

# 'TALMUD YERUSHALMI' REBORN

## Hebrew Theological College Professor Writes Commentary On Historical Scriptures

By ESTHER FIRE

When Rabbi Isaac Herzog, chief Rabbi of Israel recommended young Rabbi Chayim Kreiswirth to head the Department of Talmud at the Hebrew Theological College, no one doubted his ability, his erudition and scholarship. His cultural background was crowned with many achievements. Born in a small town near Krakow, Poland, he was a descendant of prominent Rabbin-

*Ethics* known as *Pirkei Abot*, *Ethics of the Fathers*. Then followed the vast ocean of Talmudic literature.

Some people wonder why we are called *The People of the Book*. This question may be answered in one sentence: It is the Book that constitutes the foundation of the House of Israel. Through the years of Exile, of persecution, of prejudice, of pogroms and massacres the Jew found comfort, strength and spiritual stamina to withstand the onslaught from the hordes of darkness, in the *Book of Books*, in the *Prophets*, in the wisdom of the sages and in the courage and hope of the Psalmist.

Whenever the need arose to feed the people some spiritual vitamins, the Rabbis resorted to writing new commentaries, with a new approach to the original Book, the Bible. After the destruction of the second Temple, when Jerusalem was once again waste and desolate, the Rabbis of those days compiled the first Talmudic literature known as *Talmud Yerushalmi*. This was to reaffirm the faith in the ultimate redemption of Israel. Therefore the code of Laws inculcated in this Talmud dealt mostly with the laws of Palestine, when the Jews were settled in their own land.

### In the Year 70 A.D.

It must be remembered, that this task of the *Talmud Yerushalmi* was undertaken in the year 70 A.D. when the Jews were faced with the supreme crisis of Exile, of homelessness, both for themselves as individuals and as a people. The project began with a number of fragmentary notes and few interpretations of the original 613 *Mitzvoth* set down in the *Torah*, and *Mishna*.

In the later years when the Jews found a refuge in Babylon, the Rabbis again embarked on a project to compile the *Talmud Babli* which became the authoritative and popular Talmud used throughout the Diaspora by Jewish scholars everywhere.

According to Rabbi Kreiswirth, the reason for this was that, there were many Commentaries to the later Talmud but practically none to the first one. It would be almost impossible to study the Talmud without a comprehensive understanding and a broad interpretation. The Talmudic researchers and scholars broadened the scope of the Babylonian Talmud, because it dwelt more on the codes of law of a people dispersed and scattered, living and working together with other peoples of the world.

However, since the proclamation of Israel as a Jewish State, the ancient laws of a people, living in its own land have to be revived. The problems



RABBI CHAYIM KREISWIRTH

ical families and had distinguished himself as a Talmudic scholar in the Slobodka Yeshivah, where he received his ordination at the age of 16.

During the early forties when the Hitler purge became rampant in Lithuania and the Yeshivah was disbanded, Rabbi Kreiswirth escaped to Palestine. His knowledge of the Talmud soon became known and he was invited to join the faculty of the New Israel Institute in Petach Tikvah, where he lectured on Law.

During his stay in the Holy Land, Rabbi Kreiswirth studied the political, national and religious movements, and from the fervor and devotion from all groups concerned, deduced that the day was not far off when Israel would be declared the Jewish Homeland. He realized that the time was nearing, when it would once again be the Eretz Israel, redeemed in accordance with the fulfillment of the Divine Pledge.

### Attracts Herzog's Attention

His profound understanding of Talmudic Law, with regard to a new and modern Israel, attracted the attention of the great Rabbi Herzog who befriended the young scholar and encouraged him to continue in his endeavors to prepare a *Commentary on Talmud Yerushalmi*.

The Talmud is an outgrowth of the Bible and the *Mishna*. The latter one means "repetition." It is a code of law that was transmitted by word of mouth, by repetition from generation to generation. The greatest contribution made by the *Mishna* is the Code of

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of Israel today must have an understanding of the Talmudic teachings that pertain and deal directly with needed laws.

Rabbi Kreiswirth has taken it upon himself to prepare such a comprehensive commentary to the Talmud Yerushalmi that would serve as guide to the intricate laws of the new Israel. Two huge volumes are now in the process of being revised and may soon be published.

The present age may well be termed as the renaissance of *Talmud Yerushalmi*, a literature that practically remained dormant, excepting for some scholars who were interested in the technical side, instead of the academic and philosophic.

Since Rabbi Kreiswirth took over the position of Chairman of the Department of the Talmud at the Hebrew Theological College an office made vacant by the retirement last year of Rabbi Chaim Korb, the study of Talmud has become an eagerly awaited subject by the advanced rabbinical students of the College.

Rabbi Kreiswirth maintains, that if one wants to keep on the spiritual path of learning, one must study the Law and practice it in daily life. "Talmudic Culture is that form of education which manifests itself in refinement of mind, morals, taste and intelligence, moreover it makes life worth while through continuous growth," he maintains.

He is married to the daughter of Rabbi Abraham Grodzinsky former Dean of the Slobodka Yeshivah.

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