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Tragedy and Continuity in the Synagogue: The Murder of Rabbi Morris Adler

On the anniversary of Lincoln's Birthday, Shabbat morning, February 12th, 1966, at Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* of Southfield, Michigan, in suburban Detroit, twenty-three year old congregant, "[Richard] Wishnetsky, who had reportedly been under psychiatric treatment...shot Rabbi [Morris Adler] on the *bimah*" (*Cleveland Jewish News*). In previous works that discuss Rabbi Morris Adler's murder, such as T.V. LoCiccro's Murder in the Synagogue, attention is primarily focused on the shooter, Richard Wishnetsky. However, according to Mrs. Judith Levin Cantor, archivist at Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* and witness to the shooting of Rabbi Adler, "Some people seem to focus on the perpetrator, which changes the story, as if he had a rational message" (Mrs. Cantor email Re: Rabbi Morris Adler). In addition, not much of the discussion at present sheds light on the responses by the congregants and lay leadership of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* in the aftermath. As a result, the focus here is not based on the rationale behind the murderer, the details of Richard Wishnetsky's life, or the particularities of his beliefs and illness that drove him to commit this act. As a fourth-generation Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* congregant, I want to honor Rabbi Adler and fellow congregants who endured this tragedy. Primarily through first-person accounts based on my interviews with Mrs. Judith Cantor and Mr. Harold Berry, the son of Mr. Louis Berry who was congregational president at the time of Rabbi Adler's death, this paper aims to supply currently missing information from the discussion of

Rabbi Morris Adler's assassination, more specifically: an account of Rabbi Adler's great character, as evidenced by his invaluable contributions to a multitude of individuals and organizations from various communities, which helps illustrate why his death was viewed as a tragedy and great loss to so many people. In addition, this paper underscores the congregants' reactions to the tragedy and the synagogue's response, which includes the active measures taken by individual congregants, clergy members, and lay leadership to ensure the continuity of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* after the death of their senior rabbi, Rabbi Morris Adler.

On the day of Rabbi Adler's tragic death, "Bar mitzvah rites were just being concluded for Steven Frank, a member of the congregation" ("Rabbi Shot by Assailant Near Death in Hospital", *Baltimore Jewish Times*) and Rabbi Adler had just finished delivering the Lincoln Day sermon, when Wishnetsky walked down the aisle of the sanctuary "mounted the *bimah*, and with a pistol in one hand, he fired a shot at the ceiling and shouted: 'In your seats. Off the pulpit. This congregation is a travesty and an abomination. It has made a mockery by its phoniness and hypocrisy of the beauty and spirit of Judaism'" (ibid.). At this moment, Rabbi Adler "advised all who were on the *bimah*...including Mr. Louis Berry, president of the congregation: 'You all get off. I know the boy. I'll handle him'" (ibid.). Immediately after this, Wishnetsky continued, "It is composed of people who on the whole make me ashamed to say I am a Jew. For the most part...it is composed of men, women, and children who care for and love nothing except their own vain egotistical selves. With this act I protest the humanly horrifying and hence unacceptable situation," (Slomovitz, *Jewish Advocate*). After he finished speaking, "Wishnetsky fired four times at the Rabbi. The fourth shot penetrated Rabbi Adler's head. Then, Wishnetsky shot a bullet into his own head" (Rabbi, *Times*). Four days later, at "2:30 am on Wednesday,

Richard Wishnetsky...passed away” and Rabbi Adler was still “in the intensive care department of Sinai Hospital,” (Slomovitz). Over the course of the next week, “Rabbi Morris Adler ‘spent an uneventful night at Sinai Hospital, but there [had] been minimal improvement. He [had fallen] into a coma, and his condition...critical,’” (*Jewish News*). The Rabbi continued, “hovering between life and death” (Rabbi, *Times*) until he passed away a few weeks later, “Friday [March 11, 1966]” (“20,000 Attend Funeral Rites For Slain Rabbi Morris Adler”, *Baltimore Jewish Times*). The funeral occurred just two days later when “20,000 persons attended funeral services for Rabbi Morris Adler, held at his own *Shaarey Zedek* Temple in suburban Southfield” (ibid.).

The sheer number of attendants at Rabbi Adler’s funeral can be explained in light of his exceptional character, which influenced a plethora of individuals, organizations, and communities throughout the years of his life. According to the *Jewish Advocate*, “Rabbi Morris Adler was born March 30, 1906 in Slutzk, Russia. His father was the late Rabbi Joseph Adler of New York...he was brought to the country by his parents in 1913...studied at Yeshiva [University] and then transferred...to the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary of America where he was ordained rabbi in 1935” (Slomovitz). Adler began his career in the Conservative rabbinate by serving “as the spiritual leader of Temple *Emanu-El*, Buffalo, N.Y.” (Funeral, *Times*). Meanwhile, at this time, Congregation *Shaarey Zedek*, more specifically, “senior Rabbi A.M. Hershman...and [some of the congregants] had largely remained in [a traditional] mold” (LoCicero 60). Nonetheless, “after *Shaarey Zedek* had moved in 1932 into a large new synagogue on Chicago Boulevard in the heart of the city, some of the leaders of the congregation began to talk of the need for a bright young rabbi” (ibid. 61), which led to the eventual hiring of

Rabbi Adler when he “assumed the leadership of Temple *Shaarey Zedek* in Detroit in 1938” (Funeral, *Times*).

Rabbi Adler quickly gained respect after coming to Detroit by involving himself with affairs rooted both in the Jewish community and within the non-Jewish Detroit community. It was these actions that helped establish his widespread reputation of admirable disposition, which can explain why many individuals within the congregational community saw his passing as a horrible tragedy. For example, Rabbi Adler took an active role not only in the spiritual aspect of synagogue life, but also in the educational aspect by “immediately set[ting] out to enlarge the... school; he added to the requirements for consecration and reorganized the Adult Institute established by Rabbi Hershman” (Bolkosky 229). In addition, he established himself within the Conservative movement as a whole when “the Fortieth Annual Convention of the Rabbinical Assembly was held at *Shaarey Zedek* on June 25, 1940...it was the first in the Midwest” (ibid.). Adler also gained respect in the Detroit community by strengthening relations with other religious movements by “penning articles and essays on a variety of often ‘secular’ subjects, addressing various groups in the city, often non-Jewish, and presenting radio talks on matters like brotherhood and the character of religion” (LoCicero 62). By increasing personal involvement within the Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* community, the overarching Conservative movement, and the greater Detroit community, Rabbi Adler was treated with high regard by his friends and colleagues, which reveals why so many people were personally affected by his unexpected death. For example, Rabbi Jacob Chinitz, a friend of Rabbi Adler who compiled together Adler’s best sermons after his death in *The Voice Still Speaks*, recalls in the book’s introduction, “...Morris Adler certainly did not live in a cloister. He was as involved in the Jewish and general

community as one can be and still serve as the active spiritual leader of a specific congregation... [He was] ‘appointed to the Cultural Commission of Michigan by Governor [G. Mennen] Williams.’ For years he was the Chairman of the Public Review Board of the United Automobile Workers. He had been Vice-President of the Jewish Community Council of Detroit almost as long as that body had been in existence” (Chinitz xiii). Yet, Rabbi Adler’s invaluable character is most evident in his decision to “enlist, attend chaplaincy school...[and become] the first Jewish chaplain to arrive in Japan...[he] quickly set out to assemble its Jewish population... searching for stateless Jewish refugees...[and] arranged care for these people and paved the road for many of them to come to the United States” (LoCicero 62-63). Meanwhile, Rabbi Hershman retired in 1946 after Rabbi Adler returned from the war, and “in 1954...Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* elected [Rabbi Adler] their chief rabbi for life” (ibid. 65). At this time, his commitments ranged from “serving as president of the Zionist Organization of Detroit” (Slomovitz) to “battling for civil rights...as a member of many city and state commissions [including] the Fair Elections Practices Commission” (ibid.).

Even though Rabbi Adler became extremely involved in affairs outside the synagogue, “most [people] agree, however, that Rabbi Adler did not neglect his rabbinical duties to his congregation... His sick calls and visits to the bereaved were frequent.” (LoCicero 67). Congregants and fellow clergy members also held much respect for Rabbi Morris Adler. For example, according to Mrs. Cantor, Rabbi Adler’s willingness to help congregants made him “very highly regarded and recognized [as] a great man...[that was] loved” by the congregants (Mrs. Judith Cantor Interview). In addition, Rabbi Irwin Groner, who became Assistant Rabbi of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* when he arrived from Arkansas in 1959, recalled, “[Rabbi Adler]

had great powers of personal magnetism and the ability to articulate clearly and movingly the issues of our time with a brilliant wit, a personal dynamism, and a keen insight into most situations and people...His influence reached a large number of people and his leadership guided some of the leading institutions and causes of our time...When you add everything up you see a man with a wide range of tasks, responsibilities, and commitments” (LoCicero 187).

Ultimately, the summation of Rabbi Adler’s contributions to his congregants, to his synagogue, to causes within the Detroit community, and to his leadership within the Conservative movement as a whole credited him with a sense of great character by congregants, colleagues, and many other individuals within his widespread sphere of influence. As a result, his unexpected death was seen as a great loss and a horrible tragedy to the many people who revered him.

Rabbi Morris Adler’s admiration and stature within the metropolitan Detroit community had reached an even higher zenith by the eve of the tragedy, which had been solidified with the opening of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek*’s new synagogue in 1962 due to its congregants’ move to the suburbs and significantly increasing membership. In fact, the new building’s “stained-glass peak jutted almost over the adjacent highway...with the grandeur of its foyer and sanctuary as overwhelming as a medieval cathedral. Rabbi Adler...reflected that prominence and pride, dominating the congregation and drawing attention as one of the most acclaimed spokesmen for Jews in Detroit” (Bolkosky 454-455). It was at this time, when Rabbi Adler stood at the height of his career on the pulpit, that he was also personally counseling congregant Richard Wishnetsky, after Richard was released from a mental institution. Ironically, although Richard’s family was active in synagogue life and Rabbi Adler personally knew Richard’s family, Rabbi Adler never would have guessed that his passion to help troubled congregants like Richard

would ultimately lead to his death.

In fact, at the new synagogue, on the day of the tragedy, February 12, 1966, Richard Wishnetsky's mother and sister were listening as "Rabbi Adler delivered an especially powerful sermon that unfolded from his theme of Abraham Lincoln's birthday" (Bolkosky 455).

Wishnetsky purposely chose to commit his act in front of his mother and sister, knowing that on that very day they would be in attendance, since his sister had the honor of reciting the Prayer for the Country for the congregation. While the rabbi was delivering his sermon, congregant Mrs. Judith Cantor arrived at the synagogue with her four-year old daughter Ellen. They stood directly outside the doors of the sanctuary and waited to proceed inside after the Rabbi finished speaking. Richard Wishnetsky, whom Mrs. Cantor did not know, also arrived at this time.

Wishnetsky stood outside the doors to the sanctuary while Rabbi Adler delivered the sermon, next to Mrs. Cantor and her daughter. When Rabbi Adler finished speaking, Mrs. Cantor and her daughter walked inside to join her twelve year-old son Glenn, who was sitting in the front of the sanctuary. Mrs. Cantor recalls, "Richard Wishnetsky [walked] down the aisle when we walked in. We didn't know about him until he went down the aisle and shot his gun into the roof...I was innocent enough to think that it was a firecracker... People were aroused. The young man said he wanted to talk" (Cantor). When Wishnetsky began speaking, "someone who was in World War II rushed out ahead of us to call the police...this man understood quickly what was going on...[and it was] a clue that this was a dangerous situation. At this point, with my son at my side and holding my daughter's hand, we left the sanctuary, and we saw the children (the very active junior congregation) arriving at the outside entrance. Some of them had heard there was a shooting; some had wanted to go to their grandmother. I said, 'we're going to stay right here,

I'm going to keep you safe.' Although I didn't have the slightest idea how to keep them safe!" (ibid.).

After Wishnetsky shot the Rabbi and then himself, initially, "people were alarmed with the shooting, mostly confused" (Cantor). But in the moment of the tragedy, reactions ranged from "total disbelief" (ibid.) to "sheer horror" (Mr. Harold Berry interview) and "momentary pandemonium...horrified outcries...then quick stillness...as [congregational president Louis] Berry urged the congregation to leave quietly and go home" (Bolkosky 455). Mr. Harold Berry, the president's son, did not attend services that day, yet when his father initially told him about the tragedy, he knew "you couldn't dream that anything like this would happen" (Berry). After the rabbi was shot, "several men close to the front, including three doctors who immediately attended Rabbi Adler, were quickly on the *bimah*" (LoCicero 353). Alongside the initial responses by the congregants was the reaction of Goldie Adler, Rabbi Adler's wife, who was also attending services that morning, sitting near the back of the sanctuary. When the Rabbi had fallen, "Mrs. Adler, making her way...from the back of the sanctuary through the nearly hysterical throng, managed to reach the *bimah* and knelt at her husband's side. 'It's only my arm, Goldie,' said the rabbi, 'so don't worry.' Somewhat reassured Mrs. Adler said, 'Relax, darling, and let [the doctors] fuss over you; I'm standing right by'" (ibid. 353-354). Yet, one of the most interesting occurrences right after the tragedy was Goldie's conversation with Richard's mother. Mrs. Cantor remembers, "[Goldie then] quickly went to the assassin's mother and personally put her arms around his mother and said 'this is not your fault'...to give strength and understanding to the mother. The parents had suffered under [Richard's] abnormal psychiatric behavior" (Cantor). The breadth of initial reactions that reflected an outpouring of horrorstruck

pain, suffering, and acts to comfort one another emphasizes the fact that regardless of whether one attended services that day, everyone was somehow personally affected by this tragedy.

Eventually, the chapel reached a level of calm as people left the synagogue and Rabbi Morris Adler was taken to Sinai Hospital in Detroit, where he eventually lost consciousness and fell into a coma. During this time, Mr. Berry recalled, “Anxiety and tension, every day it was: ‘is he going to come out of it? How long would he be in this state?...[We all] waited for some resolution to this condition’” (Berry). The fact that no one knew what was going to happen to Rabbi Morris Adler also created an atmosphere of “great sadness” (Cantor). Mr. Berry remembered his father’s reaction to the Rabbi Adler’s shooting and coma. He recalls “it was a great shock, [my father] was close with Rabbi Adler, and he was there – it’s almost like finding yourself in a battle scene” (Berry). Mrs. Cantor, Mr. Harold Berry, and Mr. Louis Berry all felt the same sting of the aftermath to this horrible tragedy that befell their loved and well-respected leader, Rabbi Adler. This period of limbo – where no one knew whether Morris Adler was going to soon regain consciousness and take back his chair on the *bimah* or continue to remain in a vegetative state – lasted an entire three weeks until his death.

Yet, it was during these three weeks that despite their initial reactions, congregants and clergy came together to overcome their suffering and take active measures to ensure the continuity of synagogue life. In the first week following the tragedy, Mr. Berry recalls, “The only way you overcome something like that is just go on...[we] carried on” (Berry). First of all, this notion of “carrying on” was presented initially within the walls of the synagogue, when “on the Sabbath following the shooting, Rabbi Irwin Groner...declared with sensitivity and strength the theme of continued life that *Shaarey Zedek* would explicitly set out to embody. He spoke

forcefully of purpose, truth, justice, compassion, and restoration. Fearing that the congregation would bear the mark of death and tragedy, its leadership determined to publicly and intently ‘reaffirm the biblical challenge to choose life’” (Bolkosky 455). Rabbi Groner’s response of drawing the congregation together as a pillar of strength was a promise of revitalization echoed by the actions of individual congregants and lay leadership underneath Mr. Louis Berry in the weeks, months, and years following the tragedy. Second, the fact that congregants still came to synagogue after that tragic Shabbat demonstrated that they too wanted to move forward. For example, Mrs. Cantor continued to attend services since she understood that “this was the act of one man with severe illness and psychiatric problems...this family recognized that he was psychiatrically a problem. [Coming back to synagogue] was not comfortable at first...but the leadership did a great deal by example to demonstrate they are moving on” (Cantor). Mr. Berry also felt safe returning to synagogue; he “realized this was a singular event [that was] a very offbeat peculiar kind of thing... that did not represent a breakdown of civilization...” (Berry). He understood that “[This was] not the kind of congregation that would fall down without a rabbi” (ibid.). Furthermore, the fact that Jewish lifecycle events such as “weddings, births, [and] funerals continued...”(ibid) also showed the congregants that “the synagogue was a living breathing piece and everything continued” (ibid.). Mrs. Cantor also remembers that day-to-day activities such as “the daily morning and evening *minyans* continued, the junior congregation continued, *shabbas* services continued, everyone rose to the occasion despite their heavy hearts” (Cantor). As a result, because congregants still felt safe going to the synagogue, everyday rituals and celebratory lifecycle events persisted, and signs of revitalization by Rabbi Groner and lay leadership affirmed that the congregational psyche was not fixated onto the

tragedy to the extent that the synagogue as a whole was paralyzed, "everyone [was] carrying on rather than stooping to hysteria" (ibid.). These acts helped the congregation take steps beyond their initial reactions of suffering to ensure the continuation of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* without Rabbi Adler.

Although steps taken by the synagogue leadership and congregants in the days and weeks after the shooting occurred conveyed the act of moving forward, this did not mean that everyone simply chose to forget the tragedy that befell Rabbi Adler. On the contrary, Mrs. Cantor recalls there were "communal prayers for his recovery" (Cantor) when he was in the hospital. Communal healing became most evident in the wake of Rabbi Adler's death. After nearly a month since the shooting and weeks of mounting anxiety, Mr. Berry remembered reacting to the Rabbi's death "With great sorrow. At that point, the tension and anxiety were over... the whole measure of the tragedy was affirmed" (Berry). Mrs. Cantor understood that "We had to accept the tragedy, and everyone conducted themselves with great dignity" (Cantor). It was this sense of dignity that the congregation embodied two days later at Rabbi Adler's funeral. By holding the funeral at the same place as the shooting just several weeks earlier, Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* demonstrated to the rest of the world that it was not permanently occupied with this tragedy. Rather, holding the funeral "at the sanctuary...in every way indicated we are going to go on" (Cantor). The notion of congregational unification at the funeral helped congregants mourn the loss of their beloved Rabbi in the comfort of their friends, family, and fellow congregants, and ultimately showed everyone at the funeral that the synagogue would sustain its strength.

In addition, the sense of loss was not only limited to the congregants. In fact, the

“highest clerical and lay dignitaries of the state and city, including Gov. George Romney, Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, and their official families” (funeral, *Times*) attended the funeral, which illustrated that the death of Rabbi Morris Adler was a great loss to the larger non-Jewish communities of Detroit and Michigan that he served as well. Moreover, the presence of both “national Jewish organizations [and] delegations representing Roman Catholic and Protestant churches” (ibid.) at Rabbi Adler’s funeral shows that the death of Rabbi Morris Adler was a significant loss to Christian communities as well. Mrs. Cantor recalls, “[The] funeral was full of people in secular and Jewish circles...we were a community of people, every single one of whom who had some meaningful contact to Rabbi Adler” (Cantor). Regardless of whether the individual at the funeral was a congregant, state dignitary, religious leader of another sect or community, or advocate for a cause that the Rabbi had supported, the passing of Rabbi Morris Adler brought everyone together under the roof of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* to commemorate his contributions and character. In fact, at the funeral, “Jew and Gentile, Negro and white, leader and led, worker and employer, religious and nonbeliever...converged from near and far...to pay their last respects” (Edelman xi). At the funeral, differences that divided these diverse individuals disappeared and were replaced by a sense of communal reverence and collective mourning for Rabbi Morris Adler to help everyone cope and “carry on.”

However, despite the sense of congregational unity that was exhibited when Rabbi Adler fell into a coma and at the Rabbi’s funeral, the leadership of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* now faced the challenge of permanently extending their promise and exemplification of congregational stability in the weeks, months, and years to follow. Ultimately, the combined efforts by lay leadership, Rabbi Groner, and other leaders in the synagogue conveyed the notion

of continuity after Rabbi Adler's death. First and foremost, the lay leadership knew that without a new senior rabbi at the helm of the synagogue, this congregation could not ultimately move forward. Yet, the "right" direction that was considered "moving forward" divided the lay leadership of *Shaarey Zedek*. Mr. Berry recalls his father "had to resolve the two prevailing currents of opinion amongst the board: find a well-known famous rabbi as quickly as possible... someone that has a reputation, well known throughout the Conservative Judaism world...or promote [Assistant Rabbi Irwin Groner] from within, [give him] a chance to prove himself" (Berry). One of the reasons the board expressed caution to promoting Assistant Rabbi Groner to the position of senior rabbi was because "sometimes promoting from within does not always work out...in the eyes of the membership...they would see him only as an Assistant Rabbi, always in Rabbi Adler's shadow" (ibid.). In addition to possibly feeling overshadowed by Rabbi Adler's legacy, "Rabbi Groner had his own ambitions, if this [event] hadn't happened he probably would've found a different synagogue to become principal rabbi and move on" (ibid.). The board understood that these concerns could have deterred Rabbi Groner from taking a higher leadership role in the life of the synagogue. Yet, Mr. Berry, his father, and the rest of the lay leadership realized that the ultimate "question [was]: [did Rabbi Groner] have enough [experience] to establish [his] own identity?" (ibid.). Mr. Berry's "father met with Rabbi Groner and said to him 'We're not going to do anything immediately, we want to wait for at least a year.' But the sense of it was, 'will you prove yourself within the year?'" (ibid.). By giving Rabbi Groner the opportunity to showcase his ability to lead as senior rabbi of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek*, lay leadership indicated to congregants that the synagogue itself could still produce and promote its own religious leadership from within, which guaranteed the

continuation of clergy leadership and synagogue life even after the death of their former senior rabbi.

Rabbi Groner's natural ascension to the position of senior rabbi became evident to congregants such as Mrs. Cantor in the year following the assassination of Rabbi Adler. Even though "Rabbi Groner was a very young man at the time, in his 30's... he rose to the occasion" (Cantor). More specifically, Mrs. Cantor observed that Rabbi Groner "quickly recognized the challenge of being a central figure of leadership and rose to that. His sermons reflected great learning and a great moral compass. He was young but still gained enormous respect even from the elders of the congregation" (ibid.). The fact that even the elders of the congregation showed respect to the young Rabbi Groner not only illustrated that congregants accepted him, but also embraced him as their new senior rabbi. In addition, Mr. Berry recalls, "the congregation felt comfortable with Rabbi Groner... Like Adler, he was trained in traditional Judaism. He was a deep, very effective sermonizer and a man of good judgment. By the time the year was over, the congregation was behind Rabbi Groner. The question of succession was settled" (Berry). By giving Rabbi Groner a significant amount of time where he could develop a stronger leadership role in the synagogue, cultivate a deeper relationship with congregants, and earn the respect of clergy, lay leadership, and his congregation, despite his young age, Rabbi Groner had proven himself. As the congregants grew accustomed to Rabbi Groner's leadership over the course of that year, ultimately, what was "resolved on a temporary basis turned out to be a permanent solution" (ibid.) and under his leadership, Rabbi Groner guaranteed the permanence of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* for the years to come as its next senior rabbi.

In addition, Rabbi Adler's wife, Goldie Adler, also played an instrumental role in helping

the congregants overcome the loss of her husband by setting an example for her fellow congregants. In fact, “Mrs. Adler did not retreat, even though...she was in mourning the rest of her life. But she maintained an active position in the synagogue with the sisterhood...she continued to be looked to as a leader in her own right” (Cantor). By staying involved with the synagogue life, Mrs. Adler showed congregants that even she, the widow of Rabbi Morris Adler, the individual that many would have considered the most emotionally and psychologically scarred by the tragedy, would not withdraw from congregational life, which “[was] a major contribution to the continuity of the synagogue” (Cantor). However, not only did Mrs. Adler retain an active role in the synagogue, she also helped congregants heal in response to the death of Rabbi Adler. In fact, “Goldie Adler was a factor in affirmation and courage...she was still there to sort of help everyone on. Her own attitude was a positive attitude...that kept people on a positive note” (Berry). Because Goldie Adler embodied an aura of positivity, conveyed active involvement in synagogue life, and treated her fellow congregants with care to help them heal after the tragedy, she served as an example for her fellow congregants by personally embodying the continuity of their congregation after the loss of Rabbi Adler.

Finally, other synagogue committees and leaders also showed initiative to help the congregants overcome tragedy and move forward. Mrs. Cantor recalls the formation of the “‘Klay Codesh’... Rabbi [Groner], Cantor Jacob Sonenklar, Sidney Rube, and the young Assistant Cantor Reuven Frankel along with the subsidiary groups like the Men's Club, the Sisterhood, and the school worked to overcome their personal grief and to continue the mission of the *shul*, its services, its *minyan*, its school, etc” (Mrs. Cantor email Re: your paper). By gathering individuals from all aspects of the synagogue life together with clergy, Congregation

Shaarey Zedek showed its congregants that it was still the same caring community that congregants could rely upon to help them heal after the loss of Rabbi Adler. Additionally, in order to contribute to the long-term continuity of synagogue life, Mrs. Cantor recalls “young Cantor Frankel, who worked with the young people in what I call the Junior Congregation...He was wonderful and much loved by the kids - and taught them to conduct the services, read from the Torah...that did a lot to indicate that the congregation was carrying on for the future, despite the tragedy” (ibid.). Investment in the future generation of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* also suggested that synagogue leadership unanimously agreed that they were going to focus all of their resources on ensuring the continuity of their synagogue. Ultimately, all of the initiatives carried out by the clergy, the board, Mrs. Adler, Mr. Louis Berry, and Rabbi Groner, together affirmed to the congregants and to the Jewish community of Detroit that Rabbi Adler’s death did not mean the death of Congregation *Shaarey Zedek*.

In conclusion, it is evident that the sheer magnitude of the horrible tragedy that befell Rabbi Morris Adler cannot be examined only in light of the mental illness or other particularities surrounding the murderer. In addition to the work that has dedicated its efforts to examining the murderer, Rabbi Adler’s incredible character, given by the breadth of his contributions to his congregants, to Jews across the globe, to the people of Detroit and Michigan, and to his fellow colleagues and leadership within the Conservative movement must be taken into account to understand why the loss of Rabbi Adler was considered to be such a terrible misfortune to so many people. Furthermore, first-person accounts, such as personal interviews with congregants Mrs. Judith Cantor and Mr. Harold Berry, illustrate the reactions by congregants in the moment of the tragedy and in its aftermath, which were examined to fill the current gaps of information

within the discussion of Rabbi Adler's tragic death. Finally, first-person accounts illustrated how Congregation *Shaarey Zedek* moved forward after Rabbi Adler's death, which also had not been addressed in prior works that studied the death of Rabbi Adler. Continuity after tragedy was not achieved by only one facet of the synagogue. Rather, it was confronted by a wide range of individuals and groups such as Assistant Rabbi Groner, who rose to the occasion as the new senior rabbi after Adler's death by continuing religious services and activities, and showcasing his leadership skills, which helped him gain the respect of his congregants. Congregational president Mr. Louis Berry and lay leadership took active measures to advocate for a new senior rabbi after Rabbi Adler's death. Mrs. Goldie Adler served as a model congregant by remaining an active participant in synagogue life, maintaining a positive attitude, and helping fellow congregants heal. Finally, collaborative efforts between the clergy, lay leadership, and various facets of synagogue life and the continued investment in the education of the Junior Congregation also ensured the spiritual, physical, and psychological continuity of this synagogue. It is the sum of these efforts that together helped the synagogue move forward, which should be included in discussion to understand the aftermath of Rabbi Morris Adler's tragic death.

Yet ultimately, despite the synagogue's success in moving forward after the tragedy, at the conclusion of my interview with Mr. Berry, he pointed out, "Rabbi Adler...intensified Jewish loyalty and Jewish life [as] a part of his legacy...Rabbi Adler was a good leader, [he] inspired people and his inspiration outlived his physical presence" (Berry). Congregation *Shaarey Zedek*'s ability to move forward did not suggest erasing their collective memory of Rabbi Adler. Rather, memories of Rabbi Adler and his tragic death coexisted with the acts that ensured

continuity by the synagogue. Even today, forty-five years later, his legacy is still remembered by the congregants and inspires future generations.

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