer’s Record Book that there were “about 4,000 Soldiers of the Jewish faith in the Army scattered throughout the area, making it difficult to minister to them” and that Bettan had been “untiring” in his efforts (618/6/10, AJA). To assist the Jewish chaplains in their constant travels, the JWB provided each with an automobile. We must presume that Freehof also had a driver, since it is well known that he never learned to drive.

¹³⁶Oral communication from Rabbi Walter Jacob, Rodef Shalom Congregation, January 1997.

¹³⁷“Student Notes,” *HUC Monthly* 6 (November 1919): 26, 28.

¹³⁸Certificate of Military Service, issued by National Personnel Records Center, National Archives and Records Administration, St. Louis, Missouri, 30 April 1998, sent to Joan S. Friedman.

¹³⁹Julian Morgenstern to Israel Bettan, 19 April 1919, 618/5/3, AJA.

¹⁴⁰*HUC Monthly* 9 (November 1922): 27. A humorous column of faculty sayings titled “Famous Sayings of Famous Men” quotes him thus: “It took over 2,000 years to create our marvelous liturgy, but it only takes the D Grade one day to kill it.” *HUC Monthly* 10 (May 1924): 23.

¹⁴¹Minutes of faculty meetings, 23 December 1920, 5/B-3, AJA. In 1922 a report on the school’s basketball team noted that, “Doctor Freehof, an old admirer of the game, will be with us again this year. His advice and hints on basketball are just as valuable as his ‘Rashi’ and ‘Liturgy.’” “A New Era,” *HUC Monthly* 9 (December 1922): 27.

The *HUC Monthly* contains a number of humorous references to Freehof’s ping pong playing, and in the 1923–1924 collection “Songs and Yells of the Hebrew Union College Student Body,” one of the humorous song parodies about student life advises that any student who wants a scholarship should “make each teacher think he’s fine/ So do not act fresh or flip / If you don’t want to get in wrong / (Just) let Freehof beat in ping pong.” 5/7/12, AJA.

¹⁴²210/13/3, AJA.

¹⁴³For example, the report of the Commission on Social Justice to the 1920 CCAR convention called strenuously for justice for industrial workers but also “condemn[ed] all slacking and sabotage, and ... maintain[ed] the welfare of the public to be supreme above the interests of any class or classes.” The report condemned equally both violence in labor disputes and governmental interference with constitutional rights of free speech and assembly. The only explicit reference to Bolsheviks in the convention record, however, merely notes that these are individuals who are hostile to all religions and that Jewish Bolsheviks are a foreign import who will disappear as they become acclimated to American conditions. “Report of the Commission on Social Justice;” Samuel Koch, “The Problem of the Unsynagogued Jew,” *CCARY*30 (1920): 88–89, 230–231.

¹⁴⁴The note in question in the *HUC Monthly* had stated that the students were trying to raise \$500 from alumni to bring leading speakers of the day to campus and that the names of the following had been submitted to Dr. Kohler for approval: Felix Adler, Mordecai Kaplan, Samuel Shulman, Stephen Wise, William Rosenau, Judah Magnes, Samuel Cohon, John H. Holmes, Felix Levy, Roger N. Baldwin, W.E.B. DuBois, Sigmund Livingston, Louis Marshall, Francis Neilson, Henry Cohen, Walter Lippman, Felix Frankfurter, Max Heller, Leo M. Franklin, Oswald G. Villard, and Ephraim Frisch. It further noted that since so many HUC students were in New York City during the summer, the Society had had summer sessions there and had met with Baldwin, Heller, Magnes, Adler, Lippman, and DuBois, as well as Percy S. Grant, Frank Harris, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. *HUC Monthly* 7 (November 1920): 22–23.

¹⁴⁵Minutes of faculty meeting, November 1920–January 1921, 5/B-3, AJA.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰210/13/3, AJA.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Isserman’s leftist sympathies never disappeared, however. He would later visit the Soviet Union and, at the 1931 CCAR convention, delivered a passionate defense of the new state’s achievements in response to a severe critique by Rabbi David Goldberg of its treatment of Judaism (“The Debacle of Religion in Russia—Judaism in the Mêlée” and Response, *CCARY* 41 [1931]: 243–283). Twenty years after that he was active in the defense of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

¹⁵³Jacob Rader Marcus and Freehof had discussed it a year earlier, for example, when Marcus was still a student: “[Fri 3/12/20] ... went down to Doerr’s and had supper with Sol Freehof. ... Freehof and I discussed a number of things. He told me of the possibility of making Philly [David Philipson] temporary president if [Kohler] gets sick and possibly president in the event that anything serious happens. Philly at the same time to hold his temple. He tells me that Philly is behind all the trouble all the time and keeps the college salaries down all because he wants to keep those people in subjection to him. He says that if Philly is elected the faculty will buck him.” After Morgenstern was appointed acting president, the politicking continued. In September 1921 he wrote, “Went to see Sol Freehof at his home. Talked College politics. He says Rosenau wants it bad but thinks Morgy will win because he is a fighter. Morgy is out now repairing his fences.... We saw Chaplin the Idle Class and Wallace Reid in the Hell Diggers. Both good.” Diary entries, 12 March 1920 and 22 September 1921, 210/13/3, AJA.

¹⁵⁴Meyer, “Centennial History,” 87; “Faculty Notes,” *HUC Monthly* 4 (November 1917): 78.

¹⁵⁵Jacob Rader Marcus, interview by Michael A. Meyer, 9 March 1973, Tapes 1203-4, AJA.

¹⁵⁶When the students told him they were thinking of going on strike to protest the treatment of Rosenberg and Isserman, Jacob Rader Marcus's diary comment was, "Fat chance the boys would have had in getting by with such an idea. You can't buck the college. Nosiree. You can't buck any big outfit unless you can completely shut it up and you can't do that with HUC." Diary entry, 3 February 1921, 210/13/3, AJA.

¹⁵⁷He corresponded at length, for example, with his former student Nelson Glueck about the problems involved in the merger of the College with the Jewish Institute of Religion. Freehof opposed the plan initially, but once it became a *fait accompli* he favored a type of merger in which the New York institution's distinct identity would disappear. When, however, it appeared that influential Reform laypeople in New York were going to found and support a rival institution rather than be completely subject to Cincinnati, Freehof suggested that Glueck head that off by allowing the JIR much more independence. Freehof to Nelson Glueck, February 1956, "Hebrew Union College 1955–56," Rodef Shalom Congregation Archives.

¹⁵⁸Minutes of faculty meetings, 23 December 1920, 26 May 1921, 15 June 1921, 5/B-3, AJA. In the end Ms. Neumark was not eligible to officiate because she did not pass all of her courses.

¹⁵⁹Diary entries, 14, 15, and 17 October 1921, 210/13/3, AJA.

¹⁶⁰Letter, Freehof to HUC Faculty, 5/6/10, AJA.

¹⁶¹"Student Activities," *HUC Monthly* 8 (May 1922): 210–211.

¹⁶²Meyer, "A Centennial History," 91.

¹⁶³C-72, AJA.

¹⁶⁴Tape 1203, AJA.

¹⁶⁵Ibid.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Tape 1205, AJA.

¹⁶⁸Balfour Brickner, telephone interview by author, 18 January 2001.

¹⁶⁹In this context it is perhaps worth noting that more than forty years later Louis Freehof observed of his brother that "the happiest times of his life is [sic] when he goes back to the College. . . ." Louis J. Freehof to Nelson Glueck, 19 January 1968, "Engagements Past 1967–68," Rodef Shalom Congregation Archives.

¹⁷⁰Solomon B. Freehof, "First Fruits," *HUC Monthly* 10 (May 1924): 4–5.

¹⁷¹See Lynn Dumenil, *Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), especially ch. IV, "The Acids of Modernity: Sacred and Secular Interpretations." Members of the CCAR bemoaned the tenor of the times at conventions throughout the 1920s. While it would be a mistake to read too much into what are perennial lamentations about the failure of the synagogue to draw more worshippers and to produce more committed Jews, nevertheless the rabbinical conventions of this decade criticized, in particular, the materialism of the age and the desiccated and overly rational Reform that could not satisfy the hunger of those who yearned for something spiritual. See, for example, Rabbi Abram Simon, "President's Message," *CCARY* 34 (1924): 129.