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Maintaining Tradition: A Survey of the Life and Writings of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky*

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The East European Jewish migration to the United States which began in earnest after 1881 represented unique challenges to Orthodox Jewry.¹ The dearth of rabbis, traditional or otherwise; the lack of such East European communal institutions as yeshivot, rabbinical courts, and communal supervision of *kashrut*; the scarcity of ritual observance²; and the democratic system of government created an atmosphere that differed markedly from the world the immigrants had left and challenged their identities as Jews.³ In addition, the constant pressure to produce a livelihood was a necessary obsession. The philanthropic institutions of Eastern Europe which supported intensive learning and at least guaranteed subsistence to the poor and the learned had no analogues in the well-intentioned settlement agencies in America.

The lack of rabbinic authorities and authority may well have been the most striking difference between America and Europe. Whereas the Orthodox communities of East Europe were led by a communal rabbi whose religious decisions were inviolate, ordained Orthodox scholars in America were rare until the 1880s. Gradually, however, with the encouragement of such teachers as Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Spektor, the

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1. Samuel Joseph (*Jewish Immigration to the United States: 1881-1910* [New York, 1914]) provides an early and useful statistical analysis of immigration which began with the imposition of the Tsarist May Laws of 1881 in the aftermath of the assassination of Alexander II.

2. See especially Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 146-167 for an analysis of the religious losses, and Jenna Weissmann Joselit ("What Happened to New York's 'Jewish Jews'?" *AJH* 73:2 [December, 1983]: 163-184) for a more positive understanding of the situation in New York.

3. For a series of first person accounts about the pressures and the changes they provoked among immigrants, see Neil M. Cowan and Ruth Schwartz, *The Americanization of Eastern European Jews* (New York, 1989).

chief rabbi of Kaunas,⁴ the products of Lithuania's best yeshivot began to make their way to America.⁵

The American rabbinate contrasted sharply with its European counterpart. The American rabbi's responsibilities were inspirational and communal; his learning was assumed. Although he was expected to know the law, raising up scholars and writing technical tomes on Jewish law were popularly viewed as optional, because they seemed out of place or irrelevant in America.

Those European scholars who successfully conveyed their learning to America and contributed to the scholarly enterprise while simultaneously ministering to their communities were unusual indeed. Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky, the chief rabbi of Omaha, Nebraska, from his arrival in the United States in 1891 until his death in 1947, was such an exception. The scion of a renowned rabbinic family, he sought to immerse himself in the Orthodox Jewish life that he found in his adopted American city and to transplant to it the East European (specifically Lithuanian) communal model. Yet, unlike many of his fellow immigrant rabbis, he somehow found the time to write prolifically and to publish extensively, although his large published output comprises only a small fraction of his written works. For reasons which will become apparent below, the bulk of Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky's rabbinic writings did not reach the printed page in his lifetime. The current study seeks to provide the first systematic survey of his life and career and thereby assess his achievements and the need to bring his writings to a larger audience.

The name Grodzinsky is synonymous with the summits of traditional Jewish scholarship. Such recognition is bound to the family's leading scholar, Rabbi Hayyim Ozer Grodzinsky (1863–1940). A prodigy who

4. Kaunas is commonly known in Jewish sources as Kovno.

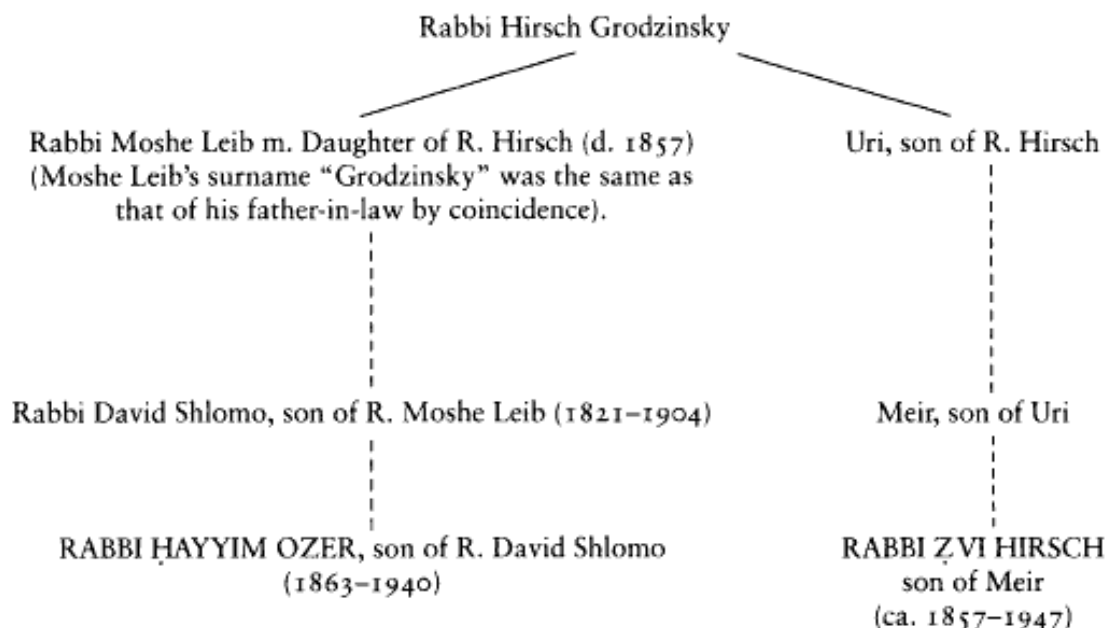
5. Only in the past decade has the history of their collective experience and adjustment been well elucidated through several important studies. As recently as 1983, Nathan M. Kaganoff would write in his own contribution to the subject ("An Orthodox Rabbinate in the South: Tobias Geffen, 1870–1970," *AJH* 73:1 [September 1983]: 56): "Little has been published to date on the Orthodox rabbi in America." Important recent studies include Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Resisters and Accommodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886–1983," *American Jewish Archives* 35:2 (November 1983): pp. 100–187, which supplies perhaps the fullest account; Marc Lee Raphael, *Profiles in American Judaism: The Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Perspectives in Historical Perspective* (San Francisco, 1984), a thorough overview of Orthodoxy in America; and Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Silver Era in American Jewish Orthodoxy*, pp. 13–42, a full description of the immigration of Orthodox rabbis to the United States.

at twenty-four became a *dayyan* (ecclesiastical judge) of Lithuanian Jewry's intellectual capital of Vilna and the author of the acclaimed *halakhic* work, *Aliezer*,⁶ Hayyim Ozer personified the pinnacle of Lithuanian Jewish learning before the Holocaust.

Zvi Hirsch was a cousin⁷ and classmate of Hayyim Ozer. Descended from a collateral line of famous scholars, he was born in April of 1857 or 1858⁸ and was exposed early to the most intensive Jewish

6. *Aliezer* was republished in Tel Aviv in 1973. In 1987, four volumes in one binding including corrections and the addition of previously unpublished manuscripts were printed in Jerusalem (publisher not listed).

7. Zvi Hirsch describes his familial relationship with Hayyim Ozer as that of related in the third generation (*shelishi be-shelishi*). The following genealogical information is provided by Rabbi Grodzinsky in his introduction to *Mikraei Kodesh* (New York, 1941), vol. 3, pp. 6–7, and is supplemented by *Ohalei Shem* (Samuel N. Gottlieb, ed.; Pinsk: M. M. Glauberman, 1912) p. 293, and by information on Zvi Hirsch's tombstone in Omaha:



In modern terminology Hayyim Ozer and Zvi Hirsch were thus second cousins.

8. Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky's exact date of birth is uncertain. The month of April appears in the U.S. Census of 1900 and 1910. However, three separate years 1857, 1858, and 1860 appear in both primary and secondary sources. The most direct primary document supports a birthdate of 1858 and comes from Grodzinsky himself when he states that he was five years older than his famous cousin, Hayyim Ozer, who was born in 1863 (*Mikraei Kodesh* [New York, 1941], vol. 3, p. 6). Secondary sources which confirm 1858 include *Ohalei Shem* p. 293; Ella Auerbach ("Jewish Settlers in Nebraska" [Unpublished manuscript, 1927], p. 64), who utilized documents and interviews in compiling her preliminary history of Omaha, although there is no indication that she ever interviewed him personally; and *Ozar Ha-Rabbanim* (N. T. Friedman, ed.; Tel Aviv, n.d.), p. 355.

The year 1857 appears on a photograph of Rabbi Grodzinsky which was hung in the

learning. Although he was probably born in the western Lithuanian town of Taurage,⁹ he received his early education in Ivye. Ivye had a population of between 500 and 800 Jews through the second half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, it was there that Zvi Hirsch came to study together with Hayyim Ozer who was five years his junior. Zvi Hirsch studied in the same yeshiva and lived in the home of Rabbi David Shlomo Grodzinsky, Hayyim Ozer's father. Zvi Hirsch also studied in Vilna and it seems probable that Grodzinsky received *semikhah* from Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Spektor like so many other leading young scholars of his day even though the *haskamah* does not mention it directly.

In addition to the years that Zvi Hirsch studied at Taurage, Ivye, and Vilna, there is some evidence to suggest that he received part of his education at the famous yeshiva of Volozhin. Rabbi Hayyim Soloveichik was the co-principal of the Volozhin yeshiva between 1881 and 1892. Rabbi Hayyim's son, Rabbi Isaac Ze'ev Soloveichik, knew Zvi Hirsch and is quoted as having stated that the latter was a leading student of Rabbi Naftali Zvi Jehudah Berlin (the *Neziv*) at Volozhin.¹⁰ This claim, however, cannot be confirmed. Indeed, a recent history of the Volozhin yeshiva does not mention Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky at all.¹¹ If he did in fact study there, it is probable that he would have done so before coming to Vilna in 1888. In any case, as we shall see, his scholarly credentials were well accepted by both Volozhin's sponsors and its heirs.

The immigration of Lithuanian rabbinical scholars to the United States began as a trickle around 1880. In that year, Rabbi Abraham Ja-

chapel of the last synagogue with which he was affiliated. That year also receives support in obituaries which appeared in *Ha-Pardes* (May 1948), the *Jewish Press of Omaha* (9 January 1948), and the *Morgan Journal* (1 January 1948), and in biographical summaries like *Latter Day Leaders, Sages and Scholars* (E. Rosenstein and N. Rosenstein, eds.; Elizabeth, NJ, 1983) p. 15, which quotes a short biographical sketch of Rabbi Grodzinsky in *Yahadut Lita* (Tel Aviv, 1967), vol. 3, p. 39.

A third date is supplied by the U.S. Census of 1900 and 1910 which lists his birthdate as 1860, but this is otherwise unsupported.

9. The birthplace was provided in an unprompted recollection by Mrs. Frances Grodzinsky, the daughter-in-law of Rabbi Grodzinsky, in an interview, 25 August 1985.

10. Rabbi Isaac Ze'ev is quoted as having even claimed that "had Reb Zvi Hirsch remained in Europe he would have been greater than Reb Hayyim Ozer." A son-in-law of the Soloveichik family and a yeshiva dean in his own right who has requested anonymity claims that he heard these statements from Rabbi Isaac Ze'ev.

11. Moshe Zinowitz, *Ez Hayyim: Toldot Yeshivat Volozhin*. Although the text does not provide any mention of Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky, another student with a similar name is included: Zvi Hirsch Rozinsky. It is conceivable that Rabbi Isaac Ze'ev was actually referring to the latter.

cob Gershon Lesser accepted a position in Chicago. He was followed a year later by Rabbi Abraham Eliezer Alperstein, who accepted a position in New York. Five years afterward, Rabbi Moses Simon Sivits immigrated to the United States with the encouragement of Chief Rabbi Spektor of Kaunas and settled in Baltimore. These moves remained isolated examples until 1887 when a coalition of congregations in New York succeeded in attracting the *Maggid* (preacher) and *Moreh Zedek* (ecclesiastical judge) of Vilna, Rabbi Jacob Joseph. Rabbi Joseph was to serve as the chief rabbi of New York and although this experiment ultimately failed, the coming of a scholar who was already acknowledged within the rarefied, learned atmosphere of Vilna legitimated the arrival of other, younger scholars to head the new and growing communities of Orthodox Jews in America. Between 1889 and 1892, Rabbi Israel Kaplan came to New York, Shalom Elhanan Jaffe to St. Louis, Moses Zevulun Margolies to Boston, Bernard Levinthal to Philadelphia, Judah Leib Levine to Rochester, and Asher Lipman Zarchy to Des Moines. All of these scholars had been trained in the leading yeshivot of Lithuania and many at Volozhin and Kaunas.¹²

During this same period, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky also immigrated to America. When he arrived in 1891 he was approximately thirty-three years old. Educated in the leading centers of East European Jewry, his studies had continued uninterrupted from his youth. In Taurage, in Iyve, and later in Vilna, he was clearly among the learned elite. His possible stay at Volozhin and his recognition by Rabbis Spektor and Gershon Mendel Zvi of Taurage portray the background of a rising Talmudic scholar.

Rabbi Grodzinsky left his family in Taurage where he had established himself as a respected member of the community and came to America in 1891.¹³ After stopping for a short while in New York, he arrived alone in Omaha before the High Holy Days. As a picture taken during

12. Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Silver Era*, 27–28. For a full description of Rabbi Jacob Joseph's experiences, see Abraham J. Karp, "New York Chooses a Chief Rabbi," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, 44:3 (March 1955): 129–198. On Bernard Levinthal, see Robert Tabak, "Orthodox Judaism in Transition," in Murray Friedman, ed., *Jewish Life in Philadelphia: 1830–1940* (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 56–59, 205–206; and Alex Goldman, *Giants of Faith: Great American Rabbis* (New York, 1964), pp. 160–176.

13. In independent interviews, Grodzinsky's disciple, Reverend Arthur Gendler (17 June 1986) and his daughter-in-law, Frances Grodzinsky (25 August 1985), have named Taurage as the town from which the family came. Further, in his *haskamah* to Zvi Hirsch's *Mikveh Yisrael* (Chicago: M. P. Ginzburg, 1898), Rabbi Ziv proudly claims him as a former member of the community. Rabbi Spektor's approbation appears in the same place.

his first years in America clearly demonstrates (Figure 1), Zvi Hirsch was a stately man who by all accounts dressed impeccably.¹⁴ He soon gained wide acceptance within the small but growing Jewish community of Omaha.

In 1880, Zvi Hirsch married Bayla Levitan (1860–1928). Born in Taurage, Bayla came from a wealthy family rooted in that community which provided ten years of support for Zvi Hirsch's continued learning. In Europe, the couple had five children: Helen (1881), Fanny (1882), Abram (1886), David (1888), and Rose (1891). There Bayla and the children remained until 1893¹⁵ when they joined Zvi Hirsch and took quarters a few blocks away from Omaha's two major Orthodox synagogues. The family thrived: William (1894) and Manuel (1896) were born on American soil.

Rabbi Grodzinsky seems to have been drawn to Omaha by a written invitation to serve as a calming force between the city's major two Orthodox congregations. On his arrival he was paid an honorarium of \$25 per month by each synagogue. Although he did supervise the *kashrut* of the local slaughter houses, this was not his exclusive or even primary reason for choosing Omaha.¹⁶

It also appears that Rabbi Grodzinsky chose to settle in Omaha, at the time a religiously underdeveloped town, so that he would be able to pursue his scholarly endeavors without having to contend with the political tension prevalent among rabbis in larger cities. His objection to the attitude of such rabbis is evidenced in the following statement with which he concluded a stinging rejection of a directive they had enacted:

The rule is not as the rabbis of New York think, that the rest of the country of America is secondary to New York, for indeed it is the opposite. "All things are full of weariness," [Ecclesiastes 1:8]¹⁷

Despite such discomfort with colleagues whom he considered arrogant, Grodzinsky kept close ties with leading scholars, many of whom

14. Robert Grodzinsky, Rabbi Grodzinsky's grandson, interview by author, 25 August 1985. [The authors wish to thank Mrs. Baylamae Tatelman and her family for their gracious cooperation and generosity in providing the photographs which accompany this article].

15. *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900 Population, Nebraska, Douglas County, Omaha* (Vol. 12, Sheet 3), lines 33–41.

16. This information was provided in recollections by Grodzinsky's disciple, Reverend Arthur Gendler (oral communication, 1 December 1987), and is consistent with an independent interview with Grodzinsky's granddaughter, Baylamae Tatelman, 6 August 1985.

17. "Kuntres Kavush Ke-Mevushal," *Mikraei Kodesh*, vol. 3, p. 295.



Figure 1. Rabbi Grodzinsky, during his first years in America, undated.

served as community rabbis in the East. Around the turn of the century, after his immigration to Omaha, Grodzinsky traveled often to the East Coast seeking to strengthen the classical Orthodoxy to which he and other immigrant rabbis were profoundly devoted. These trips allowed him to make contact with and keep the recognition of his colleagues and to remain current with the rabbinic erudition of the day. It was a pivotal time for defining the role of the Orthodox rabbi in America and Grodzinsky's attendance at the organizing meeting of Agudat ha-Rabbanim in New York in 1902¹⁸ is evidence of his commitment to the rabbinate's vitality.

18. Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Resisters and Accommodators," 110.

The origins of Nebraska Jewry reach to the earliest days of white settlement in the Nebraska territory. The territory was opened in 1854 and the first Jews arrived a year later. Most were young, single, and associated more with the American pioneering ideal than with religious duty. Of those who decided to settle in Nebraska, the majority chose to live in Omaha which was quickly becoming a center of commerce. Religious observance was difficult to maintain, and throughout the early years Jewish education was primarily the responsibility of parents. The observance of Jewish dietary laws was difficult until about 1881 when the first ritual slaughterer came to the community. Ritual circumcision also presented a problem. Though an itinerant *mohel*, a Reverend Hertsman, provided the service periodically, it was not until the 1880s that the influx of Orthodox Jews afforded Omaha the luxury of resident ritual circumcisers.¹⁹

The first recorded organized Orthodox services took place in 1880, although occasional local *minyanim* probably existed earlier. On October 3, 1883, Congregation B'nai Israel [*sic*], known to the community as the "Litvishe shul," was officially organized. As its nickname indicates, the congregation was attended primarily by recent Lithuanian immigrants. Initially, the "Litvishe shul" was led by a local ritual slaughterer, Reverend Abraham Bramson. Though not ordained, Reverend Bramson served as the congregation's religious leader until the arrival of Rabbi Grodzinsky and afterward as a Torah reader and sexton. Omaha city directories from the 1890s and early 1900s even accord him the honorary title of "rabbi." In 1888, the Lithuanian Jewish community organized a Talmud Torah. A year later, an attempt to appoint a relatively liberal, ordained rabbi to replace Reverend Bramson ended in a scuffle which resulted in several arrests.²⁰

The arrival of Rabbi Grodzinsky, a scholar of indisputable pedigree and credentials, seems to have ended such dissent, and the "Litvishe shul" was reorganized and expanded in 1897 under the new name "Beth Hamedrosh Hagadol." In September of that year, the congregation moved to a newly remodeled building where Rabbi Grodzinsky, described in a local newspaper as "a bearded patriarch with a most mu-

19. Carol Gendler, "The Jews of Omaha: The First Sixty Years," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 5:3 (April 1973): 223. Carol Gendler's work is by far the best account of Omaha Jewry's early history. It appeared in six issues of the *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*: 5:3 (April 1973): 205-224; 5:4 (July 1973): 288-305; 6:1 (October 1973): 58-71; 6:2 (January 1974): 141-154; 6:3 (April 1974): 222-233; 6:4 (July 1974): 293-304.

20. C. Gendler, "The Jews of Omaha," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 6:2 (January 1974): 148.

sical voice," presided over the dedication ceremonies which were also attended by the city's mayor and the rabbi of the local Reform congregation.²¹

The boundaries of national origin and culture were too strong to allow for a unified Orthodox community. As early as 1884, a newly arrived group of Russian Jews who were dissatisfied with the Litvishe shul organized their own synagogue, Chevra B'nai Israel Adas Russia [*sic*]. The "Russishe shul" became the first Orthodox synagogue in Omaha to dedicate its own building. It did so in June of 1889 with a Rabbi N. I. Benson presiding at the dedication ceremonies. Not to be outdone, the "Litvishe shul" dedicated a new synagogue just two months later. Both congregations would again dedicate new buildings in 1910.²² Despite this apparent competition, Rabbi Grodzinsky as the Orthodox community's central religious leader represented a unifying force which commanded the respect of both congregations.

Notwithstanding its geographic position in the middle of the country, Omaha experienced a dramatic rise in Jewish population which usually characterized larger and more accessible centers during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In the early 1890s, Omaha's Jews numbered approximately 2,000. By 1905, the estimate is 3,300. Two years later, the community was said to have 5,000 Jews, and by 1912 the Jewish community's demographic watermark was reached with 12,000. By 1917, a smaller, and perhaps more accurate figure of 10,000 is given.²³

Increasing numbers permitted the establishment of new congregations. In 1906, members of the Hungarian Society organized B'nai Jacob Anshe Sholem [*sic*]. The congregation established itself almost ten blocks west of the other Orthodox synagogues and, in 1909, bought and remodeled a church and dedicated it in a public ceremony. The entire congregation walked from their former building to the new one in a joyous procession with Rabbi Grodzinsky at their head. Books, Torah scrolls, and flags were carried by the congregation's boys and men and the great occasion was recorded in the local newspapers.²⁴ Although Rabbi Grodzinsky did not know it at the time, B'nai Jacob's members would ultimately constitute his most loyal supporters.

Between 1887 and 1916, several smaller congregations would be or-

21. *Ibid.*, 149.

22. *Ibid.*, 149-151.

23. *American Jewish Yearbook: 5678* (1917-18; Philadelphia, 1917), p. 413.

24. C. Gendler, "The Jews of Omaha," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 6:2 (January 1974): 152.

ganized and served by Rabbi Grodzinsky only to eventually dissolve. The last successful formation of an Orthodox congregation in Omaha took place in 1916 when several members of Chevra B'nai Israel (the "Russishe shul") who lived too far to walk easily to the synagogue organized a congregation under the name Beth Hamedrosh Adas Yeshurun. Known simply as Adas Yeshurun, it was served by Rabbi Grodzinsky from its inception until its members brought Rabbi Nathan Feldman to the United States in September 1927.²⁵ Rabbi Feldman had previously served as the rabbi of the city of Tubar in the Ukraine and thus possessed credentials which reasonably approximated those of Rabbi Grodzinsky. Nevertheless, in matters of *halakhic* expertise, Adas Yeshurun and its rabbi deferred to the decisions of Rabbi Grodzinsky.²⁶

From the time of his arrival in Omaha, Rabbi Grodzinsky sought to fulfill two roles: the communal responsibilities of the developing American rabbi and the *halakhic* duties of the East European *av beit din*. His concept of the rabbinate is clearly delineated in remarks which he wrote concerning Rabbi Spektor whom he considered his inspiration:

Not like our present rabbis were the rabbis and scholars (*geonim*) of the previous generation. They were vats of wine . . . like our teacher, the true scholar, leader of all the Diaspora, Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Spektor of blessed memory, *Av Beit Din* of Kaunas, who was above all a 'rabbi' and afterwards a 'scholar' (*gaon*). [As a] rabbi [he was] a master of deciding [practical law] in all four sections of the *Shulhan Arukh* [and all of its commentaries]. . . . in the past they would write [in a salutation], 'To His Honor, the Rabbi, the Scholar, etc.' but now they write 'To His Honor, the Scholar, etc.' and the title 'rabbi' is not remembered nor considered, since one may be a 'scholarly genius' from birth, but not a 'rabbi.'²⁷

25. United States, Works Progress Administration, Survey of State and Local Historical Records, Nebraska Historical Records Survey, 1936, Church Records Form: Beth Hamadrosch Adas Yurem [*sic*] Synagogue, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

26. "Beth Hamedrosh Adas Yashuruin [*sic*] Minute Book," J. Lewis Yager, trans. (unpublished manuscript in the private collection of C. Gendler), pp. 14-15. On August 29, 1937, the congregation's board heard the question of whether a picture, presumably of a female donor, which hung in the hall of the synagogue, should be allowed to remain. On November 7, a committee to which the issue had been delegated reported that "Rabbi Grodzinsky [*sic*] stated that the picture which hangs in the synagogue should be removed and Mrs. Finkle's name should be inscribed on a plaque and placed at the spot where the picture was removed." [The authors wish to thank Mrs. Gendler for her willingness to share this manuscript and other historical documents she has collected.]

27. *Mikraei Kodesh*, vol. 3, p. 5.

Although Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky possessed all the gifts of a scholar (*gaon*), he thus saw his fundamental responsibilities to be those of a rabbi (*rav*). As a rabbi in America, he seems to have sought a closeness with his congregants. Several facts point to this commitment. First, Grodzinsky's unpublished writings preserve many sermons, always delivered in Yiddish, which were presented on numerous occasions throughout the year. Omaha's rabbi preached often. The East European tradition by which the communal rabbi spoke only on the Sabbaths before Passover and between the High Holy Days was not for him. His written works include sermons for the weekly Torah portions as well as for the High Holy Days and the Festivals. Although younger, American-trained rabbis were introducing weekly sermons, which were also in English, Grodzinsky's regular speaking was relatively innovative for a European-trained scholar.²⁸

Other instances attest to Rabbi Grodzinsky's close tie to his congregants. He taught. He presided over a *hevra mishnayot*, a group devoted to studying the Mishnah, which met daily in traditional fashion between the afternoon and evening services and progressed quickly enough to provide Rabbi Grodzinsky with an opportunity to present learned words at the conclusion (*siyyum*) of each tractate and order.

Rabbi Grodzinsky was accessible to his community. As the rabbi of several congregations, he made himself available to every congregant. He served as counselor. His door was always open and his children recalled congregants coming at various hours to seek advice on a wide range of spiritual and personal matters. On one occasion, Rabbi Grodzinsky even removed a bone from the throat of one of his congregants. Many came to him with questions regarding the *kashrut* of fowl. Independent witnesses reveal that questioners were not afraid to approach the rabbi because he sought to be as lenient as possible, particularly for those who could not afford replacement. In the words of one, "he interpreted dietary rules so that they did not cause damage or expense to his congregants." When, on one occasion, a congregant mistakenly washed her best dishes in a non-kosher soap, Rabbi Grodzinsky utilized a well-established principle which permits the use of non-kosher translucent china after a substantial period of disuse. "He had remedies for making sure you didn't have to destroy." It was this willingness to find the lenient side within the bounds of *halakhah* which ingratiated him to his congregants and their children.²⁹

Grodzinsky's rabbinic responsibilities also included far more tech-

28. Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Resisters and Accommodators," 137-138.

29. Recollections of William Grodzinsky, April 1981; Mrs. Frances Grodzinsky, 25 August 1985; and Edward Shafton, 11 September 1985.

nical duties. He served as *rav ha-makhshir*. In this capacity he supervised kosher slaughter in Omaha. To fulfill this purpose it was necessary to oversee and even to train ritual slaughterers, and this he did. In December 1921, a Yisrael Yosef (later Arthur) Gendler, age thirty-two, settled in Omaha. A devout man and a Sabbath observer, he was distressed by the seemingly unalterable American requirement that he work on Saturday. Gendler was introduced to Grodzinsky who was impressed by the young man's strong yeshiva background. The rabbi encouraged him to study to become a ritual slaughterer, and although Gendler protested that he lacked the requisite experience, Grodzinsky patiently presided over his learning of the appropriate texts and commentaries as well as his practical training in the actual technique of slaughter. Some six months later, on June 6, 1923, Grodzinsky provided Gendler with the only known *kabbalah* (Figure 2) for ritual slaughter which he issued during the more than half century he served Omaha. It is an interesting document for it emphasizes both Gendler's obligation to maintain his learning and the requirement that he slaughter specifically with Grodzinsky's permission (or another *rav ha-makhshir* should Gendler move to a different community). Further, Gendler was required to comply with a directive which Rabbi Grodzinsky enacted always to slaughter in the presence of another qualified slaughterer and examiner (*shoḥet u-vodek*).³⁰

His kosher supervision was not limited to meat. Every year before Passover, he would travel to Sacramento, California to supervise the production of kosher wine.³¹ This undoubtedly added to his limited income, particularly after his rabbinic position was sharply curtailed in 1916 (see below).

In this context Rabbi Grodzinsky's expressed views during Prohibition are illustrative of his character. By the provisions of the Volstead Act, wine could be manufactured for "sacramental purposes" and sold only to those possessing permits which were generally provided by members of the clergy. Many Orthodox rabbis benefited financially from this system, which was subject to misuse. In December 1920, less than a year after the implementation of Prohibition and a month after the Assembly of Orthodox Rabbis³² had been empowered to issue

30. *Kabbalah* of Rev. Arthur Gendler and interview with him, 6 May 1985. These requirements are consistent with the requirements established for supervising rabbis by the Agudat ha-Rabbanim (Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Silver Era*, 321).

31. Mrs. Frances Grodzinsky, interview by author, 25 August 1985.

32. The Assembly of Orthodox Rabbis was established as a competing, anti-Zionist rabbinical group by Rabbi Gabriel Wolf Margolis to oppose the Agudat ha-Rabbanim and to gain opportunities for Rabbi Margolis and other members to supervise kosher pro-

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הרב

צבי הירש גרודזינסקי

אב"ד דאמארא נ"י

אהיה לך אב"ד בקהילתך ההודית הנפלאה וכן מורה אנכי על כל מי שיבקש ממך שיהיה
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Figure 2. The kabbalah issued by Grodzinsky certifying Rev. Arthur Gendler as a *shohet*.

such permits, Rabbi Grodzinsky wrote to the Assembly's president to request in the strongest terms that the Assembly desist from granting permits to anyone from Omaha. Grodzinsky explained that local wine dealers were abusing these certificates and selling to Jew and Gentile

duction. Rabbi Margolis had a distinguished reputation as a scholar and had led communities in the Russian Pale before coming to the United States at the age of sixty in 1908. See Gurock, "Resisters and Accommodators," 147-149.

alike. Several Jews had been arrested, and the local press in turn had accused Jews of using the sale of wine for ritual purposes “as a ruse to engage in an illegal wine trade.” Grodzinsky himself had stopped issuing permits altogether and called on the Assembly to do the same.³³ Clearly, Grodzinsky’s action undermined his own financial potential, but he did not hesitate to place the community’s name above his personal gain. Nationally, many of his colleagues were not as altruistic, a fact that is well documented by a recent study of rabbinic responses to Prohibition.³⁴

Like every other communal rabbi, Grodzinsky was the primary conductor of weddings, and many of Omaha’s oldest Jews still remember his role in solemnizing their own marriages. As a qualified *dayyan* (ecclesiastical judge), he assembled a rabbinical court to grant divorce decrees (*gittin*). While many of these instances were routine, the *halakhic* use of coercion (*kefiyah*) against a recalcitrant husband was occasionally necessary. In Lithuania, the power of the rabbinate would, in most cases, have been sufficient; in America, other means were sometimes necessary. In an unpublished responsum, Grodzinsky writes of an especially difficult case in which a Jewish immigrant whom Grodzinsky understandably characterizes as a “scoundrel” contracted a bigamous marriage in the United States. Eventually, he agreed to divorce his first wife, but when he was convicted of theft and forgery, his second wife filed and received a civil decree. He sought to pressure her to continue to live with him on the grounds that they were still married according to Jewish law. When she refused,

He returned . . . to his aforementioned wife, and told her that he would murder her and also kill himself. And had there not been other people there who came to her aid, who knows whether . . . he would have kept his word . . . there are acts daily in America in which such deeds are done, as everyone knows.

Finally, the “scoundrel” was incarcerated, but his wife arranged for his release on the condition that he provide her with a divorce. He was

33. *Sefer Kneset Harabanim Ha-ortodoksim Ba-Amerika* (New York, 1920), p. 14–15.

34. Hannah Sprecher, “Let Them Drink and Forget Our Poverty: America’s Rabbis React to Prohibition,” *AJA* 43:2 (Fall/Winter 1991): 134–179. Sprecher (p. 173, n. 40) speculates that Rabbi Grodzinsky could afford to be altruistic because he was relatively secure financially. This assessment fails to consider the fact that by the time Grodzinsky wrote his letter, he had lost his chief rabbinical post and the significant income it provided.

The authors wish to thank Ms. Sprecher and her teacher, Professor S. Leiman of Brooklyn College, for alerting them to this source in advance of its publication.

then put in the custody of the government-appointed guard and was brought before Rabbi Grodzinsky to arrange a religious divorce.

Rabbi Grodzinsky examines whether this constitutes a case of coerced divorce and the circumstances under which coercion with the aid of non-Jews may be permitted. He defends his right to arrange the divorce in a carefully reasoned responsum which addresses a subject that is still the source of public concern.³⁵

The year 1916 was traumatic in the life of Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky. The two major congregations, the "Litvishe shul" and the "Russishe shul," with which he had been associated since his arrival in Omaha twenty-five years earlier, decided to seek another rabbi. Rabbi Zvi Hirsch was less than sixty years old when the decision was announced and the apparent effect was remembered by his children even in their later years.³⁶ As a contemporary photograph clearly indicates (Figure 3), Grodzinsky's elegance and stateliness had not been dimmed, but times were changing and "Modern Orthodoxy" was on the rise. The Conservative movement in America was gaining adherents and plans for such a synagogue were emerging in Omaha.

The Orthodox community responded by emphasizing its capacity to be part of the American community. In 1917, the two larger Orthodox congregations, B'nai Israel and Beth Hamedrosh Hagodol, together hired Rabbi Morris Taxon, a traditionally educated Orthodox scholar who was fluent in English and committed to community affairs. During his five years in Omaha, Rabbi Taxon would head the Talmud Torah's Education Committee, administer a Sunday school, take an active role in Zionist activities, serve on the board of the Jewish Welfare Federation, be appointed to the Governor's Committee for the Thrift Stamp Campaign, take an active role in appeals and antidefamation, and serve as president of B'nai B'rith.³⁷

35. See, for example, "New York Lays Down Law on 'Get'," *The Jewish Week*, 205:13 (31 July-6 August 1992): 4, 26.

36. Recollections of William Grodzinsky (April 1981) and interview with Rev. Arthur Gendler (6 May 1985). The minutebooks of Beth Hamedrosh Hagodol between 1910 and 1918 have been lost so that the congregation's version of exact circumstances of the decision to seek a new rabbi cannot be ascertained. However, the congregational concern with being "modern" Orthodox continued long after the dismissal of Rabbi Grodzinsky. Advertisements in the *Jewish Press of Omaha* (2. September 1922) for High Holy Day services in 1922 boast "modern Orthodox" services. As late as 1928, a year after Omaha's Conservative congregation was finally founded, the Beth Hamedrosh Hagodol board of trustees was still seeking a "modern" rabbi to be Rabbi Grodzinsky's third successor (*Jewish Press of Omaha*, 17 June 1928).

37. *Jewish Press of Omaha* (24 August 1922).

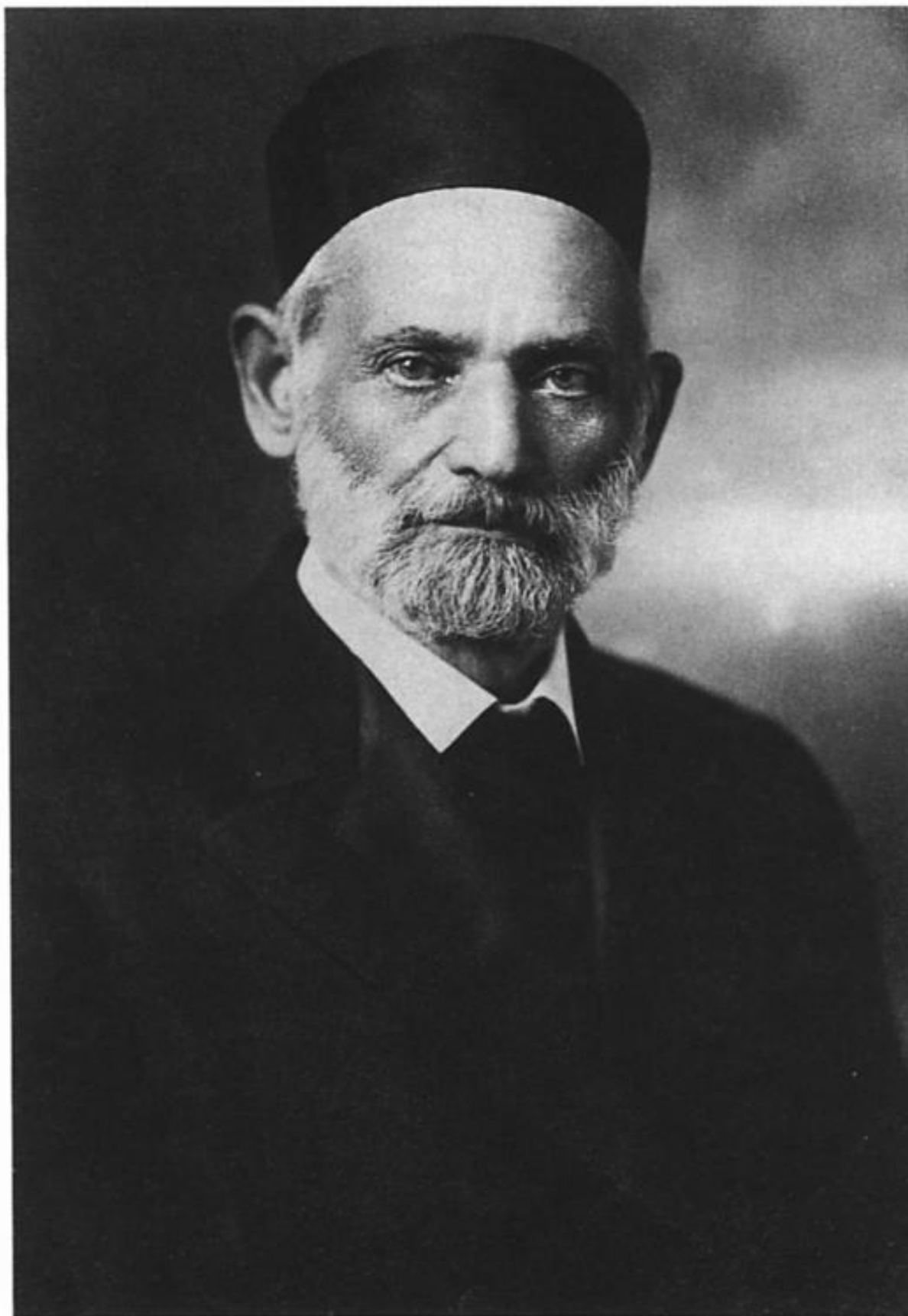


Figure 3. Rabbi Grodzinsky in his later years, undated.

In an undated handbill published in both Yiddish and English during Taxon's tenure, the two largest synagogues spoke of the problem and its solution: "Many of our best children were . . . drifted [*sic*] by the roaring billows of Reform. The general standard of our children's education was likewise deplorable." The reason for this sorry state was obvious: "All that was simply due to the fact that *we lacked the proper man* to unite all local forces." [Emphasis added.] With Rabbi Taxon's "brilliant addresses", "executive ability" in organizing the Omaha "Sunday school and confirmation class," and introduction of "one of the most important institutions which we deemed essential to establish in order to attract our younger element . . . Friday evening 8:00 o'clock services,"³⁸ a response to Reform had emerged. For Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky such competitive Americanisms were unnecessary capitulations which were irrelevant to the duties of a communal rabbi.

Rabbi Taxon stayed in Omaha for five years, to be followed by a series of eminent successors³⁹ who were generally American born and trained and who represented a bridge between Orthodox observance and American life.

Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky did not serve as such a bridge. Although he understood English, he refused to speak the language even to his own children. Although he committed himself to the well being of his community, he was unwilling to spend his time with committees and other social obligations which were even then becoming typical of the rabbi's role in American Jewish life. Nevertheless, he did not ignore modern Jewish concerns or the American experience.

38. Jacob Gordon, "Ho, Everyone That Thirsteth, Come Ye For Water! (Isaiah LV.)" (Omaha, undated).

39. Among others, three particularly prominent Orthodox leaders are worthy of note: (1) Rabbi J. M. Charlop, Taxon's immediate successor, served Omaha from 1923 to 1925. He left to serve as communal rabbi of the Bronx, New York (*Jewish Press of Omaha* [15 October 1925]). His posthumously published Talmudic commentary contains a biographical sketch which claims that his appointment in Omaha came with the approval of Rabbi Grodzinsky, though this is at variance with the minutes of Beth Hamedrosh Hagodol and the estrangement which clearly existed between Grodzinsky and his former congregants. (See J. M. Charlop, *Hof Yamim* [Z. Charlop, ed.; New York, 1978].) (2) Rabbi Uri Miller, later became the first and only president of the Rabbinical Council of America to receive *semikhah* at the Hebrew Theological College in Skokie, Illinois. (3) Rabbi Israel Mowshowitz served Omaha from 1943 to 1949 and later became a prominent leader in the New York community where, retired from the rabbinate, he held a major state post in the administration of Governor Mario Cuomo. In a recent, generally autobiographical book (*A Rabbi's Rovings* [Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1985]), Mowshowitz makes no mention of his time in Omaha. However, in an interview he easily recollected paying his respects to Rabbi Grodzinsky and having learned conversations with him (oral communication, June 1986).

As one might expect, Grodzinsky was religiously opposed to non-Orthodox leaders, although he does not seem to have had any personal malice.⁴⁰ As late as 1935, his name appears on a bill of excommunication (*herem*) issued by the Agudat ha-Rabbanim against those who sought to introduce conditional marriages as a means of preventing subsequently abandoned wives (*agunot*).⁴¹ His view of the then emerging members of the Orthodox rabbinate is perhaps more surprising and appears in the following stinging remarks:

. . . they have not studied the *poskim* except for a few of the latter *poskim* (*Aharonim*) in brief, and that too is not for the sake of practical law, but rather for *pilpul* and intellectual exercise alone. And the Rosh Yeshiva gives them a certificate of *semikhah* so they may adjudicate Jewish law without investigating whether they are fit for it . . . And it is sufficient for them if they can debate certain opinions in the Talmud . . . But they have not ministered to rabbinic scholars properly until they become experts in deciding law in a direct manner with sound logic, to infer and to deduce properly and to delve into the depths of the law. [These newly ordained rabbis] are accepted in prominent communities as rabbis and adjudicators of Jewish law . . . and many stumbling blocks arise from their decisions. And this is especially so in America, where most of the common people and opinion holders are complete boors and ignoramuses And especially if [a rabbi] knows how to flatter [the congregants] with smooth talk and to pay them respect as they desire, then these boors exalt their rabbi higher . . . and they descend lower . . . And if this is so for those who have come out of the great yeshivot of Russia and the like, then all the more so for those who come out of the yeshivot here in America, where most of their time is spent on outside studies, to discourse in the language of the country, so that they will afterward be able to speak before young men and women, to prepare [intellectual] delicacies for them as they desire, and these are the new rabbis of America upon whom the congregations pounce as soon as they receive the certificate of *semikhah*.⁴²

The rabbinic consideration of congregants' sensibilities which Grodzinsky so critically chronicled was to some extent due to pecuniary concerns. During his five years in Omaha, Rabbi Taxon was paid \$2,000 per annum and, in 1922, when asked for an extension of his contract, the congregation did so with some hesitation for an additional five-year period at the same level of pay.⁴³ On August 24th of that year,

40. As noted above, the local Reform rabbi attended the dedication of a synagogue which Grodzinsky led.

41. *Le-dor Aharon* (Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada; Brooklyn, NY, 1937), p. 32.

42. *Milei De-berakhot*, vol. 1, p. 39.

43. "Minutes of Beth Hamedrosh Hagodol [*sic*], December 29, 1918–May 12, 1929,"

Omaha's *Jewish Press* printed a front page article entitled, "Rabbi Morris Taxon Resigns as Minister of Local Synagogues" with a sub-heading, "To Receive \$8,400 at Dallas, Tex. Congregation." The Texas-size salary which Taxon secured in his new position may have chastened the lay leaders who had so warmly praised him. His immediate successor enjoyed a major increase to \$3,500.⁴⁴

The relatively substantial sums of money which the Orthodox congregations paid to "modern" rabbis were never made available to Rabbi Grodzinsky. Minutes of congregational meetings reveal that he was grudgingly paid two to four hundred dollars a year by the congregations he served.⁴⁵ He made ends meet through fees for the supervision of kosher slaughter, contributions for performing weddings and other lifecycle events, and the annual sale of Passover *mazot*, wine, and other Manishevitz products.⁴⁶ According to his own account, he never received any profit for his writings⁴⁷ despite the fact that they would be his most enduring legacy.

Were it not for his writings, Grodzinsky's life might more closely parallel those of many other European-trained rabbis who came to America in his day.⁴⁸ Through his scholarly contributions, however, he gained an international reputation although only a fraction of his work ever reached print. Thus, even rabbinic scholars have been aware of only a portion of his writings to date.

The first group of Grodzinsky's writings is the substantial number of published works. In 1898, Rabbi Grodzinsky published *Mikveh Yisrael*, a commentary on the laws of ritual baths.⁴⁹ Before 1900, two ar-

J. Lewis Yager, trans. (unpublished manuscript in private collection of C. Gendler) 12 October 1919; 15 January 1922.

44. *Ibid.*, 30 September 1923.

45. *Ibid.*, 17 April 1920; 30 September 1928.

46. *Jewish Press of Omaha* (14 April 1976): 4, and recollections of Mrs. Frances Grodzinsky, 25 August 1985. Despite the relative lack of financial remunerations by his congregations, Rabbi Grodzinsky left \$44,340 in his estate.

47. In many of the prefaces to his books, Rabbi Grodzinsky speaks of his singular goal of expanding the public's knowledge at no benefit to himself. See, for example, his statement of gratitude for financial support for the publication of *Mikveh Yisrael* (opening page) and his simple goal of enriching "rabbis, teachers, great and small like me" (*Mikraei Kodesh*, vol. 1, p. 8).

48. Other American Orthodox rabbis of this generation published, but few, if any, wrote so prolifically. Eliezer Silver published one volume and a number of responsa and articles (Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Silver Era*, 259, 348-351) and Tobias Geffen published six volumes and a number of articles which combined homiletics with *halakhah* (Kaganoff, "An Orthodox Rabbi in the South," 68). However, although Grodzinsky published much, he left unpublished a far larger corpus covering the full range of rabbinic genres.

49. Chicago: M. P. Ginsburg. All Grodzinsky's subsequent books were published by

ticles on *mikvaot* and family purity appeared in the prestigious rabbinic monthly *Kneset Hakhmei Yisrael*,⁵⁰ published in Odessa. Shortly after the turn of the century, Grodzinsky published a series of articles in the rabbinic journal *Ha-Meassef*, a monthly periodical published in Jerusalem between 1896 and 1915. Among the subjects Rabbi Grodzinsky addressed in *Ha-Meassef* is a *siyyum* for the conclusion of the study of the entire Mishnah, relating the final tractate of the *Mishnah* back to the first one. He notes that the work was prepared for the *hevra mishnayot* which he led at one of the synagogues he served in Omaha. Some eight articles in twenty-two installments appeared between 1903 and 1914.⁵¹ Grodzinsky also contributed occasionally to other periodical literature, often in defense of his decisions on controversial issues. Articles in *Ha-Pardes*⁵² and *Ha-Mesilah*⁵³ are illustrative of his willingness to defend his views in print. Through the vehicle of learned peri-

Moinester Publishing Company (211 East Broadway, New York). *Mikveh Yisrael* quickly became a well-utilized handbook among scholars and yeshiva students, a fact supported by its reprinting in more recent years in *Asefat Zekeinim Al Klalei Mikvaot* (Israel, undated), Section 3, and even more recently as a separate volume, see note 70.

50. "Be-inyan Mikvaot [On the Subject of Ritual Baths]," *Kneset Hakhmei Yisrael* (1886), no. 156; "Be-inyan Niddah [On the Subject of the Laws of Family Purity]," *Kneset Hakhmei Yisrael* (1897), no. 182.

51. "Siyuma Le-Mishnayot [The Conclusion of Mishnayot]," *Ha-Meassef* 8 (Tamuz, 5663 [1903]), pt. 10, no. 82; "Be-Inyan Ishah She-zintah [On the Subject of a Woman Who Committed Adultery]," *Ha-Meassef* 9 (Tishrei, 5664 [1903]), pt. 1, no. 1; 9 (Kislev, 5664 [1903]), pt. 3, no. 24; "Sugya De-Yakir [On the Talmudic Issue of Accepting the Testimony of a Relative]," *Ha-Meassef* 9 (Shevat, 5664 [1904]), pt. 5, no. 51; 9 (Iyar, 5664 [1904]), pt. 8, no. 90; 9 (Av 5664, [1904]), pt. 11, no. 123; 10 (Heshvan, 5665 [1904]), pt. 2, no. 16; 10 (Shevat, 5665 [1904-05]), pt. 6, no. 54; 11 (Kislev, 5666 [1905]), pt. 3, no. 24; 11 (Adar, 5666 [1906]), pt. 6, no. 54; 11 (Tamuz, 5666 [1906]), pt. 4, no. 28; "Minnui Sofer Ve-Eidim [The Appointment of a Scribe and Witnesses]," *Ha-Meassef* 10 (Elul 5665 [1905]): pt. 13, no. 120; "Le-Tareẓ Temihot Rav Ehad Neger Devarav Be-Inyan Ishah She-Zintah [A Response to One Rabbi's Opposition to (Grodzinsky's) Words Regarding the Subject of a Woman Who Committed Adultery]," *Ha-Meassef* 10 (Iyar, 5665 [1905]), pt. 9, no. 79; "Tefilin De-Rabbenu Tam," *Ha-Meassef* 12 (Av, 5667 [1907]), pt. 11, no. 65; 13 (Tishrei, 5668 [1907]), pt. 1, no. 4; "Be-Inyan Gerut [On the Subject of Conversion]," *Ha-Meassef* 16 (Iyar, 5671 [1911]), pt. 2, no. 20; 18 (Tishrei, 5673 [1912]), pt. 1, no. 4; 18 (Shevat, 5673 [1912-13]), pt. 5, no. 66; 18 (Av, 5673 [1913]), pt. 8, no. 54; "Be-Inyan Takkanat Agunot [On the Subject of Decrees of Abandoned Wives]," *Ha-Meassef* 17 (Kislev, 5672 [1911]), pt. 3, no. 30; 17 (Adar, 5672 [1912]), pt. 6, no. 76; 17 (Sivan, 5672 [1912]), pt. 3, no. 48.

52. "Be-Inyan Mikvaot [On the Subject of Ritual Baths]," *Ha-Pardes* 8-9 (1927), pt. 1, no. 80.

53. "Be-Inyan Bar Mitzvah Le-Shnei Bahurim [On the Subject of the Bar Mitzvah of Two Boys [on the Same Sabbath]" *Ha-Mesilah* (Tevet-Shevat, 5702; January 1942), no. 12, p. 7.

odicals, Rabbi Grodzinsky gained substantial recognition in Europe, the United States, and the Land of Israel.⁵⁴

Almost twenty years separate Grodzinsky's first and second monographs. In 1916, the year in which he was experiencing difficulty with his congregations, he published *Likutei Zvi*, a reference work on the whole of *Orah Hayyim*. Seven years later, in 1923, he published the first volume of *Milei De-Berakhot*. A second volume appeared in 1945. Together, they provide an extensive commentary on the first thirty-four folio pages of the first tractate of the Babylonian Talmud.

Grodzinsky's largest published work is the three-volume *Mikraei Kodesh* (1936, 1937, 1941). In this work, he systematically examines all of the laws relating to the reading of the Torah, the qualifications for acceptable Torah scrolls, and the laws regarding Jewish scribal arts. Although he claims that he does not intend to make new decisions but only to provide a clear summary of the opinion of other established scholars,⁵⁵ his elegant synthesis and analysis of earlier sources represents an important contribution to his subject.

Grodzinsky maintained close ties with other scholars throughout the world. When Israel's Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog inaugurated *Ozar ha-Poskim*, an encyclopedic project to preserve and publish virtually all rabbinic opinions regarding subjects covered in *Even Ha-Ezer*, Grodzinsky was asked to submit some of his manuscripts. This he did willingly and was honored for his effort.⁵⁶ Shortly after his death on December 30, 1947, scholars from that institution arrived in Omaha and crated almost all of Grodzinsky's scholarly effects at his behest. The materials were shipped to Israel where a reference library was established, and some of his unpublished manuscripts were utilized in later works published by the Institute.

Although meticulously stored, most of Rabbi Grodzinsky's manuscripts have not been touched since they were shipped to Israel in

54. A fuller explication of Grodzinsky's connection with the rabbinic leaders of the Land of Israel has appeared. See Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Rabbinic Repartee: Rabbi Tsvi Hirsch Grodzinsky of Omaha and the Land of Israel," In *Eretz Israel, Israel and the Jewish Diaspora: Mutual Relations*, ed. Menachem Mor, Studies in Jewish Civilization, no. 1 (Lanham, MD, 1991), pp. 151-68.

55. *Mikraei Kodesh*, vol. 1, p. 8.

56. A note of appreciation appears on the title pages of the early volumes of *Ozar ha-Poskim*, which seem to have been closely based on an unpublished manuscript of *Likutei Zvi* on *Even Ha-Ezer* which Grodzinsky had supplied. See "Rabbi Grodzinsky Receives Special Honor from Palestine Rabbinate," *Jewish Press of Omaha* (19 October 1945), p. 3. Unpublished responsa of Rabbi Grodzinsky are quoted in *Ozar Ha-Poskim*, vol. 8, 17:58, p. 164, and vol. 9, 22:8, p. 66.

1948. Perusal of the materials at the Oẓar ha-Poskim Institute reveals a veritable treasury of writings, including correspondence to and from rabbis in all parts of the world and manuscripts on a wide range of topics, many of which are ready for publication. Among the unpublished manuscripts are the following major works:

1. *Tiferet Zvi*,⁵⁷ sixty-four responsa on various *halakhic* matters, many of special pertinence to the American experience.
2. *Pitḥei Shas*, notebooks on various topics in the Talmud, arranged alphabetically.
3. *Ereẓ Zvi*, an extensive, multivolume commentary on *Shulḥan Arukh, Yoreh Deah*.
4. *Beit Hayayin*, three small notebooks on the laws of *stam yenam* (wine produced by Gentiles for nonsacramental purposes).
5. An unnamed manuscript on the laws of *niddah*.⁵⁸
6. *Ateret Rosh*, notebooks on the responsa of Rabbi Asher Ben Yehiel (the Rosh), with index.
7. An alphabetical summary of the major expressions and phrases found in the Babylonian Talmud.
8. *Ḥatimah Tovah*, notebooks containing concluding sermons for every tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, with index.⁵⁹
9. Sermons for all calendrical occasions.
10. Manuscripts of Grodzinsky's published works with corrections and addenda, and the unpublished manuscript of *Likutei Zvi* on *Even Ha-Ezer* mentioned above.
11. Occasional loose responsa.
12. Letters to and from rabbinic leaders in Cleveland, Detroit, Sioux City, Hoboken, Hartford, and other cities in the United States as well as letters to Rabbi Yosef Henkin.⁶⁰

All these works are characterized by precision and exacting organization. Grodzinsky retained an almost completely comprehensive grasp of the rabbinic literature. His *siyyumim* on all tractates of the Babylonian Talmud (No. 8, above) and a clearly prodigious memory from

57. The volume is untitled, but its name is known from a biographical reference which refers to manuscripts he intended for publication. See Samuel N. Gottlieb, *Ohalei Shem* (Pinsk, 1912), p. 293.

58. According to Grodzinsky's own account, this work is ready for publication. B. Z. Eizenstadt, *Ḥakhmei Yisrael Be-America* (New York, 1903), p. 30.

59. Grodzinsky seems to refer to this in *Mikraei Kodesh*, vol. 3, p. 181.

60. Grodzinsky also seems to have kept up his close ties with rabbis in Europe. He notes that since his youth in Vilna he had been a close colleague of Rabbi Henokh Eigish author of *Marḥeshet* (*Mikraei Kodesh*, vol. 3, p. 168).

which he often quoted even obscure sources demonstrate a control of the sources which parallels his more famous cousin, Hayyim Ozer. Despite his distance from large Jewish centers, he kept fully abreast of rabbinic publications. Among his papers at the Oẓar Ha-Poskim Institute are neat accounts of books ordered from a New York bookseller named Resnick which show his systematic bid to keep current. Also at the institute scholars still refer to his books (Figure 4) and have used them in recent projects.

It is clear that Grodzinsky intended almost all of his works for eventual publication, and he provided reasons why more of them did not appear in his lifetime. In the introduction to *Likutei Zvi*, he mentions that he had decided against publishing most of his other manuscripts because he felt that too many scholarly books (*sefarim*) have already been published. He felt that it may well degrade public respect for Torah (*kevod ha-Torah*) since people had begun to look down on new authors because congregants felt obligated to buy these books simply to support their writers. The author in turn would take upon himself the heavy burden of publication costs and sales. For these reasons, Grodzinsky concluded that further publications were unnecessary. Despite such feelings, Grodzinsky may have had second thoughts in his last years. In a 1945 newspaper article about him, he is described as “planning the publication of additional works in the field of Rabbinics.”⁶¹

Within his local community, many bought Rabbi Grodzinsky's books even though, as related by his disciple, Reverend Arthur Gendler, many Omaha purchasers did not read them and put them away on their shelves if they did not discard them entirely. In truth, although both his local obituary⁶² and an internationally read one in *Ha-Pardes*⁶³ praised him as one of the leading scholars of his generation, a substantial number of those who knew him within his own community saw him as “an old-time rabbi” whose work, though laudatory, had little to do with their lives. Though he was honored throughout his life, his scholarly contributions were little understood by those who were physically closest to him. There is sad irony in this fact since perhaps his most important work, his compendium of responsa, deals with everyday matters that are still discussed in traditional Jewish circles.

Outside of his community, among the intellectual leaders of his day,

61. “Rabbi Grodzinsky Receives Special Honor,” *Jewish Press of Omaha* (19 October 1945).

62. “Rabbi Grodzinsky, Spiritual Leader of Omaha and World Noted Scholar, Dies at 90,” *Jewish Press of Omaha* (9 January 1948): 3.

63. “Avedot Gedolot [Great Losses],” (May 1948), p. 9.



Figure 4. Part of Grodzinsky's library at Ozar Ha-Poskim, Jerusalem.

Grodzinsky was highly respected and touted. His early commendation by Spektor and posthumous accolades bestowed by Ovadia Yosef (see below) document the endorsement of the generations which came before and after him. As has already been demonstrated, he maintained close ties with Rabbi Ben Zion Koenka, editor of *Ha-Meassef*, and corresponded regularly with rabbinic scholars throughout the world. Further, a six-week visit by Rabbi Baruch Epstein (1860–1942), author of the rabbinic commentary of the Torah, *Torah Temimah*, and a visit by Rabbi Jacob Willowsky (the Ridvaz), author of responsa and a major commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud among other important works, indicates substantial recognition within the scholarly world of rabbinics.⁶⁴ In one case Rabbi Grodzinsky caused the Ridvaz to change his mind regarding an *halakhic* ruling.⁶⁵ Despite the relatively small percentage of Rabbi Grodzinsky's works which have been published, he has still been cited in recent years by contemporary rabbinic scholars.⁶⁶

The life of Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky exemplifies the challenge of the traditional rabbinate amid American institutions. Replete with learning and invested with the right to decide the greatest complexities of Jewish law, Grodzinsky still served at the pleasure of his congregations' leadership. An active, accessible leader in all segments of Jewish living, he was nevertheless ultimately put aside by a flock which wanted a leader more attuned to the general culture. An internationally known writer whose tomes became standards and who contributed to the major rabbinic journals and debates of his day, he did not pass his Jewish learning and practice to his offspring. For those committed to the twin goals of Jewish learning and its transmission, his life is a source of both admiration and circumspection.

64. *Jewish Press of Omaha* (27 August 1925).

65. *Ha-Meassef*, 16 (Iyar, 5671 [1911–12], no. 20. For more about Willowsky, see Morris A. Gutstein, *A Priceless Heritage* (New York, 1954), pp. 399–401; Aaron Rothkoff, "The American Sojourns of the Ridbaz: Religious Problems Within the Immigrant Community," *American Jewish History* (June 1968): 557–572; and Abraham J. Karp, "The Ridwas, Rabbi Jacob David Willowsky, 1845–1913," in *Perspectives on Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of Wolfe Kelman* ed. Arthur A. Chiel, (New York, 1978), pp. 215–237. For information on a stinging rabbinic controversy about *kashrut* in which Willowsky was involved, see Harold P. Gastwirth, *Fraud, Corruption and Holiness: The Controversy Over Jewish Dietary Supervision in New York City, 1881–1940* (Port Washington, 1974), pp. 55–90.

66. See, for example, Avraham Gurewitz, *Sefer Or Avraham Al Haggadah Shel Pesach—Kovez Hosafot* (Jerusalem, 1983), p. 6; Y. Y. Weiss, *She'elot U-teshuvot Minh'at Yizhak* (Jerusalem, Sofer, 1978), Responsum 22; Y. Klavan, *Divrei Yehoshua* (New York, 1966), p. 161; and N. Telushkin, *Taharat Mayim* (New York, 1976), quoted throughout.

When the full extent of Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky's unpublished works were brought to the attention of the former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, Ovadia Yosef, the latter wrote a strong letter supporting their immediate publication. He noted his own familiarity with Grodzinsky's works and their importance to the entire scholarly world.⁶⁷

Rabbi Grodzinsky asked that no eulogy (*hesped*) be given at his funeral. None was. More than forty years after his passing, his unpublished manuscripts still remain hidden from public view. As has been noted previously, this lack of posthumous publication may have been due to Grodzinsky's own disenchantment with colleagues and congregants alike. Nevertheless, time has not dimmed the demonstrated quality of his contribution. Decades after his death, his work is still quoted in rabbinic works.⁶⁸ A responsum by Grodzinsky on artificial insemination by donor, one of the earliest *halakhic* treatments of this complicated and pertinent biomedical issue, has appeared in *Halakhah U-Refuah*, an ongoing, multivolume digest of medical *halakhah*.⁶⁹ Still more recently, the remainder of his previously published books have joined *Mikveh Yisrael* in reprint. They have been republished by a press which had surveyed potential readership and found significant interest.⁷⁰ Thus, notwithstanding the years since his passing or the small percentage of his works in print, Grodzinsky's influence remains important. It is the authors' hope that his carefully penned works will soon be brought into the light which only print can provide. If this aim is realized, Zvi Hirsch Grodzinsky is likely to be regarded belatedly as one of the most prolific and notable scholars of that last generation to encompass intact the great rabbinic centers of Europe. If his rabbinic dicta eventually take their belated though deserved place in the *halakhic* corpus, he may posthumously play a role in the future of Jewish life, learning, and law. He will then have his tribute at last.

67. Private communication, 2 September 1984.

68. See note 66.

69. T. H. Grodzinsky, "Be-Inyan Hazra'ah Melakhutit," *Halakhah U-Refuah* (M. Hirschler, ed.; Jerusalem, 1988), 5:139-184.

70. Katz Bookbinding, Brooklyn, NY.