

George Axelrad
Congregation President (1958-1961)



In Austria-Hungary, near the city of Vienna, George Axelrad was born in the year 1883. In 1900 he immigrated to the United States where he traveled from New York. His port of entry, across the continent, working along the way and getting to know the country and its ways.* In 1911 he married Rebecca Blum who was from his home town in Austria-Hungary, and had emigrated with her family to the United States. They made their home in New York and together with Rebecca's father, Joseph Blum, started the business of building apartments for investment. Two daughters were born and the family prospered.

In 1935 George and Rebecca moved to Jackson, Tennessee where their two daughters and their families were living. George Axelrad opened a mortgage loan company in partnership with Harris Brown, owner and editor of the Jackson Sun and Herron Pearson, attorney and United States District Representative for the state of Tennessee.

During the years from 1935 to 1860 when he retired from active participation in his business, he was very active in many civic affairs as well as fraternal organizations. In 1976 he became a fifty year member of the Masons, was a life member of the A and A Scottish Rite of Free Masonry and an Al Chymia Shriner. He was also an active senior Rotarian.

From 1935 on he was a very active member of Congregation B'Nai Israel, holding various offices including that of president. As superintendent of the cemetery for more than 25 years, he formed and wrote the cemetery by-laws and was instrumental in forming the cemetery trust fund. He read many Friday evening services and at that time, often gave the sermon as well. At times he would read from the Torah in which he was well versed. On Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, he often would read from the Hoftorah which would extend into an explanation of the reading and an analogy to present day living. He taught Sunday school for many years and inspired many of the young people who attended.

He was a man of letters and many languages. After his retirement from active business, he became a member of the Harvest Years Senior Citizens Center and contributed many articles to the monthly publication of this organization. Some articles which were particularly acclaimed were "What I Think of Longevity," "The Procession of Life," and "Why I Love America."

In 1974 Congregation B'nai Israel honored and showed their love for George Axelrad by calling him a Patriarch of the Congregation and having a special service and reception in his honor.

**After Several years he brought the rest of his family to the U.S. There were, in addition to his parents, eleven brothers and sisters. George Axelrad prepared and paid for a house for his family and together with the transportation, paid all their expenses. He was always concerned about the members of his family and had their best interests at heart.*

Congregation B'Nai Israel

This is a memorandum of the special service held at Temple B'nai Israel in Honor of George Axelrad on Friday Evening Dec. 13, 1974. The Rabbi Brad Nelson Bleefeld of Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio, delivered the following Sermon:

SERMON IN HONOR OF GEORGE AXELRAD

Ah, tis but a dream
you say, that men grow old
and old grow young,
but this I say
it is no dream
that virtue's vision
wisdom seems.

Tonight as the Torah was read, we listened as Jacob called his sons close in order to bestow blessings upon each of them. The B'nai Israel were gathered round, and as he raised his arms above the heads of his twelve sons, Jacob performed the ancient rite of benediction, an act which is a man's highest honor. Jacob our father blessed his sons as he and his father before him and his father before him had been blessed. He was an inspiring figure and a man admired above all others. He was the Patriarch of the family. Now many of us would think that whenever a man reaches the highest level of the family he becomes the Patriarch. But what is it that makes us look to a man such as this? What is in his being that each of us recognizes as something extra special? What is it that makes a man a Patriarch?

Abraham our father! Countless generations have passed since that Patriarch crisscrossed the Near East, and yet each of us says it as if the man himself were there beside us, Abraham our father! Why? Because for each of us this man stands larger than life before us. A quiet, gentle man who is moved to smash idols, argue with God, and walk through ovens unharmed. Each member of his illustrious family then and throughout every generation until today "looks upon the rock from whence we were

hewn" (Is. 51: 1-2) and looks upon Abraham our father. He was a pious man, a Ztadik. A man like this sees and understands and treats his fellow men as if they had worth, emotion, and value. We all have heard how his intolerance for Polytheism forced him to curse his father and leave his home. We have heard how he would accept strange wayfarers into his home for rest and refreshment. Would a man who had no use or care for the needs for humanity even presume to argue with God, let alone expect to win? And when he was blessed with a son, and then asked to sacrifice him, he went unflinchingly with a whole heart in order to do God's bidding. Let us think tonight who amongst ourselves is truly so pious to be such a devout adherent to our laws and precepts, whose prayers sound with such fervor as to move all of us to prayer. Only a man whose love for God manifests itself through his love of humanity, only a man such as this is worthy of being called a Patriarch.

Isaac our Father! Your deeds have inspired us beyond the very moral heights you have so righteously achieved. It is your example we follow as our people have gone to the slaughter generation after generation. Isaac, your name brings laughter and mirth to the lips and hearts of men who seek to do some good on this earth. Men whose sheer love of mankind warms their hearts and gladdens their souls. Who amongst ourselves can look upon his deeds and say that they were done for others. Jacob our father! We are told that Jacob was a kind and gentle man who dwelled in tents, the tents of the school of Shem and Eber. It is Jacob's study and love of Torah which make him unique in his generation. For Jacob his love of God manifested itself through knowledge and teaching, by sharing Torah he shared his wisdom and his God with his family around him. Is it any wonder that it is his sons who became the heads of our people, as they were the commanders of then-respective tribes. Each of us today bears allegiance to one of those twelve tribes and these three men. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who are the Patriarchs of our vast family because each of these men exemplified precisely what our sages said the world is based on. One of the most famous quotes from Pirke Avot the Chapters of the Fathers, or for tonight's discussion we will say the Chapters of the Patriarchs, from the Talmud states that the world is based on three things, on Torah and knowledge, on worship, faith and prayer and on acts and deeds of loving kindness. Three things upon which the world stands and three things upon which lie the making of a Patriarch. But why have we come to the Talmud when we have such shining examples as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Bible? It is because though each of these men possessed all three attributes of knowledge,

faith and love of mankind, each man excelled in one area. And for any one of us today who strives for his highest potential it is not enough to be like one and not like all three, so the Talmud pulls it all together for us and we are shown all three characteristics together as being necessary for a modern day Patriarch. A modern day Patriarch. A modern day Patriarch must be a father for the B'nai Israel. We here tonight are the B'nai Israel. Congregation B'nai Israel and we have come together because we have been blessed not by, but with a Patriarch. George Axelrad is our Patriarch. And this man who stands before us larger than life itself exemplifies our Talmudic creed; on three things the world is based on Torah, on faith and on acts of love towards mankind. A few weeks ago while George and I were speaking he said, "Rabbi, I would like to ask your advice on something", and I looked at him and thought why would a man like yourself, a man who has studied and gained vast knowledge, who is conversant in our tradition and literature, who can give a Talmudic lesson from the pulpit as our sages have done for centuries, why are you asking me for advice? and I said so to him. George looked at me and smiled and let out a little laugh and I remember it was the kind of laugh a father or grandfather laughs when his son or grandson asks a silly question which really needs no reply because we both knew that whether he asked or answered the questions it was he who was doing the teaching. I grew very warm inside to think that this man was sharing of himself with me and it is not a feeling unique to me or to the other student Rabbis whom George has seen come and go throughout his thirty some odd years here, but it is a feeling each of us of his congregational family has felt. We all sit here with silent respect and honor when George teaches us from the pulpit, and it is his love of Torah combined with his love for us which brings out his Patriarchal qualities. His wisdom and knowledge of Torah have been realized by all of us who served under him as President and beside him as a member of the Board. But it is not only his learning which makes him a pillar of our Congregation, it is also his genuine affection for us as his B'nai Israel and as individuals as well. As a father looks upon his entire family, he also views exactly each one of his children, and I do not think that there is any one in our Congregation who has not benefitted from the wise guiding hand of love George has shown to each of us. Particularly as Superintendent of the Cemetery where someone can be supportive yet comforting is required to lend a father's compassion to those of us who needed it during times of stress and pain. George supplied these necessities.

Lastly Pirke Avot speaks of faith and love of God. Our congregation's Patriarch has

led us in prayer formally from the pulpit, but more significantly by his life and deeds has taught us how to be living prayers to God by our actions, our words and our feelings toward others. George, you are an inspiring man, the Patriarch of our Congregation, the man who accompanied by our Matriarch Rebecca has been the head of this Congregation and a main pillar for nearly 30 years. As the B'nai Israel of whom we read in the Bible tonight were blessed by their father Jacob, we here are blessed by you our Patriarch, by your wisdom and desire to share it with all of us, by your faith and devotion to God, and by your love for us and all mankind. We are thankful; and it is to you, whom we honor tonight that our prayers and affections and our devotion extend for good health and many more years of inspiration.

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Following the Sermon, Sam Wahl, a past president of the Congregation presented and bestowed the plaque ordered by the B'nai Israel Board of Trustees to Mr. Axelrad in which he said:

I WOULD LIKE TO READ THIS PLAQUE TO YOU

Congregation B'nai Israel, Jackson, Tennessee, December 13, 1974. For years of inspiring and devoted service to Congregational B'nai Israel, this Testimonial is presented to George Axelrad as a token of grateful appreciation and profound esteem.

AND THEN HE CONTINUED AND SAID:

The Rabbi's sermon tonight perfectly describes a Patriarch of our own. George Axelrad whom we honor tonight for his years of devoted service to this congregation.

A man of personal integrity and affable manner, George Axelrad served as president for a period of 3 years and performed thoroughly and capably.

He has been for many years, and still is, an active and dedicated member of the Board of Trustees, whose meetings he attends every month and where we all benefit from his wise counsel.

And as Superintendent of the Cemetery he was diligent in his duties and faithful to his responsibilities.

We are fortunate in having George Axelrad as our Patriarch and it is with great respect and admiration that the Board of Trustees presents this plaque to him as a token of appreciation.

George Axelrad, accept this in good health and may you continue to be our Patriarch for many more years. I congratulate you and consider it an honor to have been asked to make this presentation.

Mr. Axelrad placed his hand on Sam's shoulder and while facing him he said:

Sam:

The congregation could not have chosen a better man than yourself to present this plaque to me. About thirty years ago, when I first came to Jackson, my daughter, Pearle A. Rosenbloom and you were flying airplanes. I met you then and became your friend. Since as members of the Congregation, and working together. We became intimate. Knowing you well, I can attest - that any job you take on is - as an act of love. You are to be complimented for this rare quality, this talent and ability.

Tonight you have expressed yourself in this very same manner. As I always told you, Sam, you are a gentleman and a scholar. Thank you, Sam.

Turning to the Rabbi, George Axelrad pointing to the Plaque said:

Rabbi:

The dictionary defines a blacksmith as an individual who works with iron. – I compare you to a Goldsmith -You work with the Golden Book. Using the material from the Golden Book - You took the Patriarchs and hammered out a new Patriarch – A Congregational B'nai Israel Patriarch * A skill that is golden.

Afterwards, Mr. Axelrad walked over to the lectern of the Temple, faced the audience and gave the following general talk:

And now that I have been looked upon as the Patriarch of Congregation B'nai Israel, I look upon all of you members as my family - and I want to thank my Congregational family for the honor you have bestowed upon me. But you also know that without a family no man could be a Patriarch - and it is you and your co-operation that have helped me during the period to achieve this honor tonight. - As I look back upon my activities and deeds, I feel that it is each of you, the members of my Congregational family - that really deserve the praise. Not only for your efforts, but for your understanding and enthusiasm and your love which you have shown to me and to each other. Really - what a Patriarch can be thankful for is - that these whom he has taught and raised and tried to be an example for, have grown and progressed and achieved success. It is your success which makes us all proud - and it gladdens me especially that this has brought us all to such a joyous occasion. Thank you all for this honor my Congregational family. - - I feel that it is important for me to mention that great credit is due to my wife Rebecca - She has been very helpful with her encouragement, her wisdom and her advise. I thank her for this wholeheartedly. -I am exceedingly gratified to have here this evening my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, so that they too share in this joy. I am also overflowing with happiness that two of my blood-related brothers are with me tonight. - I am especially honored, however, with the presence of each of you DEAR FRIENDS from this community. Thank You All. It is proper at this time to wish each and all of you here A Happy Holiday Season and a year of Health, Happiness and Joy. And if I am permitted, I would like to quote an English Blessing: - - May your path be strewn with flowers, memories, friends and happy hours. - May blessings come from heaven above, to fill your life with peace and love. Amen.



<i>George Axelrad</i>	<i>Rebecca Blum Axelrad</i>
<i>December 8, 1883 - May 29, 1980</i>	<i>March 15, 1891 - December 29, 1978</i>

זְכוֹרָנוּם לְבִרְכָה.
Zichronam liv'rachah.
May their memories be for blessing.