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Do not say that earlier days were better than these!

—*Kohelet* 7:10

My late father, Rabbi Kopul Rosen died in 1962, at the age of 49. He was a remarkably charismatic personality, tall and elegant, an orator and public speaker of a type and style no longer to be found. He was arguably the most influential and certainly the most popular rabbi in the Britain of his day. But he was also the symbol of a kind of rabbi and a style of Orthodoxy that has all but disappeared.

My father was born in London in 1913 to a very modest family, and his gifts were recognized at an early age. He was invited to preach in various synagogues from the age of 13. He was taken under the wing of the great Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky, Av Bet Din in London at the time and he was sent to learn at Mir in Lithuania, where he received his *semikha* from the Rav of the town and the Rosh Yeshiva. There he came under the powerful influence of the great mussar *mashgiah*, R. Yeruham Levovitz, and indeed he gave me his Hebrew name. Mussar became the most significant element in my father's early spiritual life.

He returned to England in 1937 and was appointed the Rav of a prominent synagogue in Manchester before being promoted as Communal Rabbi of Glasgow in 1944. Despite his responsibilities, he found time to travel once a month to Gateshead to learn with the great Rav Dessler who was staying there at that time before he moved to Israel.

In 1954, my father was called to London to become the Principal Rabbi of the Federation of Synagogues. It had been established by Lord Swaythling as a more Orthodox alternative to the dominant United Synagogue. It was a meteoric rise for a man in his early thirties. While he was in the

rabbinate my father wore the “old-style” square cappel and frock coat. By contrast, my mother, although a model rebbetzin, did not normally cover her hair. My father, together with other distinguished “heimishe” rabbis, ate at the “unsupervised” vegan restaurant in Leicester Square and enjoyed the opera at Covent Garden. But this was a time when the United Synagogue itself possessed not one working kosher *mikvah,* and hardly any of its officers, let alone its members, were Shomer Shabbat.

After Chief Rabbi Hertz died in 1946, my father, only 32 at the time, was one of two final candidates to succeed him. Not only his youth but his independence told against him. He felt that the options open to him in the rabbinate were so limited that he increasingly focused on education, as this was a distraction from the pettiness and wrangling of communal affairs.

While still with the Federation, my father founded a Jewish boarding school, Carmel College, in the Berkshire countryside in 1948. It was modelled on the great English public schools, with their outstanding academic standards and well-rounded cultural and sporting programs. He wanted, in his own words, to offer the very best of Jerusalem and Athens. In his opinion, a Judaism that was not based on serious study would not survive. But equally, a person who could not find his way in the modern world and feel at home in Western culture would be lacking too. His vision of “authentic” Judaism was Maimonidean both in its elitism and its breadth of scholarship. His worldview had a lot in common both with R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch on the one hand and Rav J. B. Soloveitchik on the other (with the caveat that many who purport to speak in their names nowadays do not).

In 1949, my father resigned from the rabbinate. Coincidentally, he also resigned as president of the Mizrahi Movement in the UK when it went into politics in Israel. He was adamantly opposed to religious political parties. He believed, correctly with hindsight, that religion would end up, in his words, “prostituting itself” for political gain. Yet he was always a religious Zionist and insisted on our using Havara Sepharadit when speaking Ivrit. His dream was to settle in Israel. At the time that he died, he had been negotiating to establish a school similar to Carmel College in Israel, outside Petah Tikvah.

Our family moved to the school campus of Carmel at Greenham Common outside Newbury. Three years later the school transferred to Mongewell Park some ten miles south of Oxford, and that was where we were brought up, in rural splendour—but isolated from the main London community.

Religious life at Carmel was self-sufficient, a little community of its own in which we were all encouraged to participate. When the school was in recess it became a sort of intellectual retreat for staff and visitors, rabbinic and academic, who would come down for weekends. My father particularly delighted in hosting visitors from Oxford University and from Israel. I remember their exchanges, the sparring on matters secular and religious and the constant appearance of stacks of books of all kinds that one had to read.

We were constantly being exposed to ideas of all kinds. I recall his constant reiteration of the need to understand and feel comfortable in dealing with the dominant culture and the best way of doing that was by being confident and well grounded in one's own. He was not in favour of enclavism, of hiding within a mental ghetto to protect oneself from outside challenges. Rather, he espoused confronting these challenges and learning how to either reconcile, accept, or reject. He was inclusive in his attitude toward individuals of all types of Jewish identity while holding strongly to his Orthodoxy and having no patience for Reform ideology. When he returned from a visit to America he told us how he was taken aback by the prominent rabbis and communal leaders he met who held any degree of religious practice in contempt.

Most of my father's pupils did not come from religious backgrounds, and he therefore saw his role as one of educating and encouraging, of winning over by presenting Judaism as both a vibrant experience

and a great storehouse of learning and wisdom. Above all, he was lenient in his halakhic decisions, for others if not for himself.

This was the atmosphere in which I grew up—an atmosphere that was religiously and intellectually stimulating and yet on the fringes of the community, neither part of it yet neither completely detached. In 1967, my father sent me, a rebellious teenager, to Kol Torah yeshiva in Bayit veGan in Jerusalem. He believed that only an intensive "old-world" yeshiva education could give a Jew that profound respect and love for Torah that was essential for informed religious commitment, in the same way that he urged pupils to get a thorough and intense education in Western culture and science.

In Israel at this time you could count the number of "foreign" yeshiva bahurim on the fingers of your hands. Israel was still a poor, struggling, and largely socialist country. The daily diet revolved around TCP (tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers), together with coarse black bread and margarine, and the universal eggplant. Meat was almost unavailable; we might get chicken for Shabbat if we were lucky. Hardly anyone had a car, apart from government ministers, and one contemporary who was fortunate enough to have a Vespa was regarded as something of a Rothschild. But there was an amazing pioneering atmosphere that is now largely lost.

The extent of the antagonism that existed to religion after the State was founded is largely forgotten. The divide in Israel between the Old Yishuv and the left-wing, secular pioneers, goes back a very long way. I arrived in Haifa by boat from Marseilles. Haifa was the most secular of Israeli cities and so left-wing that it was nicknamed "Red Haifa." It was the only place in Israel where public transport continued on Shabbat. I was made fun of for wearing my cappel and was even spat at by a wild woman on Nof haCarmel. I was authoritatively informed that I did not need religion any more now that I had left the ghetto and come to this socialist paradise of liberated Jews. I asked for candles on Friday night at a Tiberias youth hostel. The caretaker told me I did not need to keep Shabbat any more now that there was Jewish State, and besides he did not fight for Israeli independence for people like me to drag the State back into the Middle Ages.

Employment was almost entirely controlled by the *Histadrut*, *Ahdut haAvodah*, and left-wing parties. It was unheard of to see men or women with head coverings working in public service. The League Against Religious Coercion used to send tenders full of brawny Kibbutzniks into Mea Shearim on a Shabbat spoiling for a fight. It is true the divide today remains as bitter as ever, but then the Orthodox were written off as unwanted fossils. Now there is a political battle for supremacy between rivals that count large followings, and both sides are more nuanced.

The yeshiva world then was dominated by the mighty institutions of Hevron and Mir in Jerusalem and Ponevez and Slabodka in B'nei Brak. The only Hassidic yeshiva of note at that time was that of the Tchebiner Rov. The Brisker Rov and the legacy of the Hazon Ish were powerful influences but not yet institutionalized. There were other smaller yeshivot in Bnei Brak and Jerusalem, and some rural ones like Kfar Hassidim. The once great Merkaz haRav Kook, torchbearer of religious Zionism, was a small collection of incompatible individuals living on its glorious past, around a courtyard at the back of the old Egged terminal on Rehov Kook. There was no such thing as a "modern" or a *ba'al-teshuva* yeshiva, much less institutions for American kids on one-year excursions.

Kol Torah was the new institution then, unique in that its old Mir Rashei Yeshiva had determined to build a clean, modern yeshiva with running water, baths, and the sort of facilities not available elsewhere. It was impressive, but too clinical for me. I was invited to the poorer, more primitive and less institutionalized yeshiva of Be'er Yaakov, for a Shabbat, and I was hooked.

Be'er Yaakov had recently started up, amongst the orchards and jackals of the coastal plane. It was a collection of bedbug-ridden huts dominated by an unlikely pair of master teachers with their rival groups of devotees, the intellectually brilliant and jovial Moshe Shapiro and the somber mussar giant

Shlomo Volbe, both graduates of Mir in Lithuania. It was intense, passionate, and totally inspirational, such a contrast to insipid Anglo Jewry. Here one could experience the passion of prayer, the introspection of serious Mussar, and the excitement of intense Torah study. Perhaps it was its smallness that enabled it to be so different, and of course as it grew it lost its initial pioneering magic.

Rav Volbe was rumored to have studied philosophy in Germany before rejecting its values and moving to Mir. Certainly his Mussar had an analytical and intellectual aspect to it. When I heard him talk about Rambam's concept of “The Perfect Unity of God” I dared to confide that I did not understand what a perfect unity was and asked if this did not conflict with Rambam's suggestion that one could only say what God was not. He smiled at me, his gray eyes fixing me through his bottle round glasses, “Don't worry, young man. Learn Torah and one day you'll understand.” In all my years in yeshiva this was the nearest I ever got to discussing philosophy.

Be'er Yaakov was where I met Brooklyn boys for the first time. They seemed to have a social scale of values that all Jews were better than all white non-Jews, all white non-Jews were automatically better than all black non-Jews, and the only exceptions to the rule were Lubavitch Hassidim who were worse than the worst black non-Jews. This was my first intimation that I was seriously out of intellectual step with a significant part of the Orthodox world!

After two different periods at Be'er Yaakov, I wanted to add other dimensions to my yeshiva curriculum and transferred to Merkaz haRav Kook, largely because of the Nazir's evening lectures on mysticism and philosophy. I was disappointed by the yeshiva itself because of its heavy involvement in Israeli politics, which I found unsavory and corrupt. (Only later did I discover that my father had resigned from Presidency of the Mizrahi organization in Britain when the Israeli branch entered the Knesset. He had never discussed it with me. He later told me he wanted me to come to my own conclusions.)

One lesson I learnt from Merkaz was that it is “The Hour that Maketh the Man.” Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook had a small coterie of faithful students around him. Most of them are now prominent in Israeli religious life. But he was largely ignored both by the rest of the yeshiva and certainly by the outside world as a man of weird and messianic views. After 1966, when the West Bank was captured and the wave of idealism swept the country, Rav Zvi Yehuda was transformed overnight into the voice of radical territorial messianism.

Thousands came to hear him repeat the same ideas that a year or two earlier had been all but ignored. This taught me, too, that tides of opinion and ideology, political and religious, go in and out according to external factors that the individual cannot hope to predict or control. I found this frustrating in one way, because it meant one's opinions mattered less than what was fashionable at the time. But it was also ultimately comforting. Even if my perception of the spiritual life was currently out of fashion, eventually the circle would turn.

I returned to the UK because my father had insisted I have, if not a career, at least qualifications that would enable me to be self-sufficient. My yeshiva contemporaries tried all sorts of devices to prevent me from leaving, moral and spiritual blackmail. And I tried. But my father, fortunately and thankfully, stood firm. When we discussed my future, I suggested I might want to go into Jewish education or the rabbinate. Even if secretly my father might have been pleased, his jaundiced view of a rabbi's life led him to insist that I have another career as a fall-back, so I applied to Cambridge University to study architecture. Tragically, he lost his battle with leukemia and died just a few months into his 50th year. Now there was no doubt in my mind I had to try my best to follow in his footsteps.

My plan was to get the most I could out of Cambridge. I switched my field of study to philosophy. They called it “moral science” in those days, although it was neither moral nor scientific. But it was a wonderful introduction to rational thought, and in particular, to linguistic analysis, which stood me in

great stead in my life as a teacher. I loved Cambridge and delighted in all the cultural and sporting as well as intellectual opportunities it offered. Although there was a small vibrant community of yeshiva graduates and a little student synagogue with Shabbat meals and regular services, nevertheless my Jewish soul went into a kind of hibernation.

Eventually it was time to exchange one world for another and I wanted it to be as intense and overwhelming an experience in Torah as I had just experienced in Western culture. So I wrote to Reb Leizer Yehuda Finkel of Mir, asking if I could come to learn there. I chose Mir because I was now in my twenties and wanted older company. In those days Mir was almost entirely a Kollel. I also wanted to be in the intense atmosphere of Mea Shearim and Bet Yisrael. It was hemmed into its own little extreme Ghetto, close to the Jordanian border in a divided Jerusalem, near the Mandlebaum Gate the only crossing point east. It was as far from Cambridge as one could get. Reb Leizer Yehuda replied, accepting me. Of course it was nothing to do with my achievements, but simply his policy of accepting the sons of old Mir alumni.

By the time I arrived in Mir in 1965, Reb Leizer Yehuda had died. I was ushered into his son Reb Chaim Zev Finkel "Chazap," who received me kindly. I told him I wanted to learn in Mir. He asked me where I had come from. I said from Cambridge.

"Oh," he said, "this is not the right yeshiva for you, and anyway we are very full. We have no space."

"But I was at Be'er Yaakov before that," I replied.

"Well, that is different. But tell me what did you study at Cambridge?"

"Philosophy," I replied.

"No, this is definitely not the place for you. Try Merkaz haRav Kook."

"But I have a letter here from Reb Leizer Yehuda accepting me." I produced my trump card.

He took it and read it. "Oh, so you are the son of Kopul. Well, I cannot go against my father. But I warn you, if you talk any philosophy here in the yeshiva you will be thrown out."

What was I going to say, that the philosophy I had studied was not anti-religious? It was not at all interested in religion because God was non-empirical? As A. J. Ayer had said, any statement that could not be empirically verified was "non-sense" (not rubbish, simply a subject there was no point in discussing rationally). Or that as Wittgenstein had said, "That about which we cannot speak we must remain silent?" Besides, I had no intention of spending any time on anything other than Torah. I knew that I would have to suppress the rational side of my mind. So I was only too happy to agree and thus began my years in Mir.

The traditional yeshiva was neither designed to deal with theological issues nor with intellectual doubt. The assumption was and remains that everyone had bought into the essential principles and ideas of its world. The question of belief in God or a definition of "truth" would never arise in such an environment. Certainly there was no one there who would have known how to respond to a challenge from outside its own parameters. In many ways, it makes sense for an institution to concentrate on its core expertise. But it meant that for the person who thought independently or who had questions that required rational answers, the traditional yeshiva was unable to meet those needs.

Much later, different types of yeshiva emerged in which discussion and debate were encouraged, mainly what are called *ba'al-teshuva* or outreach yeshivot. But even then the debate is usually within defined parameters and from a theological rather than a philosophical point of view. That is to say, theology is committed to its conclusions even before a word is spoken; whereas philosophy tries to

discover what the answer might be or might not be. Still I have my doubts as to whether it is worth diluting a specialized institution. Anyway, it did not matter to me. I had my fill of rational argument at Cambridge. Abstractions had lost much of their attraction. I really did want to leave that behind while I concentrated on a totally different sphere of religious experience.

Sadly “Chazap” himself soon died and that left Reb Chaim Shmulevitz as the Rosh Yeshiva and his son-in-law Reb Nochum “Trokker” as the power behind the throne. Reb Beinish Finkel was also a Rosh Yeshiva, but despite his impressive appearance he was not in the same caliber as Reb Chaim, and devoted most his time to fundraising.

When, in my second year, Reb Chaim began to give mussar talks as well as his talmudic tours de force he was simply extending his brilliant talmudic method to the realms of midrash instead of halakha or pilpul. Reb Chaim would occasionally launch into the political arena. He said he would not allow any of his pupils to teach in a Yeshiva Tikhonit. And during election time he said he knew that the major religious party that spoke for the Hareidi world at that stage, Agguda, was corrupt but that everyone should vote Agguda because that would benefit the Yeshiva world most. The only way I could get out of being press-ganged into working for Agguda was by declaring myself a member of Neturei Karta! Actually a significant proportion of Mir Kolleniks at that time were loyal to Neturei Karta, including the first “foreign minister” of the movement, the American Moshe Hirsch.

Mir was a shadow then of its present incarnation. The main building was the same on the outside then as it is today. In those days, though, you entered to the smell of the urinals on the ground floor that everyone in the area took advantage of, and the bedrooms next to them were the refuge of waifs and strays in Bet Yisrael. The main Bet Midrash upstairs was half its present size. It filled up only during the mornings, when many Yerushalmi kollel men chose to come and study in Mir. It was packed again for the shiurim given by Reb Chaim and Reb Nochum. But otherwise in the evenings it was all but empty except for the small number of single men who had no home to go back to. In winter the improvised paraffin metal stove that heated the hall emitted noxious fumes and clouds of smoke. But for the few late-night learners it was a haven, as well as a place where the local beggars could come and warm themselves against the fierce Yerushalmi winters. The north side of the building housed the rashei yeshiva and their families and the place had an air of run down familiarity. Mir then was small, intimate, and familial, with only a handful of “foreign” students.

I was given a bed in a room on the third floor with two forty-year-old bachelors. The room was a garbage dump. My roommates spent a good part of each day lying on their beds, chain smoking, making notes and comments on the Gemara. They seemed impervious to the filth, the smell, the dirty laundry, the ash, the dirt, and the bugs crawling up the wall. Initially I was in a state of shock, close to tears. I wondered if this was a last ditch attempt to stop me from coming to Mir. But I soon set to work, cleaned and disinfected. All the while, the two old bachelors continued to ignore me. I imposed my standards of cleanliness, bought them ashtrays, and within six months they had both left to get married. The only thing I could not clean or repair was the one bathroom, which served as a general dumping ground and storeroom. And so visits to Zupnick's *mikvah* became the only opportunities for hot water.

The contrast with university could not have been greater, especially the notion of study for study's sake, not to pass exams or to graduate. It was far more demanding than any other sort of study I had experienced. The dedication of men of all ages was tangible, completely immersed and living every moment they could in Torah. It was intoxicating. Now my soul came alive and the values of Cambridge receded into the past. It was easy to spend 16 to 18 hours a day in study, and I had so much to catch up on. It was seductive. I considered making it my life. The *shidukhim* I was offered all required that I devote myself entirely to the yeshiva world. But I knew my loyalty to my father's memory required me to go back out into the world of disappearing Jewry and tilt at windmills.

I stayed at Mir throughout the year, not like nowadays when flights are cheap and visits home or for vacation are considered the norm. I left only one summer to go to Southern Rhodesia, as it was then, on a mission to help the community in Bulawayo. Afterward, it was arranged that I would meet up with Rav Beinish in Johannesburg to help his fundraising campaign. I asked Reb Chaim what he thought I ought to do about Apartheid and racial discrimination. He said, to his credit, that he did not know enough about the situation to give me an opinion and I should make up my own mind. How unlike so many current rashei yeshiva who seem to have received "Daas Torah" on every possible situation. My Rhodesia experience was electrifying and confirmed my desire to preach, teach and outreach.

Another year, I returned to England for a summer break to be with my widowed mother and family. Otherwise, though I say it myself, I was a complete "*matmid*." I had no time or interest in anything else—no books, newspapers, music, or other distraction.

The only external influences I allowed myself were when occasionally on a Shabbat I would emerge from the depths of Mea Shearim and venture into Rehavia. Either I would visit the former Chief Rabbi of South Africa, Louis Rabinowitz, or Yaacov and Penina Herzog. Louis was primarily concerned with my future as a community rabbi. He kept insisting that I should not lose myself in the ivory tower of yeshiva, but prepare myself for the outside world and absorb as much knowledge as I could of Bible, history, and thought. He was a great raconteur and liked to entertain with stories of his rabbinical battles, either for Zionism or against Apartheid. His emphasis on national and universal issues had a significant influence on me.

The Herzog house was altogether more ethereal. The younger son of former Chief Rabbi Herzog, Yaacov Herzog, had been the Israeli Ambassador to Canada and had argued publicly with the notoriously anti-Jewish historian Arnold Toynbee, who found no room in his history of the world for the Jews. A career diplomat, he was then the Director of the Foreign Ministry. His rabbinical credentials were impressive, but it was his combination of Jewish and Western culture in such an elegant and appealing way that really had a greater impact on me than anyone other than my father. He was actually appointed Chief Rabbi of the UK, but illness intervened, and yet another brilliant mind and magnetic personality died far too early.

Another of his regular guests was Haym Soloveitchik, brilliant, incisive, and critical of the religious distortions he saw around him. He too was a strong influence on me in emphasizing the importance of academic analysis and discipline. I was tempted to consider academia. But I could not envision myself in an ivory tower. I did however realize that one of the most important elements in a good education is to have the privilege of meeting and getting to know great minds and listening to alternative perspectives.

Eventually, I devoted myself to *Yoreh Deah* with a brilliant but strange Alter Mirrer, an old bachelor called Sobel who knew every word of every commentary by heart. Although he always brought his own text with him, he never seemed to need to consult it. He was also an expert in linguistics and I was always being asked to order books by the great Danish linguists for him.

I jumped through the hoops and passed the exams and interrogations of various dayanim until I came finally to ask Reb Chaim for *semikha*. He asked me to go and speak to Reb Nochum, because he had some things he wanted to ask me. I walked with trepidation down to his subterranean apartment. We had only had a few extended personal conversations of significance during my time in Mir. One was when he wanted suggest a *shidukh*. Another was one Pesah I stayed in yeshiva and we had a conversation over the divide between the secular and the religious in Israel. He told me that he did not really understand what the problem was. His children realized and understood the problem but did not know how to deal with it. Perhaps, he suggested, his grandchildren would be able to rectify matters.

I can only recall one conversation with Reb Chaim. It was some years after I had left and had come back to recharge my batteries. It was over the limits of leniency in halakha and the room for change. I talked about the pressures in the rabbinate for change, particularly on women's issues. He said that in his opinion, though he was not paskening, so long as I could find two Rishonim who agreed with what I wanted to do, I could, within my own community, permit what custom had not.

Reb Nochum was always wise, measured, and friendly. But I did not know what to expect this time. He sat me down and then, with that twinkle in his eye and half-smile, he started.

“Before I can recommend Reb Chaim to give you *semikha* I want to clarify a few things that I have heard that you said.”

My stomach churned. I had behaved impeccably. I had studied diligently. I had not, to my memory, ever stepped out of line in any way or raised any controversial issues. But clearly I had been spied upon relentlessly. What was going to come out?

“I heard that you said that *shlogging kapporos* (slaughtering chickens before Yom Kippur as a ceremonial of atonement) is barbaric.”

“Yes,” I admitted. I had, after all, been sick after my first practical *shehita* lesson. I could not eat meat for months after visiting an abattoir. I admitted I found the *kapporos* business barbaric.

“Actually, I agree with you. We never did *kapporos* back in Lithuania. But if you are going to be a Rav in a community you need to be very careful what language you use. Barbaric is a very harsh word and people will get the wrong impression. Do you understand me?”

“Yes. I understand what you are saying and of course you are right. *Hakhamim hizaharu beDivreikhem* .”

“Yes, but you also said that Rambam cannot answer our problems because he based himself on Aristotle and nowadays no one thinks the way Aristotle did.” I admitted that error too, relieved if after years of being observed this was all they had against me.

He continued, “Look, if the Jews then were on a much higher level than the Jews nowadays, which of course you will agree, so it must be that the great non-Jews then were greater than the non-Jews nowadays. So how can someone nowadays say Aristotle was wrong?”

What could I say? He looked searchingly at me. I looked down in capitulation. I was not going to dig a bigger hole for myself.

“And I heard you said that if Noah’s flood had covered all of the earth, why were there kangaroos only in Australia? What does that mean?”

I started to explain what the problem was, and that these were the sorts of issues that a rabbi going out into the secular world would have to deal with, and I was just looking for answers.”

He must have been satisfied because he told me to go upstairs again to Reb Chaim, who wrote out a *semikha* that I am embarrassed to read to this day, so generous is the wording. I often went back over the summer to relive the past, to see that, despite the enlargements and new building, that traces of the hole could still be seen, where a shell hit the yeshiva in the Six-Day War of 1967 as everyone huddled down in the kitchen. Illness struck yet another member of the family and Reb Nochum bravely battled it. But it was sad to see his slow deterioration. His untimely death was a terrible loss to the Torah world in more ways than one. I don't know what it was about Mir that so much talent expired before its time. Perhaps the fire burnt so powerfully it burnt itself out. Or, to borrow from another culture, “Those whom the gods love, die young.”

The world I entered when I returned to Britain to become a pulpit rabbi was a very different one. Despite my time in Cambridge, it was still a culture shock. Religion was and is so much more a matter of social convention and conformity than spiritual excitement. Adjusting to a world outwardly mine, but in fact very far removed, was a challenge. Unlike in the United States, nominal Orthodoxy is the dominant denomination in Britain. Reform and Conservative have always been minority interests. Most of the rabbis or reverends in the Anglo-Jewish world of the 1960s were graduates of Jews College, with its academic approach to Jewish Studies. Homiletics, liturgy, history, and pastoral skills vied with Talmud for a place in the curriculum. (Insofar as I had any knowledge or expertise in these areas I was completely self-taught.)

Most of those I knew were admirers of the controversial Rabbi Louis Jacobs, who ended up being effectively driven out of the Orthodox community. But given the nature of Anglo Jewry, most of them decided to remain silent and keep their jobs. I on the other hand, was the first of a trickle that turned into a tidal wave of rabbis trained in black-hat yeshivot. The only alternative to the established rabbinate at that time was the fledgling Chabad movement. The *ba'al-teshuva* and outreach organizations were years away.

So when I started in the rabbinate I was coming from the right wing. It is true that my background gave me a more open and cultured approach, which helped me a great deal in reaching out to disaffected youngsters. But certainly my loyalty was more with what would later come to be known as the Hareidi world than the more flaccid Rabbinical School brand of Judaism. I found the United Synagogue a very uncomfortable, pompous and alienating place with its bureaucratic centralized authority. So I looked for independent Orthodox synagogues where I would be the *Mara D'Atra* rather than a cog in the wheel.

My first position was in Glasgow, where many still remembered my father with awe and affection. It had at the time some 15,000 Jews. My synagogue, Giffnock, was huge, nearly a thousand families—but only a small core of religiously committed individuals. Its ethos and origins were strongly Lithuanian. The vast majority of the community, particularly the younger generation, was uninterested and disaffected. The rabbinate in the city was riven by rivalry and its status was low. It was the perfect place for me because I could both provide for the old guard with daily Gemara and other shiurim and reach out to the youngsters, going where I knew I could find them and trying to present a different image of Judaism than the stuffy and killjoy one that they had previously seen. I wanted to show that one could be a modern citizen of the world and enjoy its many legitimate experiences while still adhering strictly to Torah. I tried to make the services more accessible. I would often interrupt the congregation's talking, not to shut them up directly, but to interest them in the relevant text with an explanation or observation. It helped relieve the boredom of those who understood little and cared less.

And I went out of my way to court controversy. Most of my congregants ate out in the city. I caused a stir by suggesting that if they ate smoked salmon or salad on cold plates instead of eating outright treif, they would avoid breaking any laws. As word spread, I was called by various scandalized colleagues asking me how I could justify salads without a proper check for bugs. I assured them I would give a lecture on the subject.

My methods succeeded. The synagogue began to fill up and my time in Glasgow was exciting and rewarding, the community warm and appreciative. It was hard work—almost 300 weddings and bar mitzvas in three years and constant sick visiting, funerals, and shiva houses to attend. But I made many friends who have stayed in touch ever since. Outside of its decaying industrial centres, Glasgow was a wonderful place to live, an hour's drive from the Highlands or the sea. It was only the accident of the premature resignation of the headmaster of Carmel College, my father's school, that enticed me away from my Scottish idyll. I was certainly not going to turn down the opportunity of trying to continue my

father's work.

The next fourteen years of my life as Principal of Carmel College were an opportunity for me to teach my religious attitudes and values to some three hundred 11- to 19-year-old pupils a year, from around the world. That too was an exciting and highly rewarding experience, but education is a different field than the rabbinate.

After a sabbatical in Israel in 1984, I returned to the rabbinate in London to the only old style Orthodox independent synagogue, the Western Synagogue, which was two hundred years old. The observant Jewish community had all but abandoned central London for the northern suburbs, leaving the Western without a significant local constituency. It survived because it owned its own lucrative burial grounds and its own building. I chose it precisely because of its independence and my insistence on not putting myself in a position where authority or pressure to conform would in any way hamper my style.

The demands of the community were not excessive and this gave me a great deal of time to contribute to wider issues. The synagogue also had a community centre that attracted attendance during the week from those who lived throughout the London area. But there were too many declining and virtually empty Orthodox synagogues in the West End of London and it seemed only sensible to merge. The nearest synagogue was Marble Arch, a constituent of the mainstream United Synagogue. I encouraged the merger, hoping the new combined synagogue would be independent too. But when it transpired that a condition of the merger would be the absorption of the Western into the United Synagogue, I knew that even if it was in everyone else's interests, it was not in mine. So in 1990 I decided to leave the rabbinate again.

During my time in the Western I had encountered so many examples of religious bureaucracy and politics in the United Synagogue and its Bet Din, examples of pressure brought to bear on recalcitrant or simply independently minded rabbis, that it was clear my old antipathies towards the Establishment were justified as ever. In general, a more exclusivist and intolerant mood was prevailing on such issues as excessive and unrealistic demands on genuine converts, increasing strictness on matters of kashruth and interaction with other, less Orthodox parts of the community. With the retirement of Chief Rabbi Jakobovits, whom I admired and worked for on Interfaith issues, there was no one left who could still hold the line, the writing was on the wall. I went off on my travels.

A few years later I returned to the UK to head YAKAR, the adult education center my brother, Mickey, had founded and named after our father, Yaakov Kopul Rosen. It stood for all the values I cherished: deep commitment to halakha combined with social responsibility, tolerance, and independent thought. But the UK was not and is not a welcoming place for nonconformity. Pressure to belong and to be seen to conform, fear of being perceived as an outsider, eventually tame and silence rebels, or drive them away. Some good and creative things have indeed happened in Anglo Jewry, but they are invariably from outside of the mainstream and the establishment. This is probably why most of my talented contemporaries have left the UK for either Israel or the United States.

Much of this may sound strange to American readers used to each synagogue being independent and self-sufficient, without the European tradition of state-recognized institutional religion, where pressure can be brought on individual rabbis and communities. Sadly, the European model was imported into Israel where a government-supported rabbinate and the politicized nature of religious life have combined to make religion a business and power game rather than a spiritual inspiration and a model of ethical values. The strength of American Judaism was always the laissez faire atmosphere of individual synagogue autonomy.

But the fact is that the disease of religious pressure to conform is spreading. Perhaps not in the structural style of Napoleonic Europe, but certainly in the way pressure is being brought positively and by default. Too many rabbis are worried about being regarded suspiciously by extreme opinion. There

is a natural but disappointing need to conform to the authority and influence of more fundamentalist powers and movements. If this is positive in the way it emphasizes the importance of obedience to halakhic norms, it is regrettable in that it restricts variety. In addition there is the gap that has opened up so that halakhic authority and expertise do not automatically go together with wisdom and breadth of vision. In the United States, the increasing voice of extremism used to be balanced by outstanding alternative giants. In their absence, the alternative paradigm of popular absolutism is becoming the norm.

The space for innovation within halakha and freedom of thought is shrinking. On the other hand, there are signs of a fight back through institutions such as Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Drisha, the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, and the few still prepared to stand up for their views. Edah, although it no longer functions, still lives on in spirit. But there are mixed signals; some synagogues are prepared to take risks, others not. It is still too early and we are too close to the events to know how this will play out, but my optimism stems from the historical fact of cycles in thought and fashion. What I have noticed is that in the absence of significant religious leaders and authorities to do battle, so-called modern or moderate Orthodoxy has become a grassroots movement of significance and if anything it is growing rather than shrinking.

After over 40 years in the rabbinate, my own ideas have changed little but the Jewish world itself is transformed, I would say hijacked, by the increasing fundamentalism of the Hareidi world. Whereas once Be'er Yaakov and Mir stood for the Lithuanian alternative to Hassidic populism and anti intellectualism, now even the yeshiva world has adopted Hassidic attitudes toward authority, credulity, and conformity. The politicization of religion has worsened and the capitulation of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate to the Hareidi world must be making the bodies of such great rabbanim as Rabbis Herzog, Goren, Amiel, and Uzziel to mention only the most obvious, turn in their graves.

Yet the fact is that the Hareidi world for all its abuses, misuses, and hypocrisies does contain the fastest growing core of Torah-committed Jews, devoted to study to an extent never before seen. And I sometimes wonder why it is that now that I, so far to the left of virtually all their theological and social positions, still consider myself more loyal to that world than to any other. And I hazard the suggestion that maybe the times require it. Perhaps the pressures of a secular, self-indulgent, material world are so strong and pervasive that the only way for the mass of Jews to survive religiously is through this inward looking self protective enclavism. Maybe this is a time of *Hora'at Shaah leMigdar Milta*. And if God controls the ebbs and flows of history, this is His way of talking to us today. But even so, this does not mean each individual has to follow this path. The individual must remain true to himself or herself.

How did I come to be the nonconformist and independently minded Orthodox person I am? Of course I owe most of it to the example of my father. His persona and the way religious life was a delight rather than a burden certainly played their part. But I think his pendulum theory, perhaps borrowed from Rambam, is significant. Ideally one must experience the most intense examples of two different approaches to life in order to find a balance in the middle. Of course that is not easy and not everyone can tolerate the strains such bifurcation imposes. Above all one needs to have confidence in oneself to be a minority within a minority within a minority. Certainly knowledge of text, experience of the living Judaism, of the attitudes and ideas of previous generations, together with the passion of intense religious experience can give one the confidence to feel one is walking in the footsteps of giants. For all my criticisms I know that Jewish life in the Diaspora, as well as in Israel is stronger than it has been for thousands of years even if we are lacking the individual giants we once had. Perhaps this is the nature of modernity and individuality. If so, I welcome it.