

Decorum in the Synagogue

1852

The Baltimore Hebrew Congregation is today one of the most notable Reform temples in America. It yields to no other congregation in decorum and dignity. This was not always true of the Baltimore temple — or, indeed, of any other old *now* decorous congregation. It is, in fact, no exaggeration to say that the members of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation a century ago would have felt very much out of place in the elegant and fashionable atmosphere of the present temple. A century ago, of course, relatively few of the congregants would have been native Americans; fewer yet, in all likelihood, would have felt comfortable with the amenities that worship demands today. Should there be any doubts on this score, the following document, taken from the Minutes of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, 1851-1865 — Vol. 1, should set them to rest.

April 12th [1852].

It was resolved:

To call out next week in the synagogue 1) that it is from now and further not allowed to any member or stranger to leave the synagogue from the time the *Sefer Torah* is out of the *Ha Kol* [ark] till the whole service is over without the permission of the president or one of the officers; 2) that nobody shall stay on the pavement of the synagogue during divine worship; 3) that nobody shall shaw [chew] tobacco in the synagogue.

In each of these three cases the traverser shall pay a fine of 50 cents.