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TRAINER STUDIOS



## Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer

זכר צדיק לברכה

### *His Life in Perspective*

by Pinchos Wollman - Tsamir

RABBI DR. JOSEPH BREUER, who for over four decades served as Rov of K'hal Adath Jeshurun in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan, died at Beth Israel Hospital in New York on Shaboss 3 Iyor 5740, at the age of 98.

Ever since his late wife's death in 5713, Rabbi Breuer had made his home with his daughter and son-in-law, Mr. & Mrs. Jerry G. Bechhofer. Until his last brief illness, Rabbi Breuer had been giving a regular *shi'ur* in G'mora at home for a select group of men, some of whom had been his disciples in Frankfurt-on-the-Main before he left that city in 1939. They acted as *shom'rim* all that *motzo'ey* Shaboss.

The next day, Sunday, some 10,000 mourners — including *rabonim* and *rebbe*s from all over New York and from out of town — took part in the *l'vaya*. In his humility, Rabbi Breuer had requested that there be no *hespeidim* at his funeral. Rav Shimon Schwab, who has occupied the rabbinate of K'hal Adath Jeshurun alongside Rabbi Breuer since 5718 (1958) announced that Rav Breuer would be heeded in death as he had been heeded in life, and proceeded to read several chapters of *T'hilim*. He was followed by Rav Breuer's eldest son Mordechai (Marc) Breuer who read another *kapitel*. Chazan Robert Frankel of the congrega-

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PROF. WOLLMAN-TSAMIR, author of *The Graphic History of the Jewish Heritage*, was a *talmid* of Rav Breuer in Frankfurt.

tion recited the *Keil Moley Rachamim*.

Rav Breuer was buried at King Solomon Cemetery in Clifton, N.J. beside his late wife, the former Rika Eisenman.

### Three Generations

Rabbi Breuer's passing brought to its end an era of three generations of *rabonim* who had been active in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, beginning with his maternal grandfather, Rav Shimshon R'foel Hirsch, (5568-5648), protagonist of the principle of *Torah im Derech Eretz*.

Rav S. R. Hirsch, born in Hamburg in 5568 (1808), came to Frankfurt in 5611 (1851) to lead a group of eleven stalwart Jews who had formed a congregation of uncompromising Orthodoxy as opposed to the strong Reform community that had destroyed Orthodox life in that city. An eloquent fighter against Reform, Hirsch led and ultimately won the struggle for government recognition of an Orthodox community independent of the Reform-dominated Frankfurt Jewish community. Hirsch and his followers maintained that a Torah-true congregation could not remain part of a Jewish community in whose temples the prayers were recited in German, where the organ was played, where all references to Tziyon and Y'rusholayim had been deleted from the prayerbooks, and where radical Reformers such as Abraham Geiger preached doctrines whose logical

consequences were assimilation and intermarriage.

Hirsch was an effective educator and communal organizer; one of his great accomplishments in Frankfurt was the establishment of a *Realschule* — a day and high school which grew apace and endured until the Hitler era. His literary output was overwhelming. Its brilliance and profundity created a revolution in Jewish thinking and his works are all classics. Chief among them are his translations into classical German and commentaries on the entire *Chumosh*, *T'hilim*, and the *Sidur*. His other great works are *The 19 Letters* in which he exposes all the ills of Reform, and *Horeb* in which he describes the *mitzvos* and categorizes them in six categories. He founded a periodical, *Jeschurun*, in which he regularly published articles to strengthen Torah observance, and expounded his philosophy of Judaism. His collected articles (*Gesammelte Schriften*) were published posthumously in six volumes.

Hirsch was succeeded in Frankfurt by Rabbi Salomon Breuer, who came to Germany from Hungary to study under Hirsch, and married his daughter. Breuer broadened the ideological basis of the Hirschian community by introducing into it many of the ideas that had been taught by the Chasam Sofer (Rav Moshe Schreiber; 5522-5599). He founded the first yeshiva in Frankfurt with students from Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania

to serve as models for the *Realschule* boys.

Rabbi Joseph Breuer was born in 5642 (1882) in Papa (Pupa), Hungary, one of the seven children<sup>1</sup> of Rabbi Salomon Breuer and his wife Sophie. He was brought to Frankfurt in 5650 when his father succeeded his grandfather as *rov*. At the age of 21 he was given *s'micha* by both his father and Rav Koppel Reich of Budapest. He later studied philosophy and political economy at the Universities of Giessen and Strasbourg.<sup>2</sup> After receiving his doctorate in 1905, he began a career as a rabbi and educator which was to extend over three-quarters of a century. Following the death of his father in 1926, Joseph Breuer became dean of the Yeshiva.

### At The Frankfurt Yeshiva

His *shi'urim* in Frankfurt were a blend of East and West. He devoted the opening minutes of

the main *G'mora shi'ur* every morning to a *vort* from his grandfather; it was his way of imprinting the stamp of Hirschian ideology on what was to follow. He called his illustrious grandfather, "The Commentator," because of his extraordinary commentaries on the *Chumosh* and *T'hilim*. After that he would launch into the *G'mora shi'ur*. He put prodigious mental and physical energy into the *shakla v'tarya* of the *G'mora*, yet affably answered the questions hurled at him by his erudite students. His many *talmidim* can never forget the lofty spiritual pleasure they experienced as they followed him in his quest to resolve the *kushyos*.

Rabbi Breuer published an impressive array of writings, including commentaries on *Yirm'yohu* and *Y'chezkeil* and on the *piyutim* of the Yomim Noro'im. During his 35 years of work in Germany, he shunned involvement in communal

1. Rabbi Breuer's five brothers and his only sister all were active in Orthodox Jewish life. What was unusual for their generation is that all the brothers not only attended university and held doctorates, but were strictly Orthodox. His eldest brother, *Raphael* (1881-1932) served as Rabbi in Aschaffenburg and published translations and commentaries on *T'nach*, including a commentary on *Shir HaShirim*. *Isaac* (1883-1946), an attorney, was a prolific writer on Jewish philosophy and a leader in the Agudath Israel movement. He helped organize and presided over the Agudah's labor wing, *Po'aley Agudath Israel*. *Samson* (1881-1974) was a professor of physics and mathematics at the Polytechnic Institute in Karlsruhe and later at the University of

Frankfurt. He settled in Eretz Yisroel in 1933, and held positions in the civil service there. *Moses* (1884-1958) taught Latin and German in high schools and Hebrew grammar at the Breuer Yeshiva. He, too, emigrated to Eretz Yisroel where he taught in high schools. He spent the last years of his life in Frankfurt. *Joshua* (1892-1960), a pediatrician, fled from Germany to Cuba, subsequently settling in New York, where he opened a medical practice. *Hanna Breuer-Meyer* was a talented writer and youth leader. She died in Frankfurt at the age of 30, a year after her marriage.

2. Rav Breuer, when asked about attendance at a co-educational college in the U.S. replied, "*Yeikoreig v'al ya'avor*."—Ed.

politics, devoting his life exclusively to the *daled amos* of *limud-Torah*. His students at the Yeshiva in Frankfurt remember Rabbi Breuer as a kindly mentor who was deeply concerned with their development in *ruchniyus*.

Rabbi Breuer had the unique ability to calmly and pointedly give *musor* to his students without ever raising his voice. From time to time he would look over the list of students who had attended *Shacharis*, which began promptly at 6:15 a.m. If someone had been listed as a latecomer, he would turn to him with a sad smile, "So, Mr.\_\_\_\_\_, you have once again lost the battle with the *yeitzer ho-ra?*" and he would groan deeply. This *n'zifa* was enough to get the culprit to bestir himself to be among the *asora rishonim* the next morning.

The same atmosphere pervaded the second daily *shi'ur* he gave every evening at 7 p.m. His pleasant manner and his paternal devotion to the Yeshiva students made him beloved by them all. They respected him and returned to visit him many years after they left the Yeshiva. A visit with Rabbi Breuer was like a *chossid* traveling to his Rebbe: it required preparation and self-assessment, and provided spiritual uplift.

### In Washington Heights

The K'hal Adath Jeshurun community which Rabbi Breuer organized in Washington Heights after his arrival in New York developed rapidly. The community's elementary and

secondary school, Yeshiva Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, which extends from kindergarten to the twelfth grade, has trained two new generations in the Frankfurt tradition of "Torah with *derech erez*." The principal is Rabbi Breuer's son, Jacob Breuer. The community has its own Yeshiva G'dola and Kollel for its young men and the Rika Breuer Teacher's Seminary for its young women. Academic work is pursued in the colleges that abound in New York.<sup>2</sup>

The communal synagogue today has a membership of approximately one thousand. Though the community has seen the maturing of its third generation — many of them students and graduates of East European-style *yeshivos* in this country — its services, its *nuscho'os* and its *minhogim* (including the black hats worn by the older men in the congregation which are strongly reminiscent of the old-time "cylinders") are those of Frankfurt-on-the-Main. The "Breuer community," as it has become popularly known, has gained the admiration of Orthodox Jews not only in the United States but also in Western Europe and in Eretz Yisroel for its many auxiliary institutions: adult education, youth groups, kashrus supervision, *mikveh*, *tz'doka*, and *chevra kadisha*.

Himself a man of uncompromising *yashrus*, Rabbi Breuer insisted on impeccable ethical conduct on the part of his congregants *bein odom lachaveiro*. When his board of directors

once discussed the subject of *glatt kosher* meat in the the community, Rabbi Breuer declared, "I would rather have *glatt yosher* than *glatt kosher*."

I was one of the participants in the G'mora *shi'ur* held twice-weekly at Rabbi Breuer's apartment in New York. Each participant, in turn, read and explained a segment of the G'mora with Rashi and Tosofos, and Rabbi Breuer would add his own comments or explanations from his father or grandfather or from the *rishonim* and *acharonim*. The participants listened in awe to every syllable

that he uttered so placidly in German, and truly enjoyed his Torah-statements, his Frankfurt style, and his amazing memory, for in his near-blindness he cited everything by heart. When we studied Masechess *Sanhedrin*, I recalled that I had learned this *masechta* under him at the Frankfurt Yeshiva. It was my greatest pleasure, after having studied *Sanhedrin* so many years ago in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, to return to that very *masechta* in Frankfurt-on-the-Hudson.

Sage, educator, and mentor of three generations, Rabbi Joseph Breuer will be long remembered.

תנצב"ה

## What Is "Torah im Derech Eretz?"

The principle of *Torah im derech eretz* expounded by Rav Shimshon R'foel Hirsch has been subjected to many different and sometimes conflicting interpretations. I shall cite one eloquent definition of the Hirschian principle. It was given by his grandson, Dr. Isaac Breuer, in an address he delivered in Frankfurt in January, 1936, to mark Hirsch's forty-eighth *yohrzeit*.

"What does Hirsch have to say to the present generation?" Dr. Breuer asked, and then proceeded to answer his own question. "A century ago Rousseau's call, 'Back to nature!' broke through the walls of the ghetto and created havoc there.

Thousands of victims succumbed. The Jews of the ghetto were able to explain a difficult passage from Rambam, but they were unable to find answers for new problems. Because they were paralyzed, their world collapsed and there was no one to stand in the breach.

"At that point Hirsch appeared on the scene; he stepped into the breach and put a stop to the plague of assimilation and *sh'mad*. He accomplished this with the help of the shul and the school which he established, and by the influence of his immortal writings. Rooted in the past, with his mighty arm he threw open the gates to the future. Hirsch preached a Judaism which

recognized its place in nature, in history, and therefore also in real life, one which did not turn its back on nature but strove to understand and to complement it. *Lo hamidrosh ikor elo hama'aseh*. Our Torah is a Torah of life; it is actualized in practical, everyday living; and in order to actualize it we must know about the forces of nature and the development of life. If we will not clarify for ourselves the relationship between Torah and nature, it will give others the impression that Torah and nature are two irreconcilable opposites.

"One hundred years have passed since the idea of *Torah im Derech Eretz* was stated. This is our preparation for the task that awaits us in Eretz Yisroel: to solve all the problems of modern life — our own political and cultural life — in a spirit of harmony with the Torah, and to stand as pioneers before the people in Eretz Yisroel so that we may teach them this way of thinking. In this manner even Hirsch's opponents will come to respect his ideas and see him as a giant, a beacon to illuminate our own day."

Hirsch prepared himself well for his struggle. He studied at the feet of Chacham Yitzchok Bernays and at the yeshiva of Rav Yaakov Ettliger (author of *Oruch LaNeir*). He satisfied his secular requirements at the University of Bonn.<sup>4</sup> After he had acquired the knowledge he

needed as an instrument for this holy struggle, he threw himself into the battle against the influence of Reform even as the Maccabees had launched their revolt against the Greeks and the Hellenists.

Hirsch expounded his views in his prolific writings which included his classic commentaries on the *Chumosh*, *T'hilim*, and on the *Sidur*. *The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel* was the first of a multitude of trenchant, impassioned books and essays. The Reformers had hardly recovered from this first blow when he presented his monumental work *Horeb: Essays on the Duties of Israel in Dispersion*.

The original approach of *Horeb* lies in the fact that the author took the *mitzvos* of the Torah and divided them among the Torah's own basic classifications. Some examples follow of each classification:

1. *Toros* — fear of G-d, love of G-d, idolatry, trust in Hashgocha, humility.

2. *Eidos* — Shaboss, Yomim Tovim, t'filin, *tzitzis*.

3. *Mishpotim* — justice, respect for property, truth and falsehood, peace.

4. *Chukim* — the care of one's body, dress, sexual morality, *shiluach ha-ken*.

5. *Mitzvos* — respect for parents, *limud* Torah, *t'shuva*, *tz'doka*.

6. *Avodos* — *t'fila*, *b'rochos*, *avodas ha-kohanim*.

Dr. Isaac Breuer used to repeat that whenever the preposition *im* (with) occurs in the Torah, the

4. S. R. Hirsch spent exactly one year at university, and earned no degrees. —Ed.

noun which precedes the preposition is more important than the noun which follows it. This holds true for "Torah *im derech erez*" as well. Torah is primary; *derech erez* is secondary. The latter is intended to serve the former. All the

sciences can never take precedence over Torah; they can serve only as instruments to help us understand the Torah. Torah provides the framework and the perspective to help us to a proper understanding of nature and of man, both G-d's handiwork.

*The following anecdote from Professor Wollman's manuscript work, Frankfurt Experiences, reveals Rav Breuer's mida of emess*

## Dr. Breuer's Attitude Toward Modern Hebrew

MENACHEN'S EFFORTS to popularize Hebrew as a spoken language in Frankfurt were crowned by the institution of a course in Hebrew language inside Dr. Breuer's yeshiva. This phenomenon came about in the following manner:

Following the success of the Hebrew Club, *S'hem V'Ever*, a steady stream of religious university students and students from Dr. Breuer's yeshiva would converge on Menachem every motzo'ey Shaboss.

Frankfurt's traditional Jews considered modern Hebrew—the language of the Zionists — a manifestation of secular nationalism, and thus, a tongue to be shunned.

When the Rosh Yeshiva, Dr. Breuer, was apprised that yeshiva students of his attended the Hebrew Club, he summoned Menachem for an explanation,

fearing the influence of secular nationalism on his students.

Menachem came immediately. In the course of the conversation, Dr. Breuer asked, "Since when is Hebrew spoken in Frankfurt?"

"And since when is German spoken in Frankfurt?" countered Menachem. "Yiddish was the language of the Frankfurt ghetto, not German! And then Rav S.R. Hirsch came and showed that it was possible to speak German and to study all academic subjects and all foreign tongues, and still remain an observant Jew! The same is true about speaking modern Hebrew!

"Secondly," asked Menachem, "we are preparing ourselves here in the yeshiva and in the *hachsharot* to emigrate to the Holy Land to build it up and do battle for the cause of a religious life which will serve as an example for one and all, a life

based on Israel's Torah. In what language will we wage this war in the Holy Land for attaining our objectives? In German or in Hebrew? In that case it is a *mitzva* - obligation to study Hebrew *here* to prepare ourselves for the religious tasks that await us there!"

Menachem's answer, delivered with youthful fervor, seemed to offend Dr. Breuer. Menachem regretted that his reply to his

teacher and mentor had not been more respectful.

Several weeks passed. After what must have been considerable deliberation, Dr. Breuer again summoned Menachem. This time Menachem was offered a position as the first Hebrew language instructor in the yeshiva. This incident increased severalfold his deep esteem for Dr. Breuer's integrity, love of truth, and wisdom.

*The following story from Professor Wollman's manuscript work, **Frankfurt Experiences**, reveals Rav Joseph Breuer's great bitochon.*