Early Life and Medical Studies

The first ordained rabbi to settle in America, Rav Avraham Rice, became the Rav of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation in 1840. Realizing this, the congregation asked the key to the preservation of traditional Judaism in America, Rabbi Rice, to stay on and lay down the law, shortly after arriving in Baltimore to become the first Jewish school, where he received both a secular and religious education.

“His early religious training was received at the congregational school...”

Dr. Aaron Friedenwald (1902)

Upon completion of his studies at the University of Maryland, Aaron decided to continue his medical education in Europe, before returning to Baltimore where he intended to practice medicine. Shortly before leaving for Europe, Aaron became engaged to Bertha Shilling. The engagement was kept secret with the understanding that they would marry upon his return. He hoped to open a practice that would be financially successful.

Return to Baltimore

Dr. Friedenwald returned to Baltimore in July of 1862. He hoped to open a practice that specialized in ophthalmology, but this was not financially viable at the time. He could do was open an office in his parents' home and become a general practitioner. However, he maintained his interest in ophthalmology and, over the years, his practice focused more and more on treating patients with eye problems. He became the first professor of diseases of the eye in Maryland. He was the first great ophthalmologist of the city and the state.

Commitment to Tiferet Yisrael

In 1898, Dr. and Mrs. Friedenwald visited Eretz Yisrael. Dr. Friedenwald wrote a number of letters to his children describing the trip. On December 9, 1898, after his visit to Jerusalem, he wrote:

“...I have not seen anything like the beauty of Jerusalem, the affection in which I maintain that the Jewish people would do anything to preserve. It is a city of the most varied interest. The past is preserved in the present. The past is not less interesting than the present. There are as fine Jews here as elsewhere. There is as much disinterested heroism as there are selfish or prejudiced people in any other place. Those that have been painted in the blackest colors are better than the circumstances surrounding them would warrant [one in expect-...]

And such a medley as is met with here! Some are poor, some are not of all one class; there are the Spanish-Portuguese, the Moroccan, the Yemenite, the Kurdish and the Bucharai Jews. The German Jewish community is composed of real Germans, of Russians from all the Russians, Polish, Roumanian, Turkish, Arabian, American and Oriental Jews. There are those who live in comparative luxury; many starve quite a little; and not a few live very well on nothing, their means being so primitive and so few... I have not seen anything in all my travels to interest me as much as my trip to Jerusalem.”

Aaron Friedenwald passed away on August 26, 1922. At a meeting held in his memory, he was described as “a Jew to whom the yoke of the law was a joyous privilege and not a grievous bur-...”

His obituary appearing the next day in The New York Times said in part:

“Dr. Aaron Friedenwald, an eminent American Jewish physician and philanthropist, died today, aged sixty-five years. Last Wednesday, he was operated for surgical operation for cancer...”

Dr. Friedenwald took an active interest in Jewish affairs, and held many offices in (the) various organizations. At the time of his demise he was President of the McCallum Street Temple, a Director of the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York [which was Orthodox at this time], Vice President at the Jewish Publication Society, a Trustee of the Jewish Benevolent Asylum, and the President of the local branch of the Alliance Israélite Universelle.

“As a lecturer, he was extensi-...”

Such were the many accomplish-...