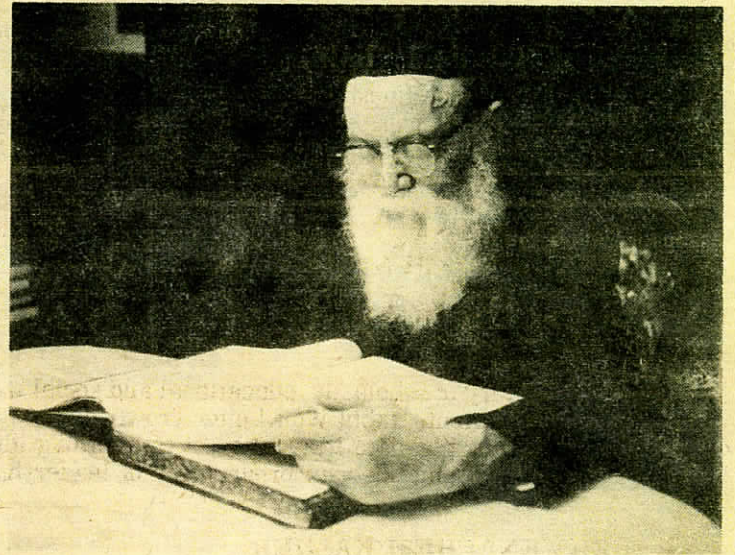


A History Of Service

The word Rabbi is a generic term which, in English, lacks the sharper distinctions drawn in the Hebrew language. Thus, in Hebrew we speak of one who decides on questions of ritual or conduct as prescribed for Orthodox Jews as a **Rav**; of a rabbinic scholar recognized by other scholars as a legal authority whose decisions are binding, as a **Gaon**; of a scholarly genius possessing the broadest field of knowledge as a **Gaon u-Boki**; and so on. In English we designate them all as Rabbi. Rarely, on the other hand, can these titles be applied to any one person without indiscriminate exaggeration. Rabbi Wolf Leiter is beyond doubt an individual who may be and has been so addressed by all those honorifics by the leading Torah scholars of the past two generations. Rabbi Leiter, Chairman of the Council of Rabbis of Pittsburgh and Director of the Maimonides Institute of Jewish Studies, combines in himself the above mentioned qualities par excellence. Rabbi Leiter embodies a unique blend of Talmudic erudition and modern day scholarship. He is broadly versed in secular as well as rabbinic studies: His recall of world history is only surpassed by his more intimate knowledge of Jewish history; his eloquence as a speaker and a writer in Hebrew and English is matched by his being conversant in a dozen languages. But above all, he has achieved the distinction of being recognized as one of the greatest living authorities on Jewish legal jurisprudence of our time.

Rabbi Leiter's career as a Talmudic scholar had early beginnings. He was born in 1891 in the city of Zevalov, Austria-Hungary to Rabbi Nathan and Haya Etya Leiter, descendants of the most noted rabbinic families (Bach, Taz, Tosephot Yom Tov, Penei Yehoshua). His parents, ardent lovers of Zion, saw to it that their son's first spoken language was Hebrew, the language of the book. At the age of six he was already studying the Talmud and, at the tender age of eight, had written his first gloss (scholarly comment). At the age of twelve he completed his first work, **Dibhrey Hakhamim**, a collection of responsa (erudite replies rendering decisions on problems in Jewish law). Two other responsa written by him at the age of twelve were later published in the **Responsa Ma'aseh Yehiel**, No. 30, No. 47. His own queries on legal matters were discussed by some of the leading scholars of the day in their well known treatises. By the time Rabbi Leiter had reached the age of fourteen his reputation as a prodigy had ranged far and wide and legal questions from throughout the state of Galicia were addressed to him. In 1911, Rabbi Leiter became **DAYAN** (judge of legal questions) and associate Rabbi of Trembovle, Austria-Hungary.



At the outbreak of World War I Rabbi Leiter emigrated to the city of Amsterdam and shortly thereafter he was appointed Rabbi of the Eastern Jewish Community in Amsterdam. While there, he founded a Talmudic Torah School for refugee children and was director of the Dutch Relief work for war sufferers in Austria, sponsored by the Jewish communities of Netherlands. It was in Holland that Rabbi Leiter published **Die Stellung Der Frau In Talmud**. Written in German, this short scholarly monograph discussed the all-embracing question of the position of the woman in Jewish life according to the Talmud. It was Rabbi Leiter's view that there is a moral and spiritual imperative that the Jewish woman not be confined to and limited by the duties of the home alone, but should also have a broad Jewish education according to the capacities and interests of the particular woman. Professor Wensick, the eminent Dutch Orientalist of the day, characterized the work at that time as one of the most important scholarly contributions to the question of the semitic attitude towards woman. This short monograph was a prime factor giving ideological impetus to the founders of the now world famous Beth Jacob School for Girls.

In 1920 and **Beth David Vol. 1**, a collection of Responsa by Rabbi Leiter was printed and in 1952 reissued together with Vol. 2. Over the years it has been quoted in over two hundred and fifty scholarly works and in thousands of responsa. It has served as the final word in the determination of many legal problems, as well as the basis for several decisions reached by the Israeli Supreme Court. Interestingly enough these decisions quoted by the Supreme Court were written by Rabbi Leiter at the age of 15½!! It has become a classic in the author's lifetime.

In 1920 he became a delegate to the United States on behalf of those European Rabbis displaced by the war. Shortly thereafter, he married Regina Goldberg, also a descendant of a great rabbinic family. Their marriage was blessed with four children David, Saul, Deborah, and Abba. In the same year, he accepted the pulpit of the Adath Yeshurun Congregation of Brooklyn.

In 1922, he was elected Rabbi of Congregation Machzike Hadath of Pittsburgh. In Pittsburgh Rabbi Leiter became a well-known and highly respected figure. He was an active participant in the affairs of the Jewish community. He served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies and also of the United Jewish Fund. He was a comrade of the Vaad HaPoel of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of America; honorary president of the Pittsburgh Mizrachi; and the Pittsburgh delegate to the Jewish World Congress of 1934. He served on the local Boards of the National Fund, The Jewish American Congress, The Committee to Aid Overseas Yeshivoth; and was an active member of all the aid and cultural organizations of the Pittsburgh community as well as of the national Jewish organizations throughout the country.

.. His unique accomplishments in Jewish learning and Torah scholarship have gained for him and for the city of Pittsburgh an honored and permanent place in the annals of Jewish literature and tradition. He has honored us, and in this, his Jubilee Year, we now honor and give homage to him. As Professor Heschel has so eloquently stated.

"In Honoring This Great Man

**We Honor G-D,
We Honor Torah,
We Honor Israel"**

.. Rabbi Leiter was instrumental in the Jewish community's decision to establish a kosher kitchen in the Montefiore Hospital. It was one of the first such facilities established in a large city hospital in America. For the past 35 years, Rabbi Leiter, in spirit of **Bikur Cholim** attending to the needs of the sick has supervised the kosher kitchen, giving of his time and energy and legal expertise. He also served as the Chaplain of the Western Pennsylvania Correctional System and of the city correctional system.

.. In 1941, with the aid of such communal leaders as Charles Rosenbloom, Julius Halpern, Dr. Maurice Taylor, Herman Fineberg, Dr. Solomon Freehof and Louis Caplan, Rabbi Leiter established the Maimonides Institute of Jewish Studies. Under its auspices, a whole series of important scholarly publications was issued. The first publication, the **Mitorotan Shel Rishonim**, was issued in 1946. It was from this book that extracts were taken and incorporated into a new edition of the Talmud. In having his notes printed alongside the text of the Talmud, Rabbi Leiter has acquired an honor of a singular nature. Indeed, Rabbi Leiter is the only one to be so honored in the past 130 years and joins the less than a score of prominent Rabbis who have achieved this distinction since the Talmud has been printed.

.. In the same year the **Sha'aray Teshubha**, a collection of responsa of the Geonic period with a comprehensive scholarly introduction by Rabbi Leiter, was published. In 1947, the code of Maimonides was published and included Rabbi Leiter's notes and commentary on **Hilkhot Melakhim** (laws of Kingship in Israel). In 1954, the **Responsa of Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi** in a scholarly edition with commentaries by Rabbi Leiter was published. In 1964, the Institute published the **Tzion Lenephesh Haya**, a collection of significant legal decisions of Rabbi Leiter and also some 30 legal essays of his father, Rabbi Nathan Leiter. This year permission has been given to the Weitzman Institute in Israel to place some of the material in this volume in its computer bank on Jewish legal jurisprudence.

.. Likewise, permission was granted to have reprinted in Israel the **RESPONSA OF RABBI ALFASI** and the **SHA'ARAY TESHUBHA**, edited by Rabbi Leiter.

.. In 1965, the Institute issued the **Shem Mishimon**, a Jubilee Volume honoring the memory of Rabbi M. S. Sivitz, who served as a Rabbi in the Pittsburgh Community for 48 years. It is a collection of heretofore unpublished manuscripts and letters of historic significance. It was edited by Rabbi Leiter's sons, Rabbi David and Rabbi Abba.

.. Aside from authoring many scholarly works, Rabbi Leiter has written memoirs of his experiences in Europe and the United States. This, alongside the rather large collection of his personal correspondence with the greats of Jewish scholarship and Torah of the 20th Century, undoubtedly has a significant historical value.

.. Rabbi Leiter has studied the Torah for over 75 years. His scholarly excellence and brilliance have placed him on a very exclusive plateau. Together with the most illustrious rabbinic scholars of the past two generations, he has stood as a titan astride the Talmud and all of its cognate literature. As Professor Saul Lieberman has so aptly commented, "His learning and his personality put him in the foremost rank of our generation. This is the least I can say about this great Rabbi. He has not however lived in the proverbial ivory tower, for his humanitarian qualities have manifested themselves in the everyday causes of life, and he has given of himself unstintingly in all areas of communal life.

.. Over and above his great abilities and accomplishments is his humility. He has loved the Torah an everlasting love, and has studied it for its own sake and not for the sake of personal greatness or to achieve fame in the public eye.