

I want to thank the organizers of this event for accepting my offer to address this audience tonight. I actually prepared two speeches; speech number 1 and speech number 2. I planned to choose between them based on the remarks of the previous speakers. I have now decided to go back to speech number 1.

We have already heard what a wonderful legacy Rabbi Wohlgemuth left us from the past. I am here to tell you that not only has Rabbi Wohlgemuth provided us a legacy from the past, he also left us a legacy that has a bright future. That bright future will become clear when I relate to you how it was that the course in Beurei Hatefila came to be taught at Maimonides.

Before I do that, I would like to share with you some posts from the Maimonides Class of 1971 WhatsApp group. I take you back to Erev Yom Kippur, just about a month ago. As I was about to leave to go to shul to daven Mincha before the pre-fast meal, when my wife, Roberta, who has been very supportive of my efforts to promote the study of Tefila, asked me: should I be davening Mincha as well. I responded that I think that you should.

When I returned from synagogue, I thought to post a reminder to the women who were part of the Maimonides Class of 1971 WhatsApp group that they should consider davening Mincha as well. Here is the exchange of posts that were posted place that day:

Abe: I am not sure it is required but it is a good idea for women to daven the special Mincha for Erev Yom Kippur before the meal.

Jackie Holcer Fessel: I remember from Rabbi Wohlgemuth's class. You are right Abie. Thanks. Gmar Tov to all.

Peshy Kastrovitsky Kurtz: Yes. I remember learning from Rabbi Wohlgemuth that women need to daven Mincha before סעודה המפסקת in case one might choke on something and pass away. This way they had the opportunity to say a Viduy which is in the Mincha today.

It is 48 years since any of the members of the Maimonides Class of 1971 sat in a Beurei Hatefila class and not only do these students remember that Rabbi Wohlgemuth touched on the subject of davening Mincha on Erev Yom Kippur but they remember the details of what Rabbi Wohlgemuth taught. That demonstrates the significant impact that Rabbi Wohlgemuth as a teacher and his subject matter had upon his students. I would not be surprised if my classmates and I could still pass the

comprehensive exam in Beurei Hatefila that Rabbi Wohlgemuth tested us with in 12th grade.

So, let me try to answer the question: how did it happen that the course in Beurei Hatefila came to be taught at Maimonides? To fully appreciate the question, you have to ask the flip side: why doesn't every day school and every Yeshiva and every Rabbinical Seminary provide courses in Beurei Hatefila to their students? Think of your own Jewish education if you were not one of those who attended Maimonides School; think of the Jewish education that your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren have received? Did they ever participate in a class on Beurei Hatefila? I can tell you about my own children, two boys and a girl, triplets, who went to some of the finest day schools New York City has to offer. They were not taught Beurei Hatefila on any level; not in elementary school; not in middle school and not in high school. And I can share with you that the sister of one of my classmates, teaches at the girls' high school which my daughter attended. Several years after my daughter graduated, she e-mailed me and told me that she was thinking of approaching the administrators of her school, offering to teach a course in Beurei Hatefila; would I help her with preparing the materials. I told her that I would. Then I did not hear from her. Several years later, I ran into her and asked her whether she had in fact offered to teach the course in Beurei Hatefila. She said that she had approached the administrators but they had no interest in seeing that a course in Beurei Hatefila be taught at that school.

Given that history you can understand why asking how the course in Beurei Hatefila came to be taught at Maimonides is a very significant question. The answer that I discovered is that three individuals came together to make that course happen; the three foundational personalities who built the educational philosophy of Maimonides. Rabbi Wohlgemuth in his own words relates to us how the course began:

Some thirty years ago the principal of Maimonides School Rabbi Moses J. Cohn, zt"l asked me to develop and teach a course on prayer. We called it Beurei Hatefilah, or "Explanations of the Prayers." It was to be taught from eighth through twelfth grades. For the senior class I outlined a special program that was a comprehensive review of the entire course. The students were also asked to present a term paper on a subject of their choice.

Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik (the Rav), זצ"ל, enthusiastically endorsed the course and stated that no student could graduate from Maimonides School without passing it.

Why was it so easy for these three men to join together and agree that the course in Beurei Hatefila be taught at Maimonides? What I discovered is that these three men shared a link to the Rabbiner Seminary in Berlin, the seminary established by Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer, z"l, in 1873 and which continued to operate until Kristallnacht when its building was stormed and it suffered severe damage. The last administrator of the Seminary, Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, z"l, who was recognized as a world renown Posek after World War II, closed the Seminary and never re-opened it. More importantly, the educational philosophy of the Rabbiner Seminary was never adopted by any other Yeshiva or Rabbinic Seminary except, perhaps, during the years in which Rabbi Wohlgemuth taught his course in Beurei Hatefila at Maimonides.

How were each of these pillars of Maimonides School linked to the Rabbiner Seminary? Rabbi Wohlgemuth received his Semicha from the Rabbiner Seminary in 1936. Rabbi Cohn, according to Rabbi Dr. Seth Farber in his book: *An American Orthodox Dreamer: Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik and Boston's Maimonides School*, received his ordination from the Realschule in Hamburg, at a time when Rabbi Joseph Carlebach was administrator of the school. Rabbi Carlebach received his Semicha from the Rabbiner Seminary in Berlin. One of Rabbi Cohn's teachers was Rabbi Yissachar Jakobson, an expert in the field of Tefila and author of a multi-volume treatise on Tefila known as Netiv Binah who also had studied at the Rabbiner Seminary. Rabbi Jakobson's book was re-published several years ago and should be currently available in Seforim stores or over the internet. Rabbi Soloveitchik, according the biography of him written by Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, audited classes at the Rabbiner Seminary when Rabbi Soloveitchik was a student at the University of Berlin.

So what was so unique about the educational philosophy of the Rabbiner Seminary? Rabbi Hildesheimer who was born and was raised in Hungary and served as Rabbi there before taking a position in Berlin, was well aware of the challenges that the Reform movement posed to the Orthodox Rabbinate. He saw how the Reform movement and the other movements that sprang from the Reform movement established Rabbinical Seminaries which adopted a method of study that developed in Germany in the early 1800's. It is known as *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the scientific study of Judaism and Jewish texts. If you are not sure what that means let me explain in a different manner. It is how Judaism and Jewish texts are studied in Jewish studies programs in universities around the world, particularly in Israel, where the best Jewish Studies programs are taught.

Rabbi Hildesheimer believed that *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was a method of study that could be adopted and adapted into an Orthodox environment. He wanted his

graduates to be able to interact with their congregants at a high intellectual level. In furtherance of that he also required his students to complete a PHD program at a secular university.

Here is how Rabbi Wohlgemuth presents this method of study and how Rabbi Hildesheimer integrated that method of study into the educational philosophy of the Seminary:

Naturally, I read and studied all books and sources on prayer that were available to me. The German Jewish movement, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, consistently dealt with this crucial subject. The study of prayer started in Germany in the nineteenth century as a result of the development of the Reform and Conservative movements, which started during this period. As these movements appeared on the stage of Jewish history, they promoted the study of prayer. On the one hand, Reform and Conservative Jews wanted to show that our prayers were not always a part of our heritage; what was not original could be eliminated. They disliked long prayers, as well as prayers in Hebrew; they preferred sermons. Thus, they attempted to demonstrate that their reforms were legitimate.

On the other hand, the Orthodox college tried to show that every element of the traditional prayer service was essential, that we have no right to institute changes or omissions. Great scholars appeared in Germany to grapple with this subject. We no longer know the first names of these men, but their family names were Berliner, Landshut, and Sachs; they were all strictly Orthodox.

Thanks to my research and the internet, I can provide the first names of these scholars. They are: Abraham Berliner, Lazer Landshut and Michael Sachs. Perhaps the most important of these men was Abraham Berliner. Dr. Berliner was one of the first teachers hired by Rabbi Hildesheimer. We are very fortunate that Mossad Ha'Rav Kook, published the collected writings of Dr. Berliner about forty years ago. It is a set of two books. In volume 1 you will find about 140 pages of the lecture notes of Dr. Berliner for his course on Tefila. When I read them, I feel like I am back in Rabbi Wohlgemuth's Beurei Hatefila class. I was able to purchase these volumes at a used Seforim store on 16th Avenue in Boro Park. It set me back \$80.00.

Rabbi Wohlgemuth continues by describing one additional scholar in the field of Tefila whose works were available to him. In doing so, Rabbi Wohlgemuth added circumstantial evidence that in fact, Rabbi Soloveitchik had audited classes, particularly in the field of Tefila, at the Rabbiner Seminary, while Rabbi Soloveitchik attended the University of Berlin:

One of the last scholars in Germany was the late Dr. Ismar Elbogen. Although he was a Reform scholar, he was always fair and thorough when he transmitted the Orthodox point of view. His contributions were based on the works of many scholars and are now available in an excellent Hebrew translation, **התפילה בישראל** (Hatefilah B'Yisrael). Rav Soloveitchik said to me, "Read his books. Study his books. He is very traditional in his approach. He is very clever and he made very valuable contributions to the study of prayer."

I can share with you that Dr. Elbogen's book was further translated, this time into English by the Jewish Publication Society in 1999. It too should be available for purchase over the internet.

Now I can provide you the answers to the two questions I presented. How did the course in Beurei Hatefila come to be taught at Maimonides? The three individuals who came together to offer the course had all studied Tefila either directly or indirectly because of the Tefila courses taught at the Rabbiner Seminary. They were all well aware of the wonderful material that could be shared with the students and how the material could enhance the Tefila experience of their students. Why do other day schools, Yeshivot and Rabbinical Seminaries not teach Beurei Hatefila? Because the administrators and teachers at those schools were never taught Beurei Hatefila. They have no idea what material can be shared with the students. If you have not been taught a subject, how can you teach the subject and how can you approve of others teaching the subject matter.

Perhaps the greatest memorial that we can create to memorialize the legacy of Rabbi Wohlgemuth and his Beurei Hatefila Course is to encourage Orthodox Rabbinical Seminaries to teach their students courses in Beurei Hatefila. It is time to recognize that the absence of Tefila courses in Orthodox Jewish schools is a top-down problem. It can only be solved by Semicha students and prospective Jewish studies teachers being taught Beurei Hatefila, and I would recommend, using Rabbi Wohlgemuth's method of study. In doing so we will create a lasting and appropriate memorial to our beloved teacher, Rabbi Isaiah Wohlgemuth.