

SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITIES

# CINCINNATI

## Then & Now



### PART I

## *Jewish Cincinnati and the Legacy of Harav Eliezer Silver, zt”l*

BY DEVORAH KLEIN

Rabbi Pam and students in front of the newly acquired second building of CHDS.

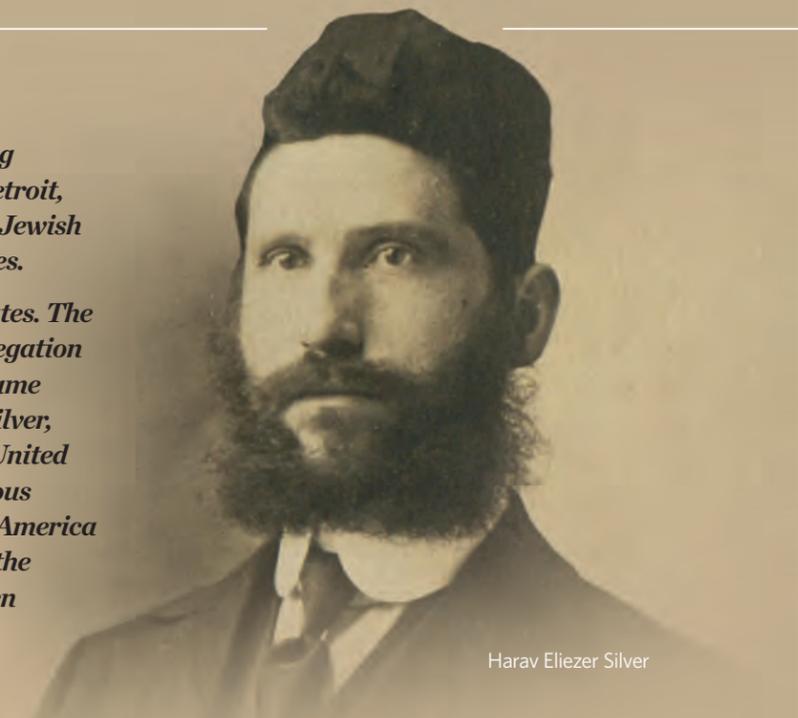


*Situated in the center of the Midwest – within easy driving distance of the large Jewish communities of Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and St. Louis – Cincinnati is home to a growing Jewish community of approximately 200 shomer Shabbos families.*

*Jewish life in Cincinnati is almost as old as the United States. The first Jew arrived in Cincinnati in 1817, and the first congregation was formed in 1824. In more recent times, Cincinnati became famous as the home base of the legendary Rabbi Eliezer Silver, zt”l. An unrivaled champion for Torah causes across the United States and Canada for fifty years, Rabbi Silver’s tremendous accomplishments contributed much to Torah Judaism in America as we know it today. Furthermore, his colossal efforts for the Vaad Hatzalah saved hundreds, if not thousands, of Yidden from the clutches of the Nazis.*

*This week, Hamodia examines the story of Rabbi Silver’s influence on Cincinnati and beyond; next week, iy”H, we will take a look at the continuing development of the community as a full-fledged Torah kehillah.*

*Hachnasas sefer Torah in Cincinnati, upon completion of the new building for Congregation Zichron Eliezer.*



Harav Eliezer Silver



Inside Congregation Zichron Eliezer on Purim.



Current home of Cincinnati Hebrew Day School.

**E**LIEZER SILVER was born in Lithuania in 5641/1881. Even as a child, his remarkable memory and quick-witted insight were recognized. After his *bar mitzvah* he studied first in the yeshivah of Dvinsk under the Ohr Samei'ach and the Rogatchover Gaon, and later in the yeshivah of Harav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski. There he was electrified by the intensive *ruach of limud haTorah* and often learned for eighteen hours a day, becoming well versed in *Shas*. He received *semichah* from Harav Chaim Ozer when he was still in his early twenties.

In 1910 he received a summons to serve in the Russian army. In his boldly decisive way, Rabbi Silver decided to escape to America, and did so with his wife and four children. His first pulpit was in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and then he served in the larger community of Springfield, Massachusetts. By 1917 his determination to do what was right regardless of repercussions was evident, and he was elected to the executive committee of the Agudath Harabbanim. In 1931, having by then been elected president of that organization, Rabbi Silver was summoned to Cincinnati. The *kehillah* had lost a powerful and beloved Rav, Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Gershon Lesser, *zt"l*, in 1924, and was now embroiled in bitter disputes and unable to find a suitable replacement. In addition, the city's prominence as the home of the American Reform movement and Hebrew Union College posed great challenges.



Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Gershon Lesser

Prior to accepting the position as Rav in Cincinnati, Rabbi Silver spent some time there. He advised the community at that point to establish a *vaad*, a religious committee for the city, and to secure a strong personality to serve as its leader. After listening to his advice, the Orthodox lay leaders of the city

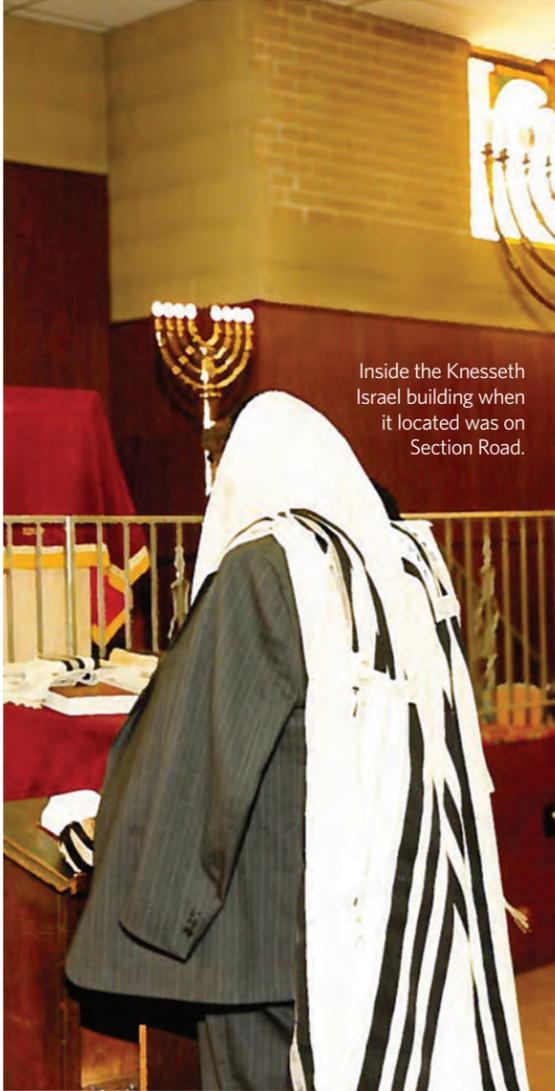
determined that the best man for the job was Rabbi Silver himself and begged him to accept the position. Although he was hesitant to leave the Springfield community, Rabbi Silver was intrigued by the challenges in Cincinnati and accepted the position, officially becoming the Rav of Congregation Kneseth Israel and the head of the newly established Vaad Ha'ir. Rabbi Silver remained in Cincinnati until his *petirah* more than thirty-five years later.

**Congregation Kneseth Israel**

Originally established in 1912, Kneseth Israel was one of the pillars of the Cincinnati community, which had numerous shuls. When Rabbi Silver moved to Cincinnati, Kneseth



Old Forest Avenue Synagogue.



Inside the Knesseth Israel building when it located was on Section Road.



Harav Eliezer Silver

***With his singular brand of dynamic activism, he organized and strengthened kashrus in the city, helped establish the day school, built mikvaos, and sought to have kosher facilities in institutions such as the local Jewish hospital.***

Israel was located on the corner of Washington and Rockdale Avenues in the Avondale section of the city. As the years passed and the community migrated north, the shul moved several times, first to Kenova Road, and later in the 1960s to Section Road, both in the Roselawn neighborhood.

Religious life was vibrant in those early years. Rabbi Silver's *shiurim* were well attended, sometimes by as many as eighty people, and it was not unusual to see many horses and buggies lined up on Washington and Rockdale Avenues while their owners attended *shiurim* or *minyanim* at the shul.

During those years Rabbi Silver proved to be a strong leader. In addition to serving as Rav of Knesseth

Israel and as a member and leader of the Vaad Ha'ir, he worked to unite all the Orthodox shuls in Cincinnati. Although there were as many as nine or ten synagogues, he was the undisputed final authority in the community, and all Rabbanim would cede to his *psakim*. Only he officiated at community weddings and funerals. On Purim, the Silver home was the center of activity and all went there for a

*mesibah*, which contributed much to the *simchah* of the day. On Yom Kippur, he would visit each shul, and address the congregants.

With his singular brand of dynamic activism, he organized and strengthened kashrus in the city, helped establish the day school, built *mikvaos*, and sought to have kosher facilities in institutions such as the local Jewish hospital.

### Silver Memories

While many of the younger generation in Cincinnati never met Rabbi Silver, his legacy is alive and well, for many members of the older generation remember him with awe and admiration. It could often be heard, "This is how the Rav did it," referring to his many *piskei halachah*.

Rabbi Yaakov Lustig, one of Rabbi Silver's closest *talmidim* who took over the pulpit of Kneseth Israel after Rabbi Silver's *petirah*, recalls his first meeting with the Rav. "I was twelve years old and we had just arrived in Cincinnati from Hungary, my parents and my younger brother and I. Rabbi Silver was waiting to greet us, and the first thing that he asked us was, 'What are you learning?' Later, Rabbi Silver convinced my parents to send me to Yeshivas Torah Vodaas in Brooklyn.

"When I left Cincinnati to go to Torah Vodaas, he made a big party in my honor. He presented me with a set of *Shas* as a gift and he told me, 'When you are twenty, I will test you on this *Shas*.' As the train ride to New York took longer than a day, he encouraged all of us *bachurim*, saying, 'Every turn of the train's wheels is another *mitzvah* for you!'

"Many people viewed him as an angry person, but he was really the finest person I ever met. If you challenged him, he was like an angry tiger, but if not, he was kind and gentle."

Mrs. Esther Deutsch, a Cincinnati native, recalls how, when she was a young girl, her father would drive Rabbi Silver to the dairy farm, where the Rav would supervise the milking. Young Esther would ride along, and Rabbi Silver would often sit in the back with her, playing games and making her laugh. Mrs. Deutsch also recalls how her mother would periodically send her to Rabbi Silver's home with a *she'eilah* on a chicken.

Mrs. Deutsch says that there was a core group of *baalei batim* in the community who were extremely devoted to Rabbi Silver — even though they were not necessarily *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos*. Rabbi



Hachaver Moshe Rabenstein, Rav of New Hope Synagogue

Silver would often turn to these community members to raise funds for a variety of needs. "He had a very powerful character and people followed him. You just couldn't say 'no' to him. In this manner, he was able to raise huge sums of money, and accomplished many things," she says.

Mr. Yaakov Rabenstein, also a native of Cincinnati, recalls, "When my parents arrived in Cincinnati from Germany in 1938, my father, Rabbi Moshe (Manfred), *z"l*, was hired right away to work for Rabbi Silver as a *shochet*. I have many memories of Rabbi Silver from my youth. I recall accompanying Rabbi Silver when he went to *kasher* a bakery for Pesach and I watched as he took straw from a broom to see if it would catch on fire, to test if the oven was hot enough to be *kashered*."

Mr. Hugo Eichelberg first met Rabbi Silver in 1940 when he arrived in Cincinnati as a young German refugee. He subsequently forged a life-long relationship with the Rav and has many memories of the lessons gleaned from this *Gadol*. For example, Mr. Eichelberg recalls that he was driving his car one day and stopped to give Rabbi Silver a ride. "Where to, Rabbi?" he inquired. Rabbi Silver was headed to a *shivah* house, and Mr. Eichelberg gladly gave him a ride to his destination.

Rabbi Silver entered the house alone to be *menachem avel*. Returning to the car, he turned to young Hugo and inquired, "Nu, you don't need to go inside?" "But I don't

**"He had a very powerful character and people followed him. You just couldn't say 'no' to him. In this manner, he was able to raise huge sums of money, and accomplished many things."**

Below: Students of Etz Chaim, c. 1940.



Yeshiva "Etz-Chaim" "ישיבה 'עץ חיים'"  
**הבה לי בנים**  
 אייערע קינדער, זין און מעכטער, וואו זיינען זיי?  
**מיר דארפען זיי האבען!**  
 די ישיבה עץ חיים איז אפען פאר אויפגעמען  
 אייערע בויעס פאר מיידלעך איז אפען—  
 פאר אייערע קליינע מעכטער  
 מיר פערשרייבען זיי אלע טאג פון 3 ביז 7  
 און זונטאג פון 9 ביז 1 אוהר  
 אין טיפעל און נאם סטריט, אין די ישיבה



Left: This card was distributed by Yeshiva Etz-Chaim (for boys) and the Bais Yaakov School (for girls) in Cincinnati, asking parents to enroll their children in these Jewish schools for daily afternoon classes following public school, as well as Sunday morning lessons.

know them," Hugo responded. To which Rabbi Silver replied, "It does not matter — you still have a *mitzvah* to be *menachem avel* another Jew."

Years later Mr. Eichelberg says, "Rabbi Silver did not chastise me for allowing the Rav to enter the home by himself, which was not really respectful. He chose to only teach me that I could be *menachem avel* any Yid, even one that I don't know. He was not particular about his personal *kavod*."

This lesson remained with Mr. Eichelberg for a lifetime. Many years later, Mr. Eichelberg was in a restaurant in St. Louis when someone entered, seeking to form a *minyan* for a *shivah* house. He readily agreed to help out, citing Rabbi Silver's lesson.

Mr. Eichelberg attended Yeshivah Etz-Chaim. Under the direction of Rabbi Silver, this yeshivah provided after-school *chinuch* for the children of Cincinnati before the day school was opened with Rabbi Silver's help in 1947. Young Hugo would often go to be tested on his studies by Rabbi Silver.

One of the *rebbeim* in Etz Chaim was Rabbi Bentzion Parczewski, who was a great *iluy*. The story is told that the Ponevezher Rav, *zt"l*, came to Cincinnati and stayed with Rabbi Parczewski over Shabbos. On seeing his great genius, the Ponevezher Rav said, "You are such an *iluy*, what are you doing here in Cincinnati?" Rabbi Parczewski responded, "When I was growing up in Eastern Europe, my parents had very little money, and sold their cow so that I could go to yeshivah. By teaching children in Cincinnati, I am paying back for what my parents did for me."

Rabbi Silver is remembered as a brilliant *talmid chacham*. He possessed a library of over 1,200 *sefarim* and was witnessed performing the legendary "pin test," whereby certain rare individuals can stick a pin into a *Gemara* and tell which word it pierces on each page.

### A Singular Leader — All L'Shem Shamayim

Rabbi Silver's persona was somewhat of a paradox in that he was a powerful personality, known to have a fierce temper, while beneath the surface he was gentle, kind, and caring. It was all a question of *kvod Shamayim*; if the situation warranted a strong response, Rabbi Silver would stop at nothing.

To those who opposed him and his fight for *kiddush Shem Shamayim*, he was fierce as a lion, especially when it came to fighting the Reform movement, which had a very strong presence in Cincinnati. To all others, he was as gentle as a lamb, and he had a heart of gold. Stories abound illustrating Rabbi Silver's multifaceted and singular approach, many of which are still retold with awe by Cincinnati natives.

Adjacent to Cincinnati sits the town of Newport, Kentucky, a town that was infamous in those days for unsavory activities. A police officer from Newport once called Rabbi Silver, saying, "Rabbi, I have one of your people here. He wants to talk to you." Rabbi Silver spoke to the man, and realized that he was a Jew who had gotten into some trouble. "I will take him into my house," he told the police officer. When you need him in court, I will present him." The police officer warned Rabbi Silver that the man was a dangerous low-life, but Rabbi Silver insisted that he would take care of him, and he did. When he was questioned how he could take this upon himself, Rabbi Silver responded, "He is a *Yid* — that's all."

In the confines of his own *kehillah*, he tried to shun the limelight. When walking to shul from his home, he would pass the large front doors of the shul building and go around to the back entrance. There he would enter the shul quietly and go straight to his seat next to the *aron kodesh* in order to avoid making a grand entrance and causing people to stand in his honor.

Yet, when necessary, he stood up for the honor of Torah with all his strength. One of the most famous stories occurred

during his attempts to build a new *mikveh*. For many years, the community *mikveh* was located in the Avondale suburb. However, because the shul had moved to the Kenova Avenue location in the newer Roselawn, Rabbi Silver felt the time had come to construct a new *mikveh* in that neighborhood.

He secured a property for the construction, but this property was located next door to a large Reform congregation whose officers vehemently opposed the construction and sued Rabbi Silver in court. Representing Rabbi Silver (*pro bono*) was his good friend and future United States Senator

Robert (Bob) Taft, the son of President William Howard Taft.

Mr. Milton Bloom, president of the Reform congregation, challenged Rabbi Silver in front of the court. "Rabbi," he began, "do you really believe everything that is written in the Torah? Do you really believe that a donkey can speak?" Rabbi Silver took a good look at Bloom, quickly pointed his finger at him and asserted, "Now I do!" The courtroom erupted in laughter. Taft turned to Bloom and said, "Milt, are you still going to argue with the Rabbi?" Rabbi Silver won the case and the *mikveh* was built, much to the dismay of



Meeting of the founders of the Cincinnati Hebrew Day School. Around the table from left to right: Ben Ritter, Al Harris, Dr. A.M. Wigser, Rabbi Silver, Meyer Goldberg, Ben Berkowitz, Eddie Jacobs, unknown.



First home of the Cincinnati Hebrew Day School.



*In the early years, whenever the school was short on funds to pay its teachers, Rabbi Silver would mortgage his house and use the money to cover the payroll.*

the Reform congregation.

His strong character and perseverance helped him accomplish his goals. While collecting funds for the new *mikveh*, he went to a wealthy Jew and asked for a large sum. The man hemmed and hawed, whereupon the Rav opened a *sefer* and started to learn. After a half hour, the man asked, "Rabbi, is this a hold-up?" Rabbi Silver replied, "Call it what you will, just produce the check."

His sharp wit was known to all. Rabbi Silver was once accompanying a congregant to his father's funeral. "Rabbi," the man said proudly, "you see this *yarmulke*? This is the *yarmulke* you gave me at my bar mitzvah." In his typical style, Rabbi Silver replied, "If you had worn it like you were supposed to, it would have been worn out long ago!"

In 1947 Rabbi Silver was actively involved in developing the Chofetz Chaim Cincinnati Hebrew Day School, along with Mr. Ben Berkowitz (father-in-law of Harav Yisroel Belsky, *shlita*) and Mr. Laibel Koenigsburg. These men were among the few staunch *shomrei Shabbos* in the city at the time and needed a school for their own children. It is told that, in the early years, whenever the school was short on funds to pay its teachers, Rabbi Silver would mortgage his house and use the money to cover the payroll. Inevitably, one of his devoted *baalei batim* would come and bail him out — until the school was short of funds again. Evidently Rabbi Silver knew that these *baalei batim* would donate money to help him finance his house, but were not so willing to cover the payroll of the yeshivah.

**Agudath Harabbanim and Agudath Israel**

As president of the Agudath Harabbanim, Rabbi Silver raised the bar for the American Orthodox rabbinate in many ways. In addition, Rabbi Silver was very active in working to establish the Agudath Israel of America, following the directives of his *rebbe*, Harav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, *zt"l*.

Rabbi Lustig recalls one of the first

Agudah conventions in America, which was held in Cincinnati in August 1940. The convention had a bittersweet flavor, as Harav Chaim Ozer was *niftar* just a few weeks earlier. Rabbi Lustig recollects: "The convention was truly an impressive event. Rabbi Silver spoke for about an hour — I can still recall him describing how he was involved in establishing the American Agudah and fulfilling the request of Rav Chaim Ozer. About 500 or 600 people came from many cities, including Detroit, St. Louis, and, of course, those on the East Coast. In those days, travel was much more difficult. It took about twenty-six hours by train to travel from New York to Cincinnati. One usually had to change trains twice, but many Rabbanim came nevertheless."

Rabbi Silver viewed the convention as a victory in many ways, especially as it had taken place in the center of Reform Judaism, as he expressed in a press

statement following the convention: "A miracle took place in Cincinnati. The capital of Reform Jewry and assimilation became a center of dedicated and uncompromising Torah Judaism. Agudath Israel conquered the city. Reform Jews were surprised when they saw so many bearded Jews with *peyos* wearing long black coats. The singing and dancing on the lawn of the synagogue upset their complacent sense of assimilation...."<sup>1</sup>

#### **Vaad Hatzalah**

It is no surprise that Rabbi Silver, always a man of action, reacted swiftly and purposefully when he became aware of the Nazi persecution of Jews in Europe. In November 1939, shortly after the outbreak of World War II, Rabbi Silver convened an emergency meeting in New York City to discuss the recent developments in Nazi-occupied Europe. It was at this meeting that the Vaad

Hatzalah was formed, with Rabbi Silver as president. The full impact of his work in the Vaad Hatzalah is beyond the scope of this article, but we will present just a snapshot of his activities.

Mrs. Bess Paper, currently of Cincinnati, worked as a secretary for the Vaad Hatzalah in the 1940s in New York and was a firsthand witness to Rabbi Silver's legendary work. She was often charged with the mission of meeting the refugees at the pier and bringing them to meet their relatives. She recalls with awe: "Rabbi Silver was responsible for bringing over countless refugees from Europe. He was very strong willed and knew how to reach people in the government and break through obstacles to accomplish his goals."

In the early war years Rabbi Silver helped many people escape Europe, affirming that they were coming to work for him as Rabbis in Cincinnati. After

*Continued after Kinyan Magazine*



Early Agudah convention in Cincinnati, 1940.



Poster announcing a taanit tzibbur in light of the situation of the Jews in Europe.

Continued from page 22 in Inyan Magazine vouching for approximately forty “Rabbis,” the immigration officers contacted Rabbi Silver. “How many Rabbis do you need?” they questioned. “Well, I have a day school and I need morning teachers and afternoon teachers. I have a mikveh, and a slaughterhouse...,” Rabbi Silver insisted, unperturbed. “Well, OK, but no more,” the immigration officer responded.

After the war was over, Rabbi Silver traveled across Europe, doing his utmost to help Jewish survivors. During his absence from Cincinnati, Knesseth Israel graciously continued to support his wife. In addition, Rabbi Leib Potashnik was hired as his assistant, to serve the community during his frequent travels. Because his son David had served as an army officer in the U.S. Armed Forces, Rabbi Silver was granted

permission to don his son’s worn military uniform as he traveled across Europe, gaining him much respect and access to many venues. He traversed postwar Europe, helping the she’eiris hapleitah both physically and spiritually. For three years he carried his food in his briefcase, and would literally give the shirt off his back to help a survivor.

He visited Catholic orphanages all over Europe to rescue Jewish children who had been hidden there during the war. Time and again he was told by the nuns that there were no Jewish children present. Skeptical, Rabbi Silver would return to the orphanage in the evening when the children were going to sleep. As he entered the large room, he would resolutely begin reciting the Shema, and inevitably, many children would join in. He left every orphanage with the Jewish children he had discovered. It is said that he can be personally credited with saving many thousands of Jews during and after the Holocaust.

### End of an Era

Rabbi Silver continued his activities into his eighties. On Rosh Hashanah 5727/1966 he suffered a minor stroke, after which he was forced to curtail his activities. He was niftar on 9 Shevat 5728/1968. The levayah and kevarah in Cincinnati was attended by Harav Moshe Feinstein, Harav Mordechai Gifter, Harav Schneur Kotler, Harav Dovid Lifshitz, Rabbi Pinchas Teitz and Rabbi Moshe Sherer, zichronam livrachah. His petirah marked the end of a chapter in the history of the American Jewish community and of the Jews of Cincinnati. □

Inyan magazine would like to thank the Cincinnati Judaica Fund for its help in providing historic documents and pictures for this article. The Cincinnati Judaica Fund can be reached by calling 513-241-5748.

1. The Silver Era, by Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, p. 169.

Part II will appear next week, iy”H.

# CINCINNATI

## Then & Now



### PART II

# Cincinnati Today

*A Flourishing Torah Community*

BY DEVORAH KLEIN

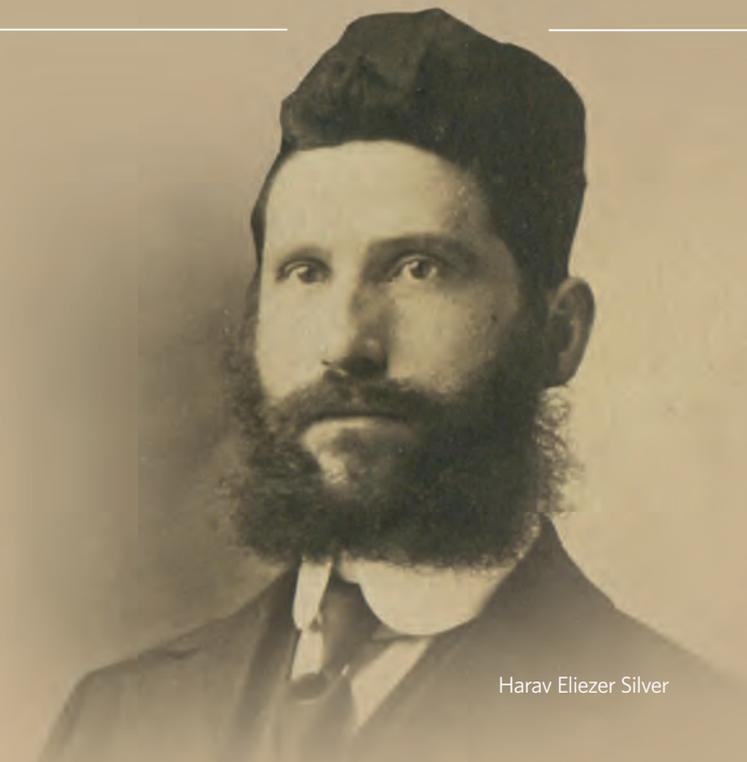
Rabbi Zev Pam and students in front of the newly acquired second building of CHDS.



*In Part 1 we documented the history of Rabbi Eliezer Silver, zt”l, and the lasting legacy he left with the Cincinnati Jewish community. In Part 2 we will examine how the kehillah continued to develop until today.*

*The changes that have taken place over the years in Cincinnati were summed up by Mr. Hugo Eichelberg, who has been living there since 1940. “Many years ago, next door to the shul there was an old-age home that was filled with mispallelim – every senior residing there knew how to daven and would join us for a minyan. Today, the situation has reversed. One can barely get a minyan at the old-age home, and the younger generation is the one that is davening!”*

*Hachnasas sefer Torah in Cincinnati, upon completion of the new building for Congregation Zichron Eliezer.*



Harav Eliezer Silver



## Why Cincinnati?

What is so attractive about the Cincinnati community? Rabbi Binyamin Travis, executive director of Cincinnati Hebrew Day School, describes the advantages of living there. "I grew up in Queens, and I really appreciate the slower pace of life here. As is typical in the Midwest, people have more time for each other, there is lots of refreshing green space, and there is little traffic. In the *frum* community, every person makes a difference. There are tremendous opportunities to be *mekadesh shem Shamayim* — whether one is working as a *kli kodesh* or in business. The friendly Midwest attitudes create a greater sense of affinity, and therefore a greater opportunity to have an influence. My children learn to deal with people of all different stripes while remaining part of the context of our home. They understand that we must be *mikadesh shem Shamayim* and inspire others through our example."

The housing in the *frum* community is very affordable, with houses starting at \$150,000. One of the best testaments to the benefits of living in Cincinnati comes from Rabbi A. D. Motzen, national director of the Division of State Relations for Agudath Israel of America, who chose to remain in Cincinnati even after job opportunities opened up for him in larger, mainstream communities.

"In Cincinnati I live in a comfortable home on one-third of an acre of land. I could not afford anything close to that in many larger *frum* communities. The school is practically in my backyard, and my kids roller blade and ride their bicycles to school. We have a close-knit community where the Rabbanim work together and get along. The quality of life is very good, and I hope to stay here as long as I can."

Cincinnati has much to offer to a young professional who wants to feel that he is a significant part of a community, and is prepared to contribute to that community. Cincinnati is home to over forty young



Rabbi Avrohom Weinrib, Rabbi of Congregation Zichron Eliezer of Cincinnati.

*bnei Torah* families that have settled there because of the high quality of life, the affordable housing and low *chinuch* costs.

Rabbi Avrohom Weinrib, Rabbi of Congregation Zichron Eliezer of Cincinnati, has several programs specifically geared to guiding young professionals in the right direction. A weekly *vaad*, nicknamed "the *Teyvah*," provides a forum for discussing how best to handle a variety of challenges that arise in the working world. In addition, Rabbi Doniel Schon and Rabbi Binyomin Teitelbaum run a night *sefer* for young professionals. Last year a full busload of Cincinnati residents attended the *Siyum HaShas* in New Jersey. A trip to Baltimore (a one-hour flight) was organized to provide an opportunity for a day of learning in Yeshivas Ner Yisrael. A similar learning trip was organized recently to Chicago.

Most job opportunities are available within a twenty-minute drive, and there is minimal rush-hour traffic. As one *baal habayis* commented, "I leave my office at 5:00 and I am home by 5:20 — downtown is only twenty minutes away. That leaves me with an extra almost two hours in the evening to learn, spend with my family and be involved in community, as compared to some of my friends on the East Coast, who spend hours commuting each day."

Even in the secular world, Cincinnati

has been voted one of the ten best American cities in which to raise a family (by *Forbes Magazine*) due to the low cost of housing, low crime rate and ease of commuting.

Recreational activities are also easily accessible, with plenty of parks and other attractions within a twenty-minute drive; parking is available at minimal cost. Furthermore, the community is incredibly warm and welcoming to newcomers. As one family reported, "When we first moved in, people were coming by nonstop to help. My children were 'swept off their feet' and we barely saw them for a week, as the local children were really anxious to play with the new arrivals."

Let's take a closer look at this developing *kehillah*.

## Post-Silver Years

When Rabbi Silver was *niftar* in 1968, the Cincinnati *kehillah* was home to eight shuls. These were: Kneseth Israel, Ohav Shalom, Golf Manor Synagogue, New Hope Synagogue (Tikvah Chadashah), the Roselawn shul, Yad Charutzim, the Bond Hill Shul, and Kehillas Bnei Yisrael. However, this period marked an era of decline for the Cincinnati community, because many of the younger generation moved away to larger *frum* communities and shuls found it more difficult to complete a *minyan*. By the early 1970s, many of these shuls had closed down.



L-R: Rabbi Yaakov Lustig and Rabbi Binyomin Travis during the *chanukas habayis* for the new building of Congregation Zichron Eliezer.

### Rebirth of a Kehillah

In the mid 1980s, a group of dedicated *baalei batim* banded together to work to revitalize the *kehillah*. During this time, Rabbi Yaakov Lustig, a close *talmid* of Rabbi Silver, was the Rav of Kneseth Israel. They first strengthened the kashrus organization (Vaad Ha'ir), and then built an *eruv* under the supervision of Harav Moshe Heinemann, *shlita*, of Baltimore.

They then turned their attention to establishing a girls' high school. The founders of this Bais Yaakov-type included Mr. and Mrs. Gidon Eldad, Mr. and Mrs. Simon Groner, Dr. and Mrs. Ned Mehlman, Mr. and Mrs. David Mizrachi, Mr. and Mrs. Bernie Moskowitz, Mr. and Mrs. Abe Wagschal, and Dr. and Mrs. Bruce Younger.

The dynamic Rabbi Nechemia Kibel

was hired to direct the school, and in 1990, Regional Institute for Torah and Secular Studies (RITSS) opened its doors. The arrival of Rabbi Kibel in Cincinnati and the establishment of RITSS marked a turning point for the Cincinnati community.

Rabbi Kibel had a tremendous impact on the *kehillah*, before his *petirah* in 2005, in his prime, after a protracted illness. Under his leadership, RITSS developed into a top-notch Bais Yaakov-type high school where *bnos Yisrael* from Cincinnati received an excellent *chinuch*. In addition, in the days when many smaller communities did not have such girls' high schools, RITSS was one of the first "out-of-town" such schools to open a dormitory. The school maintained a high academic level, and its graduates were accepted by top seminaries around the world.

Rabbi Kibel's efforts did not stop in the classroom; his commitment to *harbatzas haTorah* fueled his efforts to make Cincinnati into a true *makom Torah*. Indeed, it was partially due to his encouragement and persistence that the Cincinnati Community Kollel was established in 1992.

Young *askanim* meeting with U.S. Representative Steve Chabot. Left to right : Rabbi Avraham Y. Braunstein, unknown, Aharon Kibel, Rep. Steve Chabot, Yosef Zoimen, Yehuda Spetner, Rabbi Ari Rabinowitz.





*Yungeleit* of the Cincinnati Community Kollel, with the Kollel building in the background.

**Cincinnati Community Kollel**

Mr. Steve Rosedale, one of the founders of Cincinnati Community Kollel, relates: "Before the *kollel* came, Cincinnati was a group of families, many very committed but without an engine generating Torah. After experimenting with a summer SEED program, we determined that the time was ripe for a *kollel*."

The *kollel* was formed, with Rabbi Dovid

Spetner and Rabbi Meir Minster, *talmidim* of Ner Yisrael in Baltimore, and a core group of four *yungeleit*. The *kollel's* mission was to create a *makom Torah* from which the warmth of Torah would spread to the community, become a magnet for the entire community and thereby raise the general level of learning. The *kollel* was successful in its mission. It created a sense of community and became the catalyst for

increased Torah-oriented growth. Through a wide variety of programs, the *kollel* both strengthens the level of Torah learning and *shemiras hamitzvos* within the *kehillah*, and performs outreach in the greater Cincinnati Jewish community.

Today, the *kollel* continues to operate under the direction of Rabbi Spetner and Rabbi Minster. Rabbi Yitzchok Preis is the director of outreach. In addition to five

full-time *kollel yungeleit*, the *kollel* employs a full-time campus outreach director, Rabbi Rafi Weinschneider and Mr. Alter Raubvogel as administrator. One of the *yungeleit*, newly-hired program director Rabbi Teitelbaum, is charged with creating and directing new programs for the city's *bnai Torah*. Rabbi Isaac Kahn, serves as the eighth-grade *rebbe* at Cincinnati Hebrew Day School while learning in the *kollel* in the afternoons. Rabbi Kahn also runs an Israeli outreach program for the *kollel*, mostly reaching out to Israelis who run kiosks at the local malls, and their friends.

Another project of the *kollel* is Sarah's Place, a completely refurbished home which is a center for women's outreach and other women's programming, under the direction of Mrs. Aviva Minster and Mrs. Yehudis Polsky.

Over 50 percent of the *kollel* alumni, a total of about fourteen *yungeleit*, have settled in the city, either as Rabbanim, *rebbeim*, administrators in the community institutions, or after accepting positions in the business world. These *kollel* alumni have formed a core group of *bnai Torah* that is changing the Jewish face of the city.

### Cincinnati Hebrew Day School

At the forefront of Cincinnati's continuing development as a full-fledged Torah community is the Cincinnati



Rabbi Dovid Spetner presenting plaques honoring Mr. Steve Rosedale and Mr. Dick Weiland at the dedication of the *kollel*'s Weiland Rosedale Educational Center.

Hebrew Day School (CHDS). First established as the Chofetz Chaim Yeshiva in 1947 by community activists inspired by Rabbi Eliezer Silver, CHDS has provided *chinuch* to Cincinnati's children ever since. From 2002 to 2013, the school grew under the leadership of Rabbi Yuval Kernerman. This past summer, Rabbi Kernerman moved back to his hometown of Toronto to become *menahel* at Etz Chaim yeshivah,

and today, with much *siyatta diShmaya*, the school is under the capable leadership of Rabbi Zev Pam. Enrollment this year is at an all-time high of 249 students, reflecting a 25 percent increase over the past two years.

The school has also moved toward separate classes for boys and girls, and will continue in this path as the number of students in each class increases. Due to the



Current home of Cincinnati Hebrew Day School.

generosity of the Jewish Foundation, a second campus located around the corner from the main campus was secured this year, in which fifth through eighth-grade girls, plus the girls' high school are now housed.

The school maintains a high level of both *limudei kodesh* and *limudei chol* curricula. In the boys' division, virtually all graduates of the eighth grade attend yeshiva out of town. As Cincinnati is located in the center of the Midwest and within easy driving distance to several major Torah centers, there are many yeshivos to choose from, and graduates are usually accepted by top-notch yeshivos of their choice across the country.

The girls attend the local girls' high school and are accepted by the finest seminaries in Eretz Yisrael and America.

Financially, CHDS is on relatively stable footing. The Jewish Federation and the Jewish Foundation funded several grants that sponsored upgrades in security, technology and a state-of-the-art gymnasium. Every classroom was equipped with Smart Boards, and the younger grades are trying out the newest technology — Smart Tables.

More importantly, Ohio State vouchers are making a real difference in the fiscal realm of the community, as they provide much-needed revenue to the schools and tuition relief to the families.

### School Choice

The advertisement reads: "Say Goodbye to Tuition Bills — Move to Cincinnati and receive a tuition voucher from the State of Ohio." Due to the efforts of many, including National Director of State Relations for Agudath Israel of America Rabbi A. D. Motzen, School Choice has made great headway over the past few years.

In the State of Ohio, if a student lives

1. There are various complex regulations that govern the exact distribution of these vouchers, which are beyond the scope of this article. For more detailed information, please contact Rabbi Motzen at 513-530-1364.

in a district with a failing public school, he is entitled to a voucher worth at least \$4,250. For the residents of the *frum* community of Cincinnati, this law is very meaningful. The *frum* neighborhoods of Golf Manor and Amberly Village are beautiful suburbs with tree-lined streets, large homes and spacious backyards. There are no public schools located in these immediate neighborhoods, and the closest school, to which resident children would be assigned, is classified as a failing school. What this means is that in Cincinnati a *frum* family can live in a wonderful neighborhood and still receive these coveted vouchers, which have brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars to the community.<sup>1</sup>

### Atara Girls High School

A new face of girls' high-school education has been introduced in Cincinnati under the direction of Mrs. Penina Teitelbaum, in the wake of RITSS having closed its doors this past year. A division of CHDS, Atara, has gotten off to a great start. Mrs. Teitelbaum is incredibly devoted and has devised a comprehensive curriculum with the goal of providing her students with the best possible in *limudei kodesh*, *limudei chol*, and extracurricular activities.

"Our goal is for our students to be engaged and connected to *Yiddishkeit* in a lifelong way. We strive to give them a foundation for an adult relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*," Mrs. Teitelbaum says. "This is a community school, but I have received incredible feedback from people not connected with us. Everyone wants the school to grow and be successful.

"We have cultivated a warm environment. My door is always

Sign in front of the newly acquired second building for Cincinnati Hebrew Day School and Atara High School.



Sign marking the entrance to Golf Manor — one of the *frum* neighborhoods in Cincinnati.

open — even past school hours," she says. "All of our education is provided with warmth and love. We are proud of our educational standards and aim to be competitive with the top schools. The girls will go in many directions after high school, and we want all opportunities to be open to them."

### Cincinnati Summers and Extracurricular Learning

When school is over for the year and summertime rolls around, finding appropriate and affordable activities for

*Continued after Kinyan Magazine*



Amberly Village, another *frum* neighborhood in Cincinnati. These signs are on opposite sides of the same street, as the two neighborhoods are adjacent to one another.



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children is a challenge in any community. In Cincinnati, however, as a result of the unique synergy between the Jewish Federation, the Jewish Foundation and the *frum* community, some extra financial perks are available, which make summer planning a bit easier.

The Jewish Foundation has made available large sums of money for students who wish to travel to Eretz Yisrael. After completing tenth grade, every student, regardless of income level, is entitled to a free camp trip in Eretz Yisrael. In addition, there are scholarships available for any child wishing to attend sleep-away camp. This initiative is due to the efforts of Dr. Getzel Cohen, who recognized the value of children attending overnight camp, especially those growing up in smaller communities. The Foundation also provides large scholarships for those wishing to study in Eretz Yisrael for *yeshivah gedolah* or seminary.

For the younger children, Camp Ashreinu, a professionally run day camp with separate boys' and girls' divisions,

run by Rabbi Shai and Mrs. Tova Scherer, is often the highlight of their year. Camp Ashreinu was established by Mrs. Ellen Pollack, a Cincinnati resident who was looking for some summertime activities for her grandchildren. About eight years ago, she asked the Scherers to help her, and ultimately asked them to assume leadership of the camp. The Scherers built Camp Ashreinu into a full-fledged, quality

summer camping experience. This past summer, close to 200 children enjoyed a wide variety of activities: swimming, sports, cooking, aerobics, dance, choir, woodworking and weekly trips were all part of the program.

In a mutually beneficial arrangement, Project SEED provides many of the counselors for Camp Ashreinu. The counselors are inspired by the out-of-town atmosphere and have commented that they never saw children who are so enthusiastic and excited. The children in turn benefit from the *ruach* and energy of the counselors.

Rabbi Scherer, who is a *rebbe* in CHDS, also runs an active branch of Pirchei Agudath Israel that offers Shabbos afternoon groups in the summertime, Pesach and Sukkos learning programs, trips to the Midwest Pirchei Siyum Mishnayos, and a father-and-son Shabbos learning program in the summer, which often attracts over 100 participants.

For the girls, Mrs. Miriam Ottensosser directs extracurricular activities, learning programs and weekly Bnos groups. The local Agudah that runs these programs was started by Dr. Michael Weinberg. There is also a Motzoei Shabbos learning program, started by Mr. Josh Kibel and now run by Rabbi Raffie Zuroff and Rabbi Yechiel Gabay.

Rabbi Yechiel Gabay teaching a class at Cincinnati Hebrew Day School.



“You can’t imagine the impact one can have on other people’s lives in a community like this,” says Rabbi Scherer. “You spend a few years here, and you can really enjoy the fruits of your labor. You see the kids growing and the parents growing right along with them,” Rabbi Scherer says. “One can’t move here asking, ‘What does this community have to offer me?’ You must be prepared to give, to ask, ‘What can I give to the community?’ In the end, you will receive much more than you gave.”

### Bikur Cholim of Cincinnati

Another important element of the Cincinnati community is the Bikur Cholim house. Cincinnati is home to both the world-famous Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and Shriners’ Hospital for Children, which specializes in burn treatments. Families of patients from all over the world, especially from Eretz Yisrael, have traveled to take advantage of the state-of-the-art care offered in these facilities. The Bikur Cholim of Cincinnati has risen to the challenge with the purchase of a dedicated apartment building with four units, where families of patients can stay free of charge for as long as they need to be in Cincinnati. Often, the need exceeds the space, and additional



Rabbi Isaac Kahn at a recent Cincinnati Community Kollel Junior Yarchei Kallah.

families are housed by community members. Many families stay in Cincinnati for months while their children undergo tests and treatments. The success of the Bikur Cholim is due to the herculean efforts of Mrs. Meryle Schreiber, who dedicated her life to the Bikur Cholim families before making *aliyah* in 2012.

In addition to *chesed* opportunities, the *bikur cholim* initiatives present *kiruv* opportunities as well, as many of the patients do not have religious backgrounds. Rabbi Isaac Kahn of the

*kollel* runs classes and outreach programs in the Bikur Cholim house. “Many Israelis are more receptive to *kiruv* in America than when they were in Eretz Yisrael,” says the *kollel’s* Rabbi Yitzchok Preis. “One Russian family from Israel even commented that they have done more for their Judaism while in Cincinnati than during the thirteen years that they were in Israel.”<sup>2</sup>

2. For more information on Bikur Cholim, please call Tzippy Konstam at 513-702-1871.



Pirchei Cincinnati boys at a *seudah* recognizing learning accomplished during the Pesach *bein hazmanim*.

## The City's Shuls

About 98 percent of the Orthodox community lives within one square mile, in the Golf Manor and Amberly Village neighborhoods, where there are several shuls. Golf Manor Synagogue is currently led by Rabbi Pinchas Landis; Congregation Shaarei Torah is led by Rabbi Ezra Goldschmidt; and Rabbi Sholom Kalmenson directs several Chabad centers throughout the area. Chabad also runs Yeshivas Lubavitch Cincinnati, a yeshivah with approximately seventy *bachurim*, and Cheder Menachem Chabad. Congregation Zichron Eliezer/Kneseth Israel is led by Rabbi Avrohom Weinrib.

Kneseth Israel, Rabbi Silver's shul, has moved several times. In the 1990s, as the community moved north from the Roselawn neighborhood, Kneseth Israel began conducting *minyanim* in a house in the then-new Amberly Village neighborhood. About four years ago, a beautiful new shul building, with a modern *mikveh*, was built on Section Road in Amberly Village, and the shul was renamed Congregation Zichron Eliezer (CZE) in memory of Rabbi Silver. Rabbi Reuven Pelberg served as interim rabbi after Rabbi Lustig retired in 2007. From 2008 through 2011, Rabbi Meir Minster, the *Rosh Kollel*, served as Rav of the shul. In 2012, Rabbi Avrohom Weinrib, formerly Rav of Agudas Yisrael of West Rogers Park in Chicago, moved to Cincinnati to assume the pulpit in Zichron Eliezer. Under Rabbi Weinrib's leadership, the shul has solidified its programming and ability to be a central institution for the community.

Rabbi Weinrib, who also serves as head of the Vaad Ha'ir, moved to Cincinnati because he saw the opportunity to make a real difference in this developing community. "I came for the beauty of 'out of town' and the ability to really make a difference. Cincinnati has the infrastructure and potential to be a full-fledged Torah community," asserts Rabbi Weinrib. "So far, it has been a very positive and rewarding experience."



At the construction site for the new building of Congregation Shaarei Torah. L-R: Howard Mayers, president emeritus, Rabbi Ezra Goldschmidt, and Norman Frankel, president.



Inside view of Golf Manor Synagogue. Inset: Rabbi Pinchas Landis, at his recent *hachtarah* as Rabbi of Golf Manor Synagogue in Cincinnati.

What is Rabbi Weinrib's vision of the future? "To keep building, while maintaining that close-knit community feeling. We want to be a warm and friendly place, without any rifts. Different should not mean apart. We want to focus on growth but also focus on building from within — and developing more unity. Individuals can't really grow unless they are part of something bigger than themselves. Everyone should feel that they are a part of a growth-oriented *kehillah*."

One of Rabbi Weinrib's initiatives is the formation of monthly "Heads of Mosdos" (HOM) meetings, in which the heads of seven different *mosdos* meet to discuss various community issues. "There is a beautiful synergy in the room during these meetings," says Rabbi Weinrib. "We all share the common goal of bringing the community together and helping in any way that we can."

### No Explanation

What is the real secret behind Cincinnati's recent growth and success? As with everything, it is all the Will of Hashem, as Rabbi Yaakov Lustig, a close *talmid* of Rabbi Silver and his successor as Rav of Kneseth Israel, said when summarizing the transformation that has taken place in Cincinnati, and so many other communities, over the past twenty years.

"I have spanned four generations of Cincinnati history, and I see how things have changed. In 1955 people here said *Kaddish D'Rabbanan* for Orthodox *Yiddishkeit*. The older people were dying, and the younger generation was not interested. Many years ago, we were happy if we had fifty students in the day school and only about twenty boys went away to learn in yeshivah from Cincinnati in a span of twenty years. Today, we have over 200 students in the day school and

almost every boy who graduates goes to yeshivah. Many years ago, I tried to start a *kollel*, but it did not work out. Today, there is a thriving *kollel*. Many years ago, if I tried to bring in a guest speaker we were lucky if we had five people in the audience. Recently we brought in a guest speaker and several hundred people showed up. And this is happening all over America. I don't have any explanation except to say a *ruach* came down from *Shamayim*, making everybody desire to come close to Orthodox *Yiddishkeit*. It is a different world." ■

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*This article is intended to provide a profile of the wonderful Jewish community in Cincinnati. It was not intended to be comprehensive coverage of all of the people and institutions that helped to form the kehillah historically and/or continue to support it today. Readers with additional information are welcome to send comments to [magazine@hamodia.com](mailto:magazine@hamodia.com)*



Congregation  
Zichron Eliezer  
on Purim.