

ASHKENAZ: THE WORLD THAT IS

RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM VISITS BALTIMORE

By Avi Tannenbaum

It was Baltimore's distinct treat over *Shabbos Parshas Mishpatim* to host Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum, the National Director of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland's Living Memorial Project, author of the popular *Peninim al HaTorah* series for more than two decades running, and acknowledged speaker and author. And it was Rabbi Scheinbaum's treatise, *The World That Was: Ashkenaz - The Legacy of German Jewry 843-1945, Survival and Perseverance in Defiance of Prejudice and Adversity*, that spurred Kehillas Ashkenaz of Baltimore to invite him as a visiting scholar.

The three-year-old *minyán*, deeply committed to preserving the centuries-old German-Jewish Orthodox tradition, presently convenes at Baltimore's Shomrei Emunah Congregation for Friday evening and *Shabbos* morning *davening*. The *minyán*, under the direction of its energetic founder, Mr. Alexander Weil, has sponsored highly-regarded authorities on *minhag Ashkenaz* to speak at Shomrei Emunah as scholars-in-residence. Last year, it hosted Rabbi Binyomin Shlomo Hamburger of Bnei Brak, founder of the Machon Moreshes Ashkenaz (Institute for German Jewish Heritage), as well as Dr. Elliott Bondi, a recognized authority on the teachings of Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch and the *Ashkenazic mesorah*.

Rabbi Scheinbaum *davened* with Kehillas Ashkenaz over the *Shabbos* and spoke in several venues on the *minyán's* behalf. At a Friday night *oneg* at the home of R' and Mrs. Yosef Wiener, Rabbi Scheinbaum focused on the life and work of Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg z"l (1884-1966), the *baal Seridei Eish*, the last *rosh yeshiva* of the Rabbiner Seminar in Berlin and a *Slabodka talmid*. Many of his *talmidim* were murdered by the Nazis, *ym"sh*, and he did not have children. Therefore, Rabbi Scheinbaum feels a particularly strong personal *achrayus* to disseminate the work of the *Seridei Eish*.

Kehillas Ashkenaz arranges a *shiur* and *kiddush* each week following the conclusion of its *Shabbos* morning *davening*. Rabbi Scheinbaum, who personally comes from a *nusach Sefard* background, remarked that there was an aura created in the room that was already palpable even before *Ashrei* at the Friday *Minchah*. There was a sense that something special, different and unique was taking place behind the closed classroom door. With the

chazzan clearly identified by a distinct *davening kaepchen*, and the *hakpadah* on traditional *nusach* and *niggunim*, one could imagine himself in a *shul* in Frankfurt or another German city well more than one hundred years back in time. He encouraged the *minyán* members to imagine that in the room with them are the likes of Rabbiner Hirsch and Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer, for the *minyán* remains faithful to the *davening* of yesteryear, which combines a strong sense of purpose with attention to every nuance of the *Ashkenazic* liturgy.

Rabbi Scheinbaum's remarks at the *kiddush* covered two other critical and instructive points. The subtle, low-key German *davening*, he said, reflects the centuries-long hardship through which the German Jewish citizenry lived. Having known those perilous times, the essence of *davening* is to speak simply and sing to the Creator; fanfare and wild gesticulation are not necessary. Rabbi Scheinbaum then dwelt on what it means to be a visionary in the Torah *velt*, citing such luminaries as Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, and Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch. A visionary thinks on a large scale and in dramatic terms - from the very inception of his idea. Just as a Rav Aharon Kotler envisioned not tens, but thousands, of *bochurim* learning in an upstart *yeshiva* in a New Jersey town decades ago, so too was it the plan that a Rabbi Breuer could build a magnificent transplanted *kehillah* on New York's shores. Likewise, the Kehillas Ashkenaz *minyán* in Baltimore can expand enormously if the members continue to relentlessly pursue such a lofty goal.

Before *Shabbos Minchah*, Rabbi Scheinbaum spoke in the Shomrei main sanctuary. That lecture was open to the entire community. He spoke about the value of teaching our children and ourselves about our forebears and the *mesirus nefesh* they exhibited to help us appreciate their accomplishments. Moreover, it connects us with what they stood for and the *mesorah* they have passed down to

us. He recalled how his father would tell of his experiences during the Holocaust and take him to the cemetery to tell him about various relatives buried there. Rabbi Scheinbaum also related the importance that various *gedolim*, such as the *Chasam Sofer* and the *Chazon Ish*, attached to telling stories about *gedolim*. Finally, Rabbi Scheinbaum warmly praised Kehillas Ashkenaz for maintaining a *mesorah* that dates back to before *Rashi*, thereby maintaining the all-important connection with our past.



Reb Alexander Weil, Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum and Rabbi Yonah Sklare.

Shomrei member Dr. Mark Lustman said, "Two things impacted on me immediately from

Rabbi Scheinbaum's talk. First, it was a perfect lead-in to the memorial lecture we had last night for Rabbi Bak, the first *rov* of our *shul*; that is, remembering the past and the vision of Rabbi Bak for Shomrei and how this made us what we are today. Rabbi Scheinbaum's references to Rav Mordechai Gifter were especially poignant, since he and Rav Bak were very close. Incidentally, Rabbi Weinreb, our second *rov*, would often speak about his 'heroes' - namely, the *Tannaim*, *Amoraim* and *gedolim* of the past, with whom he interacted as he learned the pages of the *Mishnah*, *Gemara* and other *seforim*. Rabbi Weinreb 'brought the *gedolim* to life' in many of his *drashos*, and, as Rabbi Scheinbaum implied, the inspiration from these 'encounters' is extremely powerful. Secondly, my father z"l (as well as my mother, may she be well) was also a Holocaust survivor, and our *Pesach sederim* consisted of numerous stories of my parents' experiences in the Holocaust. Each year, we would 'live through' their *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and this had a tremendous impact on our lives."

Another Shomrei member, Mr. Alan Taragin, expressed the message he took away from the lecture: "One important point that Rabbi Scheinbaum made was that by understanding and appreciating our past, we will have the tools to properly continue our special role as the Jewish people in the future. He also emphasized that some liberal movements have

denied their glorious past and by doing so have endangered our future ability to perform the duties given to us by Hashem at *Har Sinai*."

The *melava malka* at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Avi Tannenbaum was the *minyán's* first such gathering, and its purpose was to foster *achdus* for the like-minded devoted to the *Ashkenazic* way. Rabbi Scheinbaum's remarks for the last of his speaking venues included vignettes about our past *gedolim*. He included the inspiring story of Rav Shimon Schwab z"l in the aftermath of having had a speech tragically misunderstood by German spies sitting in his *shul* in Ichenhausen, Germany, during Hitler's rise to power. Fearing for his life and that he might be taken from his home in the middle of the night to be hung, Rav Schwab slept in his rabbinical garb for six weeks. He did this because he felt it would be dishonorable as a congregation's *rov* to be attired in anything less than the clothing befitting his station in life and that he would not be allowed to properly dress if roused by the Nazis.

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The *Ashkenazic* Jewish tradition is the cumulative product of two millennia of brilliant scholars and dedicated community leaders. By publishing *seforim* expounding on the solid *halachic* foundations of the *minhag* and establishing new *botei knesses*, Machon Moreshes Ashkenaz is revitalizing the spiritual treasures of German Jewry. There are currently *minhag Ashkenaz shuls* affiliated with the Machon functioning in Bnei Brak, Yerushalayim, Kiryat Sefer, Beitar, Baltimore, Brooklyn and South Shore of Long Island, NY, with an additional branch planned for Passaic, *b'ezras Hashem*.

Rav Binyomin Shlomo Hamburger has devoted his life's work to collecting, archiving and publishing materials pertaining to *Ashkenazic* Jewry's historic, *halachic* and musical traditions. Born in Switzerland and raised in Bnei Brak, he founded Machon Moreshes Ashkenaz in 1985. He has authored the widely-acclaimed series *Shroshei Minhag Ashkenaz*, edited the annual *Yerushoseinu*, and recently released an updated and expanded edition of *Meshichei Sheker uMisnagdeiheim*. He recently published a monumental three-volume study of the famous Yeshiva of Fürth, touching on many related points of *masores Ashkenaz*.

5TH ANNUAL SHABBOS OF CHIZUK PRESENTED BY AGUDAS YISROEL AND MELAVA MALKA AT CONGREGATION BETH JACOB IN ATLANTA

PHOTOS: RUBY GROSSBLATT



Rabbi Daniel Estreicher of Yeshiva Atlanta leading *Tehillim*.



Rabbi Binyomin Friedman



Rabbi Doniel Neustadt



Rabbi Paysach Krohn



Rabbi Y. Ben-Zion Bamberger



(L-R) Rabbi Ilan Feldman of Congregation Beth Jacob, Rabbi Shmuel Koshkerman of Congregation Ner Hamizrach, Rabbi Paysach Krohn, Rabbi Binyomin Friedman of Congregation Ariel, Rabbi Y. Ben-Zion Bamberger, Rabbi Doniel Neustadt and Rabbi Chaim Glazer, Atlanta *chizuk* coordinator.



(L-R) Rabbi Yosef Cavalier of Yeshiva Ohr Yisrael, Rabbi Y. Ben-Zion Bamberger and Rabbi Naphtali Estreicher of Yeshiva Ohr Yisrael.