

TRADITION, ACCOMMODATION, REVOLUTION AND COUNTERREVOLUTION: A
HISTORY OF A CENTURY OF STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF ORTHODOXY IN
JOHANNESBURG'S JEWISH COMMUNITY, 1915-2015

BY DAVID FACHLER

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SUPERVISOR: ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ADAM MENDELSON

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ABSTRACT

Over the past century, South African Jewry has undergone significant changes in its religious makeup. This dissertation provides the first comprehensive study of Orthodox Judaism within Johannesburg, the dominant religious movement within the single largest Jewish population centre in South Africa.

From a splintered and largely immigrant community in 1915 with weak religious and educational institutions, and a pattern of religious laxity, Orthodox Jewry has transformed into a highly organized and structured community with high levels of religious observance. These processes of change accelerated from 1970 with the arrival of imported religious revival movements. Notwithstanding considerable emigration and political instability, Johannesburg Jewry today boasts high levels of religiosity with almost half its members labelling themselves Orthodox.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom that Johannesburg was a united and largely homogenous community prior to the arrival of the revival movements, this study finds that already by the 1930s the Orthodox community was ideologically divided. While the Federation of Synagogues and Board of Jewish Education were led by academically trained rabbis with an inclusive interpretation of Orthodoxy, the religious Zionist Mizrachi movement and its affiliates sought to reintroduce East European traditions and advocated strict levels of observance that were unpopular with the majority of the community. Over the decades, and in alliance with the sometimes rival revival movements, the latter camp has come to dominate the Johannesburg religious landscape. The receding influence of the rabbis with a more inclusive orientation – partly because of retirements and emigration – is visible in the decreasing numbers of Jews in Johannesburg who describe themselves as “traditional.”

This dissertation traces these developments through the decades and explains how and why the character of Johannesburg Jewry has changed.

DECLARATION

I, David Fachler, hereby declare that the work on which this thesis is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university. I authorise the University to reproduce for research either the whole or any portion of the contents in any manner whatsoever.

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Much of this material has been gleaned from interviews, especially with those involved in outreach activities. I would like to take the opportunity of thanking each and every interviewee for kindly giving of their precious time. I would especially like to thank Rabbi Larry Shain who not only agreed to an interview and continued to answer specific queries, but also provided me with further contacts who I was able to also interview.

On a personal note I lovingly acknowledge the sacrifices and indulgences of my wonderful wife, Dawn, and our five precious children. Engaging in this academic field can be very distracting and I thank them for their understanding, support and devotion. My mother and my two brothers have served as sources of inspiration and support. Oftentimes we reminisce about Johannesburg and its special community.

I wish to dedicate this work to the memory of two very special souls. My father passed away eleven years ago and I cherish his memory every day since. He was a remarkable human being, a true scholar, a wise counsellor and an exemplar of Orthodox Judaism. Believing that life was a journey of self-improvement he constantly strove to perfect himself while seeking to uncover the goodness and dignity of all those he encountered. His presence is sorely missed.

Mr. Colin Gamsu of blessed memory was a fiery spirit who passionately fought to achieve his dreams and who spurred on other to achieve theirs. He is remembered by those who knew

him as a dedicated member of the executive and chair of the South African Board of Jewish Education. I will always be indebted to him for his fervent belief in my abilities and for his animated encouragement that took all forms of persuasion to see to it that I realize my academic pursuits. It was a privilege to have been in his presence.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

From its establishment and until the 1960s, Johannesburg Jewry resembled many other Jewish communities at the fringes of the Anglophone Jewish world. While the Jewish population maintained an Orthodox rabbinical court, Orthodox synagogues, a moderately Orthodox Coeducational Jewish day school, a nascent Yeshiva boys' high school, and a small Orthodox rabbinical training college, most local Jews were personally non-observant and possessed a limited religious education. Half a century later, against the background of political and social change wrought by the end of the apartheid and the mass emigration of a third of the Jewish community, this is no longer the case.¹ Early surveys conducted in 1974 showed that strictly Orthodox Jews accounted for only 9% of the overall South African Jewish population. In 2005 the figure had risen to 14% nationally and to 17% for the Johannesburg Jewish community.² In 2019, 13% of Johannesburg's Jewish population self-defined as strictly Orthodox or Haredi/Hasidic, and a further 35% described themselves as Orthodox. Almost half (48%) of Johannesburg's Jews now considered themselves either Orthodox or strictly Orthodox.³ The same data, moreover, indicates that what it means to be Orthodox may have shifted too, with a move away from the non-observant style that characterized the community into the 1960s toward stricter and more fervent observance and belief. This contrasts sharply with Cape Town, home to South Africa's second largest Jewish population, where only 2% professed strict Orthodox observance, and a further 20%

¹ Milton Shain and Richard Mendelsohn, "South African Zionism and Jewish identity", in Danny Ben-Moshe and Zohar Sege (eds.), *Israel the Diaspora and Jewish Identity*, (Brighton, England: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), 282. While apartheid and mass emigration have impacted the community as a whole, including its Orthodox contingent a deep analysis of these factors is beyond the scope of this study. For a discussion on mainly passive posture adopted by Orthodox rabbis during Apartheid see Gideon Shimoni, *Community and Conscience: The Jews in Apartheid South Africa* (Boston: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 36-41.

² Mendel Kaplan and Shirley Bruk, *The Future of South African Jewry: Comments and Observations* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2006), 10. These data are even more significant if we recall that in 1974, the standard for classifying the strictly Orthodox was no travel on the Sabbath; in 2005 this classification was given to those who did not turn on lights, clearly a more stringent marker. For a breakdown of the 2005 survey which was conducted jointly by London's Institute for Jewish Policy Research, and the University of Cape Town's Kaplan Centre, see Shirley Bruk and Milton Shain, *Jews in a changing South Africa: Highlights of the 2005 National Survey, with comparisons to the 1998 and earlier surveys* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2005).

³ David Graham, *The Jews of South Africa, in 2019: Identity, community, society, demography* (Cape Town: Kaplan Centre, 2020), 39, [https://jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR-Kaplan The Jews of South Africa in 2019 March 2020.pdf](https://jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR-Kaplan%20The%20Jews%20of%20South%20Africa%20in%202019%20March%202020.pdf). In previous surveys, the population was described as either strictly Orthodox or as traditional. This meant those who were moderately Orthodox defined themselves either as traditional or strictly Orthodox. In this latest survey, participants could describe themselves as simply "Orthodox" which means that many who had previously described themselves as strictly Orthodox would now, given the new choice, choose the "Orthodox" option. This unfortunately blurs the comparisons. Using objective criteria, we see that the rate of those who do not turn on lights on the Sabbath rose moderately from 17% in 2005 to 21% in 2019 (*Ibid.*).

considered themselves Orthodox.⁴ This high rate of religious observance is a compelling indication of a significant religious revival among Johannesburg's Jews.⁵

The rise in Johannesburg's Orthodox community stands in contrast to the situation in the United Kingdom.⁶ The comparative figures on an international scale also show South Africa in general, and Johannesburg in particular, to be much more religious than their co-religionists abroad. Whereas the gaps between South Africa (56%, 28%), Australia (56%, 26%), and the United Kingdom (61%, 26%) are not large on questions involving feeling part of the Jewish People or enjoying Jewish cultural events, larger differences are evident in attitudes towards issues associated with religion. Thus 53% of South African Jews say they believe in G-d, 36% believe prayer is important, and 20% routinely study Jewish religious texts. Corresponding figures for Australia and the United Kingdom show that 28% of Australians and 32% of British Jews believe in G-d, only 16% of the former and 21% of the latter regard prayer as important, and 13% of Jews in Australia and 14% of British Jewry routinely study Jewish texts. In all three categories the differences are significant, suggesting that, South African Jews are far more religiously inclined than their co-religionists in peer English-speaking countries.⁷

These statistics will come as no surprise to many observers of the changing face of Johannesburg's community. Testament to this religious revival are the flourishing networks of religiously intensive *shtieblach* (small synagogues), proliferating primary- and high

⁴ On the other side of the spectrum 40% of Cape Town's Jews define themselves as either Reform or secular, whereas in Johannesburg, the corresponding figure is less than half at 19%. On matters more theological, the gap is even wider, so that as opposed to 71% of Johannesburgers who believe in G-d, 64% who believe He created the universe, and 57% who believe He personally intervenes in their life, the corresponding figures among Capetonians is 51%, 42% and 36% respectively, representing at least 20% fewer in each category. The Orthodox belief that the Torah was given by G-d to Moses and the Jewish People is shared by 65% of the Johannesburg Jewish community, whereas only 44% of Capetonians agree with such a notion. *Ibid*

⁵ Graham, *The Jews of South Africa*, 34.

⁶ Jacqueline Goldberg, who analysed surveys comparing South Africa with the UK, notes that 23% of United Kingdom Jews identify as secular, 10% as strictly observant, and 32% traditional. Corresponding figures for Johannesburg Jewry were 3%, 17% and 67% respectively. (Jacqueline Goldberg, "Social Identity in British and South African Jewry," in Zvi Gitelman, Barry Kosmin and Andras Kovacs (eds.), *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 13) Her data demonstrated that South Africa's main Jewish centre contained a far higher proportion of observant and traditional Jews than British Jewish centres. It should be borne in mind that the figures Goldberg relied on was the 1998 survey, and as mentioned in footnote 3 above, in the latest surveys many South African Jews no longer self-identify as "traditional". In any event, considering the UK began with a far larger contingent of people observant from birth, Johannesburg's revival is all the more remarkable. According to the partisan Ner Le'elef organization, South Africa "has the most successful outreach movement of any country outside of Israel." See <https://www.simpletoremember.com/vitals/world-jewish-population.htm>, accessed on 29 December, 2021.

⁷ Graham, *The Jews of South Africa*, 37. This religious revival did not come without costs, and in our concluding chapter we shall return to this subject and suggest that increased religiosity may have brought about an "ever shrinking middle ground."

schools, informal adult learning centres, increased number of ritual baths (*mikvaot*), and a thriving kosher restaurant industry. While there is a discernible trend towards the resurgence of Orthodox Jewry in the western world, the Johannesburg example stands out for its significant quantitative and qualitative changes.⁸ To date, this phenomenon of revivalism, and of the changes within Johannesburg's Orthodoxy that has produced it, has not received a full academic analysis. This dissertation aims to fill this lacuna. It will attempt to closely track processes of change within Johannesburg's Orthodox Jewish community that eventually led to the religious revival. This will include identification of the primary and divergent camps within Johannesburg Orthodoxy, and will analyse their impact on the community at large. Although consideration is given to wider contextual factors and influences, the focus throughout is on the internal workings and dynamics of the Orthodox religious leadership. The study will conclude by noting the gains and losses this revival represents, and will offer some speculative thoughts as to the future of Orthodoxy in Johannesburg.

This introductory chapter presents a general portrait of the early years of Johannesburg Orthodoxy before it split into various camps with different ideological perspectives on matters of religion. Chapter 2 provides the historical background to the arrival of Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky, the latter's relationship with the laity and with Chief Rabbi Judah Leo Landau, and the resultant split of the Orthodox leadership into two camps, namely the accommodators and the Litvak traditionalists. The chapter explains their philosophies and outlook as well as their internal struggles and clashes. Chapter 3 focuses on the eventful ministry of Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz, especially over the decade of the 1950s, his impact on the community, his modernist views and his disagreements with his traditionalist colleagues. This is followed in chapter 4 by an account of the rising fortunes of the traditionalist rabbis and their followers, their tenuous alliance with the sectarians, their challenge to the establishment, and the public's reaction to these phenomena. Chapter 5 traces the origins of the religious revolution and the first generation of innovators, as well as

⁸ Johannesburg's religious revival has been widely documented including Gideon Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*: 226ff and 312, n101; Milton Shain, "Jewish Cultures, identities and contingencies: reflections from the South African experience" in Cathy Gelbin, Sander Gilman (eds.), *Jewish Culture in the Age of Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2015), 95; Dana E Kaplan, "South African Orthodoxy Today: Tradition and Change in a Post-Apartheid Multi-Racial Society," *Tradition*, 33(1), Fall 1998: 71; Mendel Kaplan and Marian Robertson, *Founders and followers: Johannesburg Jewry, 1887-1915* (Johannesburg: Vlaeberg Publishers, 1991), 250; Jocelyn Hellig, "The Religious Expression," in Marcus Arkin (editor), *South African Jewry; a Contemporary Survey* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1984), 95-116; Hellig, "South African Judaism: An expression of Conservative Traditionalism," *Judaism*, 35 (2), 1986 : 233-242; Hellig, "The religious expression of South Africa Jewry," *Religions in Southern Africa* 8(2) 1987:3-17.

their impact on the other two camps in Orthodoxy. That chapter also focuses on particular controversies between the innovators and the establishment, as well as the results of these clashes. Chapter 6 tracks the developments of the second generation of innovators, noteworthy for their more moderate approach and avoidance of conflict. Chapter 7 explores the impact of the innovators on the accommodators and the traditionalists. The influence of the accommodators receded, in contrast with that of the traditionalists, now led by the Torah scholar and Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Azriel Goldfein. The chapter also assesses the tenure of Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein and the parallel ascendance of the traditionalists and their virtual takeover of the establishment. The dissertation concludes by addressing the state of Orthodoxy in 2020, its overall impact on the broader Jewish community, and the prospects of remaining powerful while keeping the general community intact.

2. *Historical Background: Religious Life in Early Johannesburg 1886-1925*

2.1. *Historical Background*

2.1.1 *Origins*

In 1880, South Africa's Jewish population was approximately four thousand strong, mostly a mix of immigrants from western and central Europe.⁹ A year later the first wave of East European immigrants arrived at the Cape; in time they would comprise the bulk of South African Jewry. In the wake of persecutions by the Russian government and deteriorating economic conditions, Jews from the Pale of the Settlement had begun migrating westward to the United States, South America, and Western Europe. A small trickle, mainly from the provinces that later became the independent Republic of Lithuania, found their way to South Africa.¹⁰ They tended to come from the unskilled masses, and like many immigrants they had a very limited religious education and tended not to be rigorous in their observance.¹¹ The few religious scholars who did arrive in South Africa mainly took up other occupations.¹² A

⁹ Riva Michal Krut, "Building a Home and a Community: Jews in Johannesburg, 1886-1914," Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of London (SOAS), 1985, 6.

¹⁰ On this immigrant stream, see inter alia Milton Shain and Richard Mendelsohn, *The Jews in South Africa: An Illustrated History* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2008), 29-47; Gerald Mazabow, *The Quest for Community: A Short History of Jewish Communal Institutions in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Houdini Publishers, 2008), 13; Margot Rubin, "The Jewish Community of Johannesburg, 1886-1939: Landscapes of Reality and Imagination," Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Pretoria, 2004, 9-28; Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 1-3; Krut, "Building a Home and a Community," 6-9; Allie Dubb, *Jewish South Africans: A Sociological View of the Johannesburg Jewish Community*, (Occasional Paper Number 21, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, 1977), 19-20; Chaim Gershater, 'From Lithuania to South Africa,' in Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz (eds.), *The Jews in South Africa: A History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 59-84.

¹¹ See Shain and Mendelsohn, *The Jews in South Africa*, 33: "[T]he migrants were generally not the learned. The more professional... the more skilled, the more affluent, the more established and the more pious tended to remain at home." See also Louis I. Rabinowitz, "The Transvaal Congregations," in Saron and Hotz, *The Jews in South Africa: A History*, 166 where Rabinowitz describes early Johannesburg Jews as "not being pious and observant".

¹² Gershater, "From Lithuania to South Africa," 76

contemporary observer of Johannesburg's immigrant Jews noted at the time of the city's founding that despite having recently left the "old country, where Jewish tradition was strictly observed" the immigrants, "with few exceptions" had "no qualms to desecrate the Sabbath and even the holy days."¹³ In most cases this did not weaken their associations with the Jewish community and indeed, those arriving brought with them a robust ethnic identity. Along with their more acculturated co-religionists in South Africa, who had established Jewish institutions and who were the first to form Hebrew congregations in Johannesburg, the immigrants keenly contributed to the Johannesburg Jewish community. Many joined or established synagogues, and, after boosting their numbers nationally by approximately 40,000 in the space of 30 years from 1880-1910, East European Jews eventually ran most of Johannesburg's Jewish organizations.¹⁴ During this period, which ended abruptly with World War I, a few limited educational facilities, mostly affiliated to Hebrew congregations, were established. These succeeded primarily in ensuring the youth had some competency in leading the prayers and completing their bar mitzvah preparations. Parents appeared more concerned that their children receive a comprehensive general education, lose their Yiddish accents, acculturate into middle class society, and qualify to enter respectable occupations in the professional and administrative fields.

1.1.2 *The Cultural Baggage of the First Wave*

The first wave of eastern European immigrants was influenced by the various ideological movements that had engulfed Lithuania and had challenged Orthodox hegemony there. Most prominent was the Zionist movement, which had begun with small secret societies in the early 1880s but had grown in prominence over the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁵ Indeed, many brought their Lithuanian experience to South Africa and became actively involved in supporting a Jewish national homeland.¹⁶ At the opposite

¹³ Meir David Hersch, "Das Naye Wort (English translation)," *Jewish Affairs*, August 1959, 38. See also the colourful, if not exaggerated, description of religious life in Johannesburg at the turn of the century in Gwynne Schrire, "You are not in Lithuania anymore' - Yehuda Leib Schrire in Johannesburg, 1892-1893", *Jewish Affairs*, Rosh Hashanah, 2016:26.

¹⁴ Sergio Della Pergola and Allie Dubb, "South African Jewry: A Sociodemographic Profile," *American Jewish Yearbook* 1988, 65. See also Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 2, where he implies that by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century East European Jews had taken over the reins of communal leadership.

¹⁵ For the growth of Zionism in Lithuania, see David E. Fishman, "From Shtadlanut to Mass Parties: Jewish Political Movements in Lithuania" in Vldas Sirutavičius, Darius Staliūnas, and Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė (eds.) *The History of Jews in Lithuania: From the Middle Ages to the 1990s* (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2020), 218-226.

¹⁶See Shain and Mendelsohn, *The Jews in South Africa*, 55-56. The community's prominent role in the Zionist movement was already chronicled in 1950 (see Marcia Gitlin, *The Vision Amazing: South African Zionism* (Johannesburg: Menorah, 1950). For an academic treatment of this phenomenon see generally Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism the South African Experience* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980).

extreme there were members of the antireligious and socialist *Der Algemeyner Yiddishe Arberter Bund* (The General Union of Jewish Workers, or the Bund).¹⁷ Though overwhelmed by the numerically stronger Zionists, and having lost most of their followers in South Africa by 1907, Bundists appear to have played a role at the fringes of the community, by participating in broader labour organizing.¹⁸ Those less ideologically inclined who belonged to neither movement had nonetheless come from a country where the rabbinic forces were waning and where the Enlightenment or *Haskalah* was represented in the establishment of schools, in which secular subjects were elevated above traditional learning.¹⁹ It is no surprise then that the immigrants do not appear to have had a high standard of religious observance. For practical reasons, the Sabbath could not be observed by newcomers struggling to make a living. Proprietors could ill afford to close their businesses on Saturdays, and employees had little choice to work on that day if obliged to do so by their employers.²⁰ Despite this, there appeared to be a consensus when it came to certain public observances:²¹ Generally speaking, High Holiday services were well attended, especially at the Kol Nidre prayer chanted on the eve of the Day of Atonement and other prayers occasions such as Yizkor, where worshippers commemorated the memories of their ancestors. Friday nights were observed across the board, even among those who otherwise did not keep the Sabbath. Candles were lit and Kiddush was recited together with a special Sabbath meal. The importance attached to Friday night observances may well represent one of the few specifically local features of Orthodox Judaism as developed in South Africa. In contradistinction, private observances such as kashrut, and attendance at the ritual bath were

¹⁷ Rubin, "The Jewish Community of Johannesburg, 1886-1939," 83. For a history of this movement see David E. Fishman "From Shtadlanut to Mass Parties," 226-233; Masha Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania: A History of a Remarkable Community 1316-1945*. (Jerusalem: Geffen, 1995), 144-155.

¹⁸ Alexander, "Zionism in South Africa," in Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz (eds.), *The Jews in South Africa: A History*, 276; Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 8-9, note 83. Marxist Zionist movements like Hashomer Hatzair also played a role in shaping the minds of some of the radicals, see *Ibid.*, 68, 84, 90-91.

¹⁹ See Mordechai Zalkin, "The Relations between the Haskalah and Traditional Jewish Communities," in Vldas Sirutavičius, Darius Staliūnas, and Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė (eds.) *The History of Jews in Lithuania: From the Middle Ages to the 1990s*, 172-184; Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania*, 115-120.

²⁰ The renowned Jewish scholar, Solomon Schechter remarked on a visit to South Africa in 1910 that the "greatest religious question" to face that country's Jews was whether they would continue the "observance of the Sabbath" in generations to come. (*Jewish Chronicle*, 30 December, 1910 cited in Gustav Saron "Epilogue," *Jews in South Africa: A History*, 391).

²¹ John Simon, "A Study of the Nature and Development of Orthodox Judaism in South Africa c.1935", Unpublished Masters' Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1996, 80-81. This conclusion and the nature of the observance mentioned below are taken from Simon, who in turn based them on the findings cited in B I Feldman, "Social Life of Cape Town Jewry 1904-1914 with special reference to the Eastern European Immigrant Community," unpublished B.A. (Hons) Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984. Though these findings relate to Cape Town, it is probably safe to assume the level of observance among immigrants in Johannesburg was fairly similar.

less fastidiously kept within the immigrant population. Despite the “indifference to ... religious observance,” even those who observed the “very lowest standard” made an effort to maintain “some outer semblance of religious attachment.”²²

2.1.3 *The Cultural Baggage of the Second Wave*

After the end of the World War I, immigration from the nascent Republic of Lithuania resumed apace. This was almost unrestricted until 1 May 1930, and saw an average of 2,000 Jews enter per year. With the coming into force of the Immigration Act, quotas were placed on the number of immigrants allowed to enter the Union from any country not specified in the Act’s schedule.²³ Lithuania’s exclusion from this list meant that Jewish immigration from that country was severely restricted. This shorter second wave of immigration introduced a different type of immigrant from the first wave. Jews in independent Lithuania came from an environment that had undergone significant changes from what had prevailed before the Great War. They were now given representation in the Lithuanian Parliament and in an independent Jewish Council.²⁴ Additionally, the educational system and employment conditions had changed quite radically. The new Tarbut school system was established which offered comprehensive education from nursery school all the way to high school and beyond. It laid great emphasis on the Hebrew language and culture and had educated a whole generation of Lithuanian Jewry over the period between 1922-1940. While Tarbut catered for 60% of the population, a third of the children received a fairly modern Orthodox education from the Yavneh school system, with the remainder going to the *Yiddish Kultur Lige* schools which taught in Yiddish and had a pronounced socialist orientation.²⁵ From the beginning of Lithuania’s independence, Jews were more urbanized than the norm and played a dominant role in trades and in the professions. With the nationalization of many sectors and the concomitant preference given to ethnic Lithuanians, many Jews suffered economic hardship. The population which then arrived in the 1920s would have therefore been better educated in Hebrew culture and would have been at a higher professional level than those who immigrated at the turn of the century. Coming from an increasingly less religious culture, it is

²² *Ibid.*, 81.

²³ Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm: Antisemitism in South Africa: 1930–1948*, (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2015), 12; Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 2; Krut, “Building a Home and a Community,” 25; Saron “Epilogue 1910-1955,” 378.

²⁴ For an account of this flirtation with autonomy, see Mordechai Zalkin “Jewish National Autonomy “in *History of Jews in Lithuania: From the Middle Ages to the 1990s*, 285-291; Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania*, 228-239.

²⁵ Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania*, 264-270. For a discussion of these school systems, see Mordechai Zalkin, “Ideological Differentiation between Jewish Schools,” in *History of Jews in Lithuania: From the Middle Ages to the 1990s*, 317-327.

doubtful that many of these immigrants would have been punctilious in their personal observance. Yet their experience of increasing hostility directed at the Jewish population in their home country, as well as their Zionist-oriented educational background, meant these immigrants maintained a strong Jewish identity. In particular, they added impetus to the South African Zionist movement. Between 1933 and 1937, these immigrants were joined by three and a half thousand Jews escaping Hitler's Germany. They too would play a special role in defining the future character of the Jewish community.²⁶ While the bulk would join the mainstream Orthodox community, some of these arrivals would buttress the numbers of the nascent Reform movement in South Africa. An even smaller contingent set up an independent strictly Orthodox community, the Adath Yeshurun, which was based on the separatist model pioneered by Samson Raphael Hirsch.²⁷

Following World War Two, relatively few Holocaust survivors made their way to South Africa.²⁸ Nonetheless, the impact of the Holocaust was felt in other ways. Though pre-war restrictions radically diminished the flow of immigrants to South Africa, South African Jewry still had close cultural, religious, and social ties with its "mother" community in Lithuania. These were severed by the almost total destruction of Lithuania Jewry.

2.1.4 Division and Union of an Evolving community

The community which emerged between 1890 and the 1930s from the mix of Anglo-German and Lithuanian immigrants and their locally born offspring developed certain characteristics that were reflected in the nature and expression of observance of Judaism. Originally Johannesburg had witnessed much division between East European Jews and their Anglo-German co-religionists. The latter tended to be prominent among the "financiers, wholesale merchants, jewellers, and confectioners."²⁹ As is evident in reports by a visiting Litvak observer, the Anglo Jewish sector was viewed, somewhat exaggeratedly, as "exceedingly rich."³⁰ This impression was probably induced by the fact that members of this sub-community were more likely than the recent immigrants to live in the expensive, upper class northern suburbs from which they could afford to commute by tram to their business interests in town.³¹ In contradistinction, the new arrivals from Lithuania were occupied

²⁶ Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 13; Jocelyn Hellig, "German Jewish Immigration to South Africa during the 1930s: Revisiting the Charter of the SS Stuttgart," *Jewish Culture and History* 11(1-2), 2009, 124-138.

²⁷ See David Saks, "The Yekkes of Yeoville," *Jewish Affairs*, Summer, 2002, 14-16.

²⁸ Della Pergola and Dubb, "South African Jewry," 65-66

²⁹ Krut, *Building a Home and a Community*: p. 74.

³⁰ Meir Dovid Hersch, "Through the Eyes of a Litvak. 1893," *Jewish Affairs*, December 1956, 23.

³¹ Rubin, "The Jewish Community of Johannesburg," 58.

mainly as shopkeepers, clerks, craftsmen, tradesmen, artisans, peddlers, and hawkers.³² Many struggled as result of the economic depression that affected Johannesburg for almost a decade from 1896-1906, forcing them to become part of the *lumpenproletariat*. To the shame and disdain of some within the Anglo sector, a Litvak underclass, unkindly described as “Peruvians,” joined the “vast Johannesburg underworld.”³³ Unsurprisingly, these dire circumstances prompted many of the newly arrived Litvaks to prioritize security, independence, and upward mobility above their religious and spiritual affairs.³⁴ It is no wonder that, for many, observance of Orthodox precepts was sacrificed on the altar of economic advancement.

In the first decade after their arrival until approximately 1910 these immigrants were concentrated in Johannesburg’s inner-city slums of Marshalltown and Ferreirastown.³⁵ With increasing prosperity, the Litvak population began to migrate north eastwards between 1910 and 1920 to the suburbs of Yeoville and Judith’s Paarl.³⁶ These local migrations continued after 1920, at which time it became increasingly difficult to differentiate between Anglo-German Jews and their Lithuanian counterparts. A new South African Jewish identity was emerging so that by the 1930s the children of the immigrants no longer identified themselves as East European or as Anglos but saw themselves as South African Jews, a great percentage of whom were centred in the suburbs of Doornfontein and New Doornfontein.³⁷ This amalgamated Anglo- Lithuanian Jewish identity was the product of a concerted effort by first generation immigrants to invest in their children’s education and to mimic their Anglo co-religionists in acculturating themselves to the English-speaking white population. As Riva Krut has argued, this transformation may have also been the result of the Anglo section flexing their communal muscles and exploiting their social welfare institutions to ensure that already by 1914 their poorer brethren would be cajoled into conforming to a broader South

³² Krut, “Building a Home and a Community,” 74-75; Rubin, “The Jewish Community of Johannesburg,” 90; Mazabow, *The Quest for Community*, 18.

³³ See generally Charles van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2001). For the etymology and use of the word Peruvian see Krut, “Building a Home and a Community,” 90-91, and note 75; Shain and Mendelsohn, *Jews in South Africa*, at 41-42.

³⁴ Shain and Mendelsohn, *Jewish in South Africa*, 42; Simon, “A Study of the Nature and Development of Orthodox Judaism,” 45.

³⁵ Rubin, “The Jewish Community of Johannesburg,” 90.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 123-125, 141; Simon, “Orthodox Judaism in South Africa,” 190-191; See Alter Hilewitz, “South African Jewry,” (Hebrew) *Barkai*, Rosh Hashanah, 5727 (1967): 23 for a discussion of what he regards as the unique South African Jewish identity.

African white identity.³⁸ Much higher priority was accorded to the state's free secular education than to the Jewish educational system.³⁹ Furthermore, more than half of school age Jewish children in Johannesburg were enrolled in the private Catholic Marist Brothers school, where they received a superior level of education.⁴⁰ One of the consequences was that those born during this period were often referred to by religious leaders as a "lost generation."⁴¹

2.1.5 *Acculturation and Antisemitism*

Though striving to acculturate themselves into English-speaking South African society, it was rare for Jews to intermarry with the gentile population.⁴² Apart from originating from a region that discouraged mingling between its heterogeneous population groups, the new adopted country also discouraged full integration. In the years prior to the South African War, Jews in the South African Republic were classified as *Uitlanders*, along with other non-members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Among other handicaps, they were denied the franchise.⁴³ After these rights were granted in the Transvaal following the war, anti-Jewish sentiment resurfaced among both the Afrikaans and English-speaking populations. The imposition of quotas in 1930 and the virtual halt to Jewish immigration in 1937 may have come from the government but also reflected a "populist discourse that characterized Jews as unassimilable, exploitive and subversive, [and] an additional 'racial' challenge to a country grappling with its own sense of identity."⁴⁴ Alienated from their own government by these discriminatory measures, the Jewish community developed a proud sense of independence.⁴⁵ Right from the start, institutions were established to strengthen Jewish identity, on the one hand, and to cater to the philanthropic needs, domestic political rights and religious requirements, on the other. Key among them was the South African

³⁸ The thesis that a common Johannesburg Jewish communal identity was foisted upon the poorer sections of the community is one of the key points of Riva Krut's bold dissertation (See Krut, "Building a Home and a Community," 6-23).

³⁹ Myer Ellison Katz, "The History of Jewish Education in South Africa, 1841-1980," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1980, 120, 143. In 1902 the British government in Transvaal provided every child with free education, resulting in many poor immigrants taking advantage of this.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 180,200. Indeed, it was so popular that Landau would provide Hebrew classes for the Jewish students. (Simon "Orthodox Judaism in South Africa," 95).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*,188; Hilewitz, "South African Jewry" 26.

⁴² Simon, "Orthodox Judaism in South Africa c.1935," 101.

⁴³ Shain and Mendelsohn, *Jewish in South Africa*, 56.; see also Gustav Saron, "Boers, Uitlanders and Jews,"184-185.

⁴⁴ Shain, *A Perfect Storm*, 6. While this anti-Jewish sentiment was more prominent among the Afrikaans speaking white population, it also featured among English speaking whites. As Krut demonstrates, at some of Johannesburg's more exclusive clubs, frequented by wealthy, mostly Anglo Jews, the management were unabashed anti-Semites. (See Krut, "Building a Home and a Community," 149).

⁴⁵ Simon, "Orthodox Judaism in South Africa," 181.

Zionist Federation, founded in 1898, and the Transvaal Jewish Board of Deputies (1903).⁴⁶ Overwhelmingly represented by Anglo Jews, the latter body initially lacked immigrant support.⁴⁷ This was remedied nine years later, in 1912, when the provinces joined forces to establish the South African Jewish Board of Deputies representing 70 societies and institutions, including a number of Hebrew congregations, many of whose members were immigrants.⁴⁸

2.1.6 *The emergence of non-observant Orthodoxy*

Hebrew congregations too sprouted in the interwar period, but many of those erected by upwardly mobile immigrants and their native-born children were “less a place of worship than a symbol of the community’s social ambitions.”⁴⁹ Since the first Hebrew congregations across South Africa were established by Anglo-German Jews with English clergy, English custom and an English sense of decorum, many new synagogues followed this model.⁵⁰ Features foreign to Lithuania, such as cantors and choirs, became important signs of success and accorded synagogue members and their committees a degree of prestige.⁵¹ Contemporary reports suggest the pomp and ceremony accompanying a choral service and a formal sermon was reserved for the distinctively South African Friday night service, which was attended by many who did not observe the Sabbath.⁵² This phenomenon, in which adherence to public religious rite was set against the backdrop of limited individual commitment to strict

⁴⁶ Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 2.

⁴⁷ Krut surmises that this body, whose founding members were exclusively Anglo-German, was set up to “manufacture a Jewish community in Johannesburg which [would] remove the Peruvians from public scrutiny...assuring all its members a place in white South African society” (“Building a Home and a Community,” 4).

⁴⁸ Mazabow, *The Quest for Community*, 59,77. See also Saron, “Epilogue”, 396 where he states that by 1955, 147 of the 327 represented organizations were Hebrew congregations.

⁴⁹ Shain and Mendelsohn, *The Jews in South Africa*, 75; see also Saron, “Epilogue,” 392; Simon, “Orthodox Judaism in South Africa,” 175, 184. For similar comments on the synagogue’s centrality see Hilewitz, “South African Jewry,” 26.

⁵⁰ Hilewitz, “South African Jewry”, 24.

⁵¹ Simon “Orthodox Judaism in South Africa,” 171. In an interview between Meir Tamari and Mary Kropman (undated) Tamari noted that South African Jewry had a reputation of importing world-famous cantors but never world-famous rabbis. This adoption of English infrastructures by non-East European population has been colourfully described by Gustav Saron as the “pouring of Litvak spirit into Anglo Jewish bottles” (Gus Saron, “The Making of South African Jewry,” in Leon Feldberg, (ed.), *South African Jewry 1965* (Johannesburg: Fieldhill Publishing, 1965), 9-48.)

⁵² “We have such beautiful choirs, such magnificent readers, such eloquent preachers, in fact everything you could wish for ... we give services Friday night to enable you to do your work on Saturday.” *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 17 June, 1907 cited in Simon “Orthodox Judaism in South Africa,” 170. Indeed, in other countries, Friday night services are a non-event and the main attendance at synagogues is on Saturday morning. Joseph H Hertz observed that the Friday night services at South African synagogues “may boast of the largest numbers of worshippers of any English congregation in the British Empire” (*Ibid.*, 85).

observance has been described by scholars as “non-observant Orthodoxy.”⁵³ It was this phenomenon too which would later challenge and perplex the rabbinic leadership.

1.2 *Synagogues and Religious Frameworks and the Orthodox Establishment*

2.2.1 *The Founding Synagogues*

Barely a year after Johannesburg’s founding, the Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation was established by affluent Anglo-German Jews. Within a few years, internal disputes split the congregation into two, with the original taking the name, the Old Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation and its offshoot styling itself the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation.⁵⁴ Around the same time the first arriving immigrants, unused to the English formalities and prayer services at the existing congregations, seceded.⁵⁵ In 1892 they built a synagogue in Fox Street which they called the Beth Hamedrash Hagadol, which was also known as the Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation (JOHC).⁵⁶ Other congregations were established, mostly after the South African War, but it was these three congregations, and their religious leaders, which were principally responsible for shaping religious life and education for at least the next two decades. While the Old Congregation and Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation were fairly similar, with the latter only slightly more observant than the former, their split was based mainly on personality differences rather than on substance. The JOHC, on the other hand, was attended by immigrants including a small contingent of scholars; overall its membership was better versed in the traditional synagogue liturgy. Apparently it was the only Jewish house of worship that from the beginning hosted daily services.⁵⁷

2.2.2 *Jewish Schools*

As early as 1896 the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation officially opened the Johannesburg Jewish School which catered to more than one hundred pupils.⁵⁸ Although open

⁵³ Jocelyn Hellig, “South African Judaism: An Expression of Conservative Traditionalism,” *Judaism* 35, no. 2 (spring 1986): 233. This term was already used by scholars in the 1950s to describe a similar phenomenon among certain East European immigrant Jews in the United States (see Zev Eleff “The Vanishing Non-Observant Orthodox Jew” [The Vanishing Non-Observant Orthodox Jew | The Lehrhaus](#), accessed on 3 January, 2022).

⁵⁴ See Mazabow, *The Quest for Community*, 24, who makes the observation that by following the English custom of calling themselves Hebrew Congregations as opposed to Jewish congregations, the latter sought to give the impression of originating from a cultured Hebrew nation rather than lowly Jews.

⁵⁵ See Krut, “Building a Home and a Community,” 88-89, where she cites contemporary accounts by Anglo Jews of the Beth Hamedrash Hagadol.

⁵⁶ Kaplan and Robertson, *Founders and Followers*, 27; Rabinowitz, “The Transvaal Congregations,” 165-172; and see also Simon, “Orthodox Judaism in South Africa,” 55 ff.

⁵⁷ See Krut, “Building a Home and a Community,” 88-89, and the various sources cited there.

⁵⁸ Katz, “The History of Jewish Education in South Africa,” 86, 91.

to members of all three congregations, it had limited appeal. Since the Boer Republic did not subsidize Jewish education, the school was beyond the financial reach of the poorer immigrants and only a few wealthier Lithuanian Jews sent their children there. For Anglo Jews, the private Catholic schools with their perceived higher standards were a more attractive option.⁵⁹ In 1898, after a succession of unremarkable rabbis, the Old Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation enhanced its standing by enlisting the services of Austro-Hungarian native, Rabbi Joseph Herman Hertz. Raised in the United States, Hertz had been awarded a doctorate from Columbia University, and was the first rabbi ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary.⁶⁰ Around this time, the Orthodox Hebrew Congregation, housed in modest premises and lacking in ornate decorations, was led by the Latvian-born, yeshiva trained, Rabbi Moishel Friedman.⁶¹ Though less worldly than Hertz, this rabbi catered to a more Jewishly literate, if not necessarily rigorously observant, flock. This synagogue arranged small groups or *Chevras* devoted to the study of the Talmud, which was referred to as the Chevra Mishnah U' Gemora, it ran an independent kosher supervision service, and employed its own shochetim. It was apparently the only synagogue to construct a ritual bath or *mikva*.⁶² In 1899 the South African War erupted leading to a mass exodus of Jews from the city, and only the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation continued to provide regular services. The rest of Johannesburg's Jewish population including Hertz sought refuge in other parts of South Africa, but mainly in Cape Town.⁶³

2.2.3 *Decentralization of the Orthodox Establishment*

After Britain conquered the Transvaal, most Jews returned to Johannesburg but were now spread across the city. The need then arose to build local synagogues in the vicinity of the new Jewish neighbourhoods. Unaffiliated with the principal congregations, these independent synagogues reflected a trend toward “decentralization.”⁶⁴ In 1902 the East

⁵⁹ See Mazabow, *The Quest for Community*, 24.

⁶⁰ Simon “Orthodox Judaism in South Africa”, p. 82-83; John Simon “Pulpit and Platform: Hertz-Landau” in Kaplan and Robertson, *Founders and Followers*, 1991, 182.

⁶¹ See Kaplan and Robertson, *Founders and Followers*, 99. Little is known of rabbi Friedman. He was born in 1862 and was in possession of the largest Jewish library collection at the time numbering 500 books. During the South African War, he also assisted the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation in addition to his own congregation; Rose Norwich “Johannesburg’s Beth Hamedrash Hagodol and its Legacy”, *Jewish Affairs*, Rosh Hashanah, 2013, 43.

⁶² Mazabow, *The Quest for Community*, 17. Shochetim (singular Shochet) are ritual slaughterers. The Chevra Mishnah U' Gemora was established just before and after the Anglo-Boer War (see Sowden “Transvaal Jewry 1902-1910” in G. Saron and L. Hotz (eds.) *Jews in South Africa: A History*, 221). Sowden believed these Chevras were a sign of piety and scholarship but see Schrire, “You are not in Lithuania anymore”: 26, who derides the general level and enthusiasm for learning.

⁶³ Simon, “Orthodox Judaism in South Africa,” 83.

⁶⁴ Katz, “The History of Jewish Education in South Africa,” 103; Sowden “Transvaal Jewry 1902-1910”, 215.

European Jewish population that had moved to Jeppestown built a synagogue that could hold 400 people. Shortly thereafter they inaugurated an afternoon religious school or Talmud Torah adjacent to the synagogue.⁶⁵ In 1903 a synagogue and Talmud Torah was established in Doornfontein, a suburb that would later become one of the most Jewish in the city.⁶⁶ That same year, the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation welcomed as their new spiritual leader Galician-born Judah Leo Landau. The scion of a rabbinical family, Landau was educated in traditional yeshivas as well as at the Vienna Rabbinical Seminary and Vienna University. Prior to his arrival, he served as a rabbi in Manchester.⁶⁷ His appointment was to have a profound impact on Johannesburg Jewry for many years to come. Despite, or perhaps because he possessed similar scholarly credentials to Hertz, who was then the rabbi of the rival Old congregation, the two leaders viewed themselves as competitors. This in turn aggravated the acrimony between their respective congregations.⁶⁸

While both were interested in furthering education, they disagreed on this subject as well. Since the British government was now offering free public schooling, a decision was made to cede control of the Johannesburg Congregation's Jewish school to the state. This meant Jewish education would be limited to afternoon and weekend schools in both principal congregations. Discerning that these institutions were not well attended, Landau sought and received permission to teach Jewish subjects at the Marist brothers Catholic school which accommodated half of Johannesburg's Jewish children.⁶⁹ Believing that children should be receiving religious instructions solely from the religious institutions, Hertz criticized his colleague for providing these lessons.⁷⁰ This bickering between the rabbis, coupled with the poor quality of the afternoon school education, could only have exacerbated negative feelings among the Jewish youth towards religion. In 1905, in an effort to improve religious ritual in his synagogue, Landau oversaw the construction of a *mikva*, which was to compete with that managed by the Beth Medrash.⁷¹

In 1906, the small Ophirton synagogue was constructed. This was followed by the establishment of the Fordsburg Synagogue in 1907, and of the La Rochelle Synagogue, the

⁶⁵ Rubin, "The Jewish Community of Johannesburg", 82.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 82; Mazabow *The Quest for Community*, 65.

⁶⁷ For a profile on Landau see Solomon Rappaport, "J. L. Landau – Thinker and Writer," in Saron and Hotz, *Jews in South Africa*, 283-297.

⁶⁸ See Simon, "Orthodox Judaism in South Africa," 90-91.

⁶⁹ Katz, "The History of Jewish Education in South Africa," 86,91.

⁷⁰ Simon, "Orthodox Judaism in South Africa", p.95. Landau believed the criticism was disingenuous and motivated by Hertz's purported personal dislike of Landau.

⁷¹ Mazabow, *The Quest for Community*, 65.

Braamfontein Hebrew Congregation, and the Booyesen's Reserve Synagogue in 1910. All of these synagogues were established by immigrant Jews who lived in these areas. Presumably some were Sabbath observant and would therefore not use public transport on Saturdays. In addition to the Talmud Torahs, some of these synagogues also formed a Chevra Mishnah U' Gemora.⁷² The first decade of the twentieth century ended with Johannesburg boasting ten synagogues with their respective religious facilities. The community was growing and in turn the Hebrew congregations were expanding. Poor synagogue attendance by the youth and the concomitant low level of religious education did not, however, bode well for the future religiosity of the community.

2.2.4 *The United Hebrew Congregation*

In 1911, Hertz left Johannesburg to take up a new rabbinical post in the United States which was followed shortly by a call to assume the position of Chief Rabbi of the British Empire.⁷³ Unable to fill this vacancy and planning to relocate its premises, the Old Congregation approached its rival with a view to amalgamate. While negotiations took place between the premier congregations, new independent congregations continued to sprout across Johannesburg, including the Chassidim Congregation and Bertrams Hebrew Congregation.⁷⁴ Finally in June 1915 the inter-congregational talks bore fruit and the United Hebrew Congregation (UHC) was constituted on new premises in Wolmarans Street, with Landau appointed as the "Chief Rabbi" of this combined congregation.⁷⁵ The congregation's constitution contained several clauses, presumably at Landau's behest, which outlined the UHC's grand aims. One of these appeared to be an attempt to reverse the centrifugal trends in religious life in Johannesburg by seeking to "unite, affiliate or co-operate with and subsidise one or more Congregations and Institutions in South Africa".⁷⁶ Addressing the perceived crisis in youth education, the new congregation resolved to establish a school for "teaching of the Jewish faith and doctrines" based on a curriculum that leaned heavily on "Hebrew, literature and history".⁷⁷ The proposed syllabus probably reflected a departure from the traditional subjects taught at the Talmud Torah, and it is noteworthy that the

⁷² *Ibid.*, 66. See discussion above at note 61.

⁷³ Simon, *Orthodox Judaism in South Africa*, 103.

⁷⁴ Rubin, "The Jewish Community of Johannesburg", 94. It should be noted that this study follows the conventional academic transliteration that spells Hassidism and its variations with an H, except for denoting the synagogue that was spelled as the Chassidim or Chassidic congregation, or when quoting press reports which uses this variant spelling.

⁷⁵ The details of the unification are contained in the *United Hebrew Congregation: Constitution and Bye Laws* which is available at <https://archive.org/details/constitutionbyel00unitiala>, accessed on 30 December, 2021.

⁷⁶ Bye Law 3(c) of the UHC Constitution.

⁷⁷ Bye Law 3 (e).

centrality of Hebrew would in later decades become a source of dispute among educators and rabbis.

2.2.5 *A Beth Din and a Federation*

Arguably the most pressing need for strict Orthodox observance was the establishment of an Ecclesiastical Board or Beth Din whose “influence and activities” would extend to the entire Johannesburg Jewish community.⁷⁸ The absence of a Beth Din created challenges for the more observant sector of the community. In ancient times the Beth Din had civil and criminal jurisdiction and its rulings were enforceable on the Jewish public. Over time, the role of this body was severely curtailed; it was stripped of its criminal jurisdiction and its civil awards were only enforceable if both parties voluntarily agreed to be bound by its arbitration.⁷⁹ Knowing that most of the community, including the many who were veteran members of the Hebrew Congregations, were lax in private observances, it is unlikely that Landau envisaged the laity would take their legal disputes to the Beth Din. Yet there are other areas in which a Beth Din plays an effective, if not essential, role. In Orthodox tradition, the power to divorce a Jewish couple or convert proselytes is given exclusively to a Beth Din constituted of three qualified rabbis. Though this body is not the only one qualified to grant kosher supervision or to inspect the qualifications of a *shochet*, its oversight minimizes dispute and adds an air of authority. It was these function that Landau probably had in mind. He was not the first person to raise the issue of a Beth Din; as far back as 1898 there are indications that Hertz presided over a private Beth Din, which conducted a limited number of conversions.⁸⁰ Upon Landau’s arrival in 1903 attempts were made to form a public Beth Din and for a short time Landau, Hertz and Friedman formed such a body, but it was Friedman’s employer, the JOHC, which quickly withdraw its support for this rabbinical court.⁸¹ Twelve years later, Landau finally overcame the failures of his predecessors.

In 1915, the newly minted Chief Rabbi wrote to his colleague Rabbi Moses Gaster, the senior rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish congregation in London, that he had finally succeeded in forming a Johannesburg Beth Din.⁸² To secure the loyalty of the JOHC, Landau offered Friedman joint authority over the court, and these two, together with Rev. H. Lipschitz,

⁷⁸ Bye Law 3(d)

⁷⁹ For more information of the judicial workings of a modern Beth Din see Chaim Jachter, “Beit Din Basics– Part Two by Rabbi Chaim Jachter”. <https://www.koltorah.org/halachah/beit-din-basics-part-two-by-rabbi-chaim-jachter>, accessed on 30 December 2021.

⁸⁰ Simon, “Orthodox Judaism in South Africa,” 81.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 101

⁸² Gaster Papers, Mocatta Library, University of London, Landau to Gaster, 16 June 1915 cited in Simon, “Orthodox Judaism in South Africa,” 102.

constituted its founding members.⁸³ In 1916 Landau declared that the Beth Din had gained the recognition of all the important congregations in the Transvaal and had succeeded in resolving disputes between congregations.⁸⁴ In 1917 it was reported that notwithstanding the accepted authority of the Beth Din it was unable to stop butchers in Ferreirastown, Fordsburg, and Doornfontein from passing off non-kosher (*treife*) meat as kosher. The fact that these establishments succeeded in committing such fraud was blamed on the indifference of the Jewish public.⁸⁵ From 1917 to 1923 an increasing number of upwardly mobile East European Jews migrated to the suburbs of Yeoville and Berea.⁸⁶ Along with these Lithuanian Jews, several Wolmarans Street synagogue members moved to these suburbs prompting the UHC to expand its congregational network by building a new synagogue in Yeoville in 1923, and consecrating it two years later at the induction of its first rabbi who hailed from England.⁸⁷ At the same time, immigrant Jews in the neighbouring Berea suburb erected their own synagogue, provoking criticism from the Chief Rabbi for needlessly splitting the community by establishing an autonomous congregation less than a mile away from the UHC's Yeoville Synagogue.⁸⁸ In August 1924, in a bid to create an umbrella organization that would incorporate the UHC and the many independent congregations, and to strengthen the Beth Din's ambit, Landau convened a meeting of all the presidents of the synagogues on the Witwatersrand. This culminated in the formation of a Provisional Federation of Synagogues (FOS) Council under Landau's leadership as Chief Rabbi. This provisional Federation was designed to coordinate all the activities of the various congregations and to ensure that as constituent members of the Federation they would adhere to the rulings of the Beth Din which was the recognized legal authority of this body. With the establishment of this Federation, Johannesburg's Orthodox Jewish community inched ever closer towards unity.⁸⁹ This successful initiative by Landau, along with other later initiatives by the Chief Rabbi such as

⁸³ Gerald Mazabow, "The Johannesburg Beth Din from its early days", *Jewish Tradition* Pesach 5768 [2008], 28.

⁸⁴ Mazabow *The Quest for Community* p. 121-122, citing *The Annual Report of the UHC 1916*, 11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid* 122 citing *The Annual Report of the UHC 1917*, 4. A similar situation pertained in the United States and especially in New York. In 1925 the "New York City Department of Markets estimated that 40 percent of the meat sold as kosher in the city was non-kosher." (Timothy D. Lytton. *Kosher: Private Regulation in the Age of Industrial Food*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013), 10. For the the inability to enforce New York's Kosher Bill of 1915 that regulated against fraud in the kosher industry, see, Zvi Gastwirt, "Kashrut and the Law in New York City," *Michael: On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora* 3 (1975), 283-284.

⁸⁶ Rubin, "The Jewish Community of Johannesburg", 123, 125.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 122; "The United Hebrew Congregation Tenth Annual Report," *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 5 June, 1925: 525.

⁸⁸ Mazabow, *The Quest for Community* p.167 citing *South African Jewish Chronicle*, September 1923. See also *Berea Synagogue, 1967: The Story of the Berea Synagogue, 1923-1967*, Brochure on the 44th Anniversary of the Berea Synagogue, cited in Rubin "The Jewish Community of Johannesburg," 130, n.21.

⁸⁹ Mazabow, *The Quest for Community*, 167.

the South African Board of Jewish Education and its affiliated institutions, created the basis for what this dissertation refers to as the establishment.

3. *Terminology:*

3.1 *The Establishment*

Throughout this dissertation reference will be made to the “Orthodox establishment” or merely the “establishment”. This will refer to the Orthodox bodies, and their lay and rabbinical officers, which were established in the early period of Johannesburg. These organizations and their leaders considered themselves -- and were considered by many -- to represent the community as a whole. Among other bodies, this included the UHC; the Federation of Synagogues (which in the 1980s would change its name to the Union of Orthodox Synagogues, and which was the body in charge of the Johannesburg Beth Din); and the Office of the Chief Rabbi. Other institutions which were not constitutionally Orthodox such as the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the Zionist Federation and the Board of Jewish Education, and its affiliates, will for the sake of convenience also be referred to as the establishment.

3.2 *Accommodators, Traditionalists and Innovators*

As will be described in the first chapter, the arrival of Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowky in September 1933 split Orthodoxy into two.⁹⁰ The establishment camp was led by Rabbi Judah Leo Landau, who, it appears, understood the expectations and standards of the bulk of the Johannesburg Jewish population, and strove to implant a broad view of Judaism. He apparently viewed himself as responsible for all members of the Johannesburg community, regardless of their level of observance.⁹¹ In contradistinction, Kossowsky and his allies formed a camp that saw itself as responsible for continuing the traditions of Eastern Europe, with a strong emphasis on a strict and exclusively Orthodox lifestyle. In this camp only slight adjustments could be made for the lax level of observance of the Johannesburg community. This clash of outlooks was not unprecedented in world Jewry. As documented in his seminal work on the United States Orthodox rabbinate, Jeffrey Gurock has proposed that the holders of these opposing views may appropriately be referred to as “accommodators” and

⁹⁰ See Irwin Manoim, *Mavericks inside the Tent*, (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2020), 32 where he records that Kossowsky arrived a month after Weiler who arrived in August 1933.

⁹¹ See Dora Sowden, “Chief Rabbi J.L. Landau the man in the community,” in Yehuda Friedlander and Rafael Weiser, (eds.), *Rabbi Playwright and Poet - Judah Leo Landau*, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 33: “In South Africa, his object was unity, to bring all Jews together in a common aim- for better education, more Jewish consciousness, greater Zionism”.

“resistors.” He defines accommodators as those who “accepted the seeming inevitability of Americanization and ... joined arms with less-traditional elements in the community so to perpetuate the essence of the ancestral faith.” Resistors, on the other hand, “attempted to reject acculturation and disdained cooperation with other American Jewish elements, fearing that alliances would work to dilute traditional faith and practice.”⁹²

Whereas Landau’s approach resembled the school of thought of the accommodators, Kossowsky and his spiritual heirs do not quite fit the definition of resistors as provided by Gurock. Kossowsky and others in his mould joined establishment institutions such as the Zionist Federation and Board of Education. Rather than “disdaining” cooperation, they tried to force change on the community. Unlike the resistors in the United States, most rabbis arriving in South Africa (with the exception of Kossowsky), either spoke, or quickly learned to speak, fluent English, and language was no barrier to their communication. This school, however, like the resistors, rejected acculturation and placed a high premium on undiluted tradition and practice. I have chosen therefore to refer to those following this philosophy as “traditionalists.” This name is derived from the fact that they were punctilious in their observances of the Litvak tradition, and sought to perpetuate it. While this term aptly describes this camp within Orthodoxy, it bears mentioning that it is quite distinct from the large segment of the South African Jewish population who have been described, and often describe themselves as “traditional.” By this they mean they observe the public traditions common among South African Jews, but at the same time do not consider themselves strictly observant.

Over time, the traditionalist views espoused by Kossowsky would gain popularity especially with the arrival of a new conservative crop of British and American rabbis much later in the century. Among the latter, who arrived from the beginning of the 1960s, some would split off to form a vigorous and independent group which from the 1970s would mount a serious challenge to accommodator and traditionalist alike. This latter group, discussed later, introduced many innovations that were foreign to the community and will be referred to as the “innovators”. That future struggle, however, was already prefigured in the difference of approaches exemplified by Landau and Kossowsky.

⁹² Jeffrey S. Gurock, “Resistors and Accommodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886-1983,” *American Jewish Archives* 1983, 109.

4. *Historiography and Scholarly Contributions*

4.1 *South African Jewish History*

This study comprises a historical and critical analysis of a Jewish community and the changing attitudes and philosophies of its Orthodox leadership. The foundational background for this study is the history of South African Jewry. In this section of the introduction, we will explore the scholarly literature on the history of Jewish Orthodox movements in general and the Johannesburg Orthodox community in particular.

While there have been studies on South African Jewry and its Orthodox community, few have provided a complete historical overview of Orthodoxy in Johannesburg and its changing role over the course of the last century, leading up to and following the religious revival that occurred there. John Simon's Master's thesis provides solid historical evidence of the homogeneity of Johannesburg's Orthodox community, but his 1935 cut-off date cannot assist us in the more crucial later periods.⁹³ Other scholars have provided a snapshot of the Johannesburg Orthodox establishment. This includes the works of Jocelyn Hellig and of Dana Kaplan.⁹⁴ Whereas the latter's focus was on the impact of the *Teshuva* [Return to Religion] movement, Hellig's essays were mostly written in the early period of the revival. She refers chiefly to the success of the Kollel and the Chabad movement; her 1995 article only makes brief mention of Ohr Somayach.⁹⁵ Kaplan's more analytical articles provide wider exposure to the impact of Ohr Somayach, and discuss the divisions between the "innovative" *Baal Teshuva* [returnee] movements and the rabbinic establishment.⁹⁶ Other scholars who address the religious revival include Gideon Shimoni, who offers a probing analysis of what he terms the "turn to religion."⁹⁷ Yet the interpretation provided by Shimoni is of limited scope and is restricted to the impressions of those who played a key role in the innovator movement.⁹⁸ The independent scholar, Claudia Braude, whose work accuses the Orthodox community of an apathetic response to Apartheid, taps, perhaps unconsciously, the

⁹³ Simon. "Orthodox Judaism in South Africa."

⁹⁴ Hellig, "The Religious Expression" (1984), Hellig, "South African Judaism: An expression of Conservative Traditionalism", in *Judaism*, 35 (2), 1986, 233-242; Hellig, "The religious expression of South Africa Jewry" *Religions in Southern Africa* 8(2) 1987, 3-17, Hellig, "The South African Jewish Community" in Martin Prozesky, and John De Gruchy (editors) *Living Faiths in South Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 1995), 155-176; Dana Kaplan, "South African Orthodoxy Today"; Dana Kaplan, "South Africa, Practice of Judaism," in Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck, and William Scott Green (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Judaism*, Volume III, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 1347-1357.

⁹⁵ Hellig, "The South African Jewish Community" (1995) 172.

⁹⁶ Both writers purport to discuss South African Jewry in general, but most examples are drawn from Johannesburg. D. Kaplan, "South African Orthodoxy Today" 74, specifically notes that while Johannesburg's synagogue attendance has risen considerably, it has declined in Cape Town.

⁹⁷ See Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 226-242.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 236-237.

lines between the accommodators and traditionalists and their approach to broader modern society.⁹⁹

The broader academic literature that relates to this dissertation may be divided into five different fields. The first is South African Jewish history. One of the primary aims of this dissertation is to add to this field. Key works include, inter alia, the original volume on *The Jews in South Africa* by Gus Saron and Louis Hotz. Though a product of the South African Sociological and Historical Society and not an official publication of the Board of Deputies, its decision to use “well-known members of the community” as authors, its uneven and at times uncritical approach to its subject, and its dated nature (it was published in 1955) makes it unreliable for an objective academic study of South African Jewish history. This is exacerbated by the fact that it was written at a time when the Nationalist Government ruled over South Africa, which induced the authors to present a form of apologetics in which emphasis was placed on portraying the Jewish community as “fully integrated into the life of South Africa making its due contribution to the progress and development of this country.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, scant mention of religion or of Orthodoxy is made beyond a discussion on the history of the various synagogues of the Transvaal. The influential head of the Federation of Synagogues Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky does not even get a mention. At a time when strict religious observance was fairly low and when religious institutions were firmly in the hands of the accommodator establishment, this omission is understandable but unhelpful.¹⁰¹

A more recent survey is provided by Milton Shain’s and Richard Mendelsohn’s *The Jews in South Africa*. This work seeks to provide an unvarnished and impartial narrative of South African Jewry, but the time period it covers over one volume does not provide enough space for truly in-depth analysis of various aspects of Jewish history. While religious history is not ignored, the volume does not attempt or pretend to provide a critical analysis of Orthodoxy in all its variations. Instead, it focuses on various areas in which Orthodoxy has had an impact on the general South African Jewish history. There are therefore in-depth analyses of the early rabbinate of Landau and Hertz, the later tension between Rabinowitz

⁹⁹ Claudia Braude, “From the Brotherhood of Man to the World to Come: The Denial of the Political in Rabbinic Writing under Apartheid,” in Gilman, Sander L. and Shain, Milton (eds.), *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1999, 259-289.

¹⁰⁰ Shain and Mendelsohn, *The Jews in South Africa*, 136.

¹⁰¹ Saron and Hotz, *The Jews in South Africa*, “Preface”.

and Abrahams, and a thoroughgoing review of Jewish education and the impact made upon it by “ultraorthodox” institutions, without in fact tracing the roots of the latter.¹⁰²

Mendel Kaplan’s and Mary Robertson’s work on Johannesburg titled *Founders and Followers* provides a very thorough chronological account of early Johannesburg that is based on the minutes of the community’s institutional bodies. Aside from its limited timeframe, ending in 1915, it tends to overwhelm the reader with unfiltered information without pausing to provide historical analysis. While it provides an excellent analysis of the rifts between Hertz and Landau, its discussion with regard to Orthodoxy is limited to the institutional frameworks and not to everyday practices.

The unpublished dissertation by Riva Krut offers an important and imaginative study on the origins of the Johannesburg Jewish community, but it does not provide much perspective on religious aspects and here too the time frame is limited. Krut is much more concerned with institutional frameworks such as the Jewish Board of Deputies, and her focus on synagogues and Hebrew schools is sometimes used as a springboard to highlight the class differences between the English Jews and their poorer Litvak co-religionists.¹⁰³ John Simon’s Master’s thesis on Orthodoxy reflects a deep knowledge of Orthodoxy that proved helpful. However, its timeframe – covering the period from the first congregation in the 1840s and up to 1935 – and its concentration on the entire country limit its utility for the current study. Drawing on oral histories collected by the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, it contains some references to everyday practice of the community’s Orthodox Jews. But it tends to rely more heavily on information gleaned from the archives of rabbis and of Hebrew congregations. Hebrew sources are almost completely ignored.¹⁰⁴

Margot Rubin’s geographical study on the early Johannesburg Jewish community is thoroughgoing and very helpful in locating socioeconomic and demographic aspects of Johannesburg Jewry. By its nature it is not an historical work and the writer does not appear familiar with the finer aspects of Orthodoxy, presuming a high level of religious observance by the immigrant Litvak community.¹⁰⁵ Rabbi Gerald Mazabow’s work offers a thorough

¹⁰² See Shain and Mendelsohn, *The Jews in South Africa*, 94-95, 164, 183-187.

¹⁰³ See for example Krut “Building a Home and a Community,” 98-100.

¹⁰⁴ The notable exception to this are the translations that Simon commissioned of rabbinic responsa that he incorporated into his thesis. (John Simon, “Responsa and Rulings Reflecting some South African Issues” in *Jewish Journal of Sociology* Vol. 36 No. 1 June 1994.)

¹⁰⁵ See for example her exaggerated description of “Eastern European population” as “very devout, and highly orthodox” and “devoted to matters of the spirit.” She also assumes widespread observance of the Sabbath already by the 1920s (Rubin, “The Jewish Community of Johannesburg, 1886-1939,” 55, 125).

history of the origins of institutions but focuses on a limited time period (1841 to 1939). While his account of Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz's ministry in Johannesburg is very useful, it suffers from the author's admiration of his subject and its consequent uncritical evaluations¹⁰⁶

As mentioned, none of these works have systematically traced the fate of Orthodoxy over the decades. Much of the scholarship that does pay attention to Judaism focuses on institutions and individuals as opposed to broad changes within religious life. Though some of the more recent works note the religious transformation of Johannesburg Jewry, the relative recency of these processes has ensured that the topic has not yet been studied in depth. Those who have driven these processes, moreover, have typically not written their own accounts.

This dissertation will also draw from other disciplines. This includes the field of Jewish education where Jeremy Hayman conducted quantitative research on Orthodox high school pupils and detected a trend of children being more stringent than their parents, indicating a revival among the younger generation.¹⁰⁷ The study will also consider the work of the sociologists of religion, Roberta Sands and Dorit Roer-Strier, whose qualitative study of South African female returnees to Orthodox Judaism concluded that a strong familial relationship usually persists between those who became religious and those who did not.¹⁰⁸ Finally, the dissertation will draw upon various surveys conducted of the South African Jewish population.¹⁰⁹

4.2 *History of Orthodoxy*

The second field of research that will be drawn upon here, albeit to a lesser extent, are the various studies devoted to defining and understanding Orthodox Judaism, with a particular emphasis on its different manifestations. This study will compare Orthodox Judaism as it developed in Johannesburg Orthodoxy with that which developed elsewhere.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Krut, "Building a Home and a Community."; Simon, "Orthodox Judaism in South Africa."; Rubin, "The Jewish Community of Johannesburg, 1886-1939". Mazabow, *The Quest for Community*. Mazabow., *To Reach for the Moon*.

¹⁰⁷ Jeremy Hayman, "A case study of the modern orthodox and ultra-orthodox sectors of Johannesburg Jewry with special reference to their educational institutions", Unpublished Master's thesis University of Cape Town, 1988, iii: "The level of religious practice of the pupils often exceeds that of their parents." See also *Ibid.*, 203-207.

¹⁰⁸ Roberta Sands and Dorit Roer-Strier, "Ba'alot Teshuvah" Daughters and their Mothers: A View from South Africa," *Contemporary Jewry*, 21(1) (2000):55-77.

¹⁰⁹ Dubb, *Jewish South Africans: A Sociological View of the Johannesburg Jewish Community*; Graham, *The Jews of South Africa, in 2019*; Kaplan and Bruk, *The Future of South African Jewry Comments and Observations*; Bruk and Shain, *Jews in a changing South Africa.*; Shirley Bruk, *The Jews of South Africa 2005 - Report on a Research Study* (Cape Town: Kaplan Centre, 2006).

¹¹⁰ An analysis will be made primarily in chapter 7.

Both in Israel and in the United States, Orthodoxy has become a serious research subject.¹¹¹ One central argument that has occupied scholars is how to define Orthodoxy. Is it a continuation of traditional Judaism? Or is it a self-conscious and novel response to modernity? Related to this question is how one defines East European or Lithuanian Orthodoxy. Was there, for example, a so-called uniform *Litvishe Derekh* or Lithuanian Orthodoxy?¹¹² Is the version imported by some outreach organizations into Johannesburg the restoration of a lost observance, or an alien innovation, never part of South Africa's native Orthodoxy? Some Israeli scholars have sought to differentiate Lithuanian Orthodoxy from its Western and Central European counterparts. Yosef Salmon suggests that Lithuanian Orthodoxy is built on the premise of fierce preservation of tradition, rather than on a tendency towards stringency.¹¹³ He shows that polemicists such as Alexander Moses Lapidot who held moderate views on general studies were at the vanguard of Orthodoxy for defending traditional customs and norms. In Mordechai Zalkin's alternative view, the Lithuanian community was too decentralized to speak of any uniform Orthodoxy until late into the 19th century.¹¹⁴ As we shall see, the very definition of South African Orthodoxy was a matter of much sparring among the accommodators, traditionalists, and innovators. The last-mentioned, especially in the first generation of the religious revolution, introduced many stringencies under the guise of restoring authentic Judaism. The traditionalists for their part rejected these practices while claiming to be the true continuers of the *Litvak* tradition. At present it seems that a truce has been reached between the traditionalists and innovators, with the influence of the accommodators having little effect.

¹¹¹ See Kimmy Caplan "Trends and Characteristics in the Study of Orthodoxy in the Israeli Academy," *Zion* 74 (special issue: Remembering and Forgetting), 2009: 353-373 (Hebrew); See also Adam Ferziger, *Beyond Sectarianism: The Realignment of American Orthodox Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 1, where he refers to the "burgeoning investigation" of American Orthodoxy".

¹¹² See the Yom Hashoa presentation by then Chief Rabbi Elect Warren Goldstein, where he strongly infers that the *Litvish Derekh* [Lithuanian Way] is being retaught in South Africa, <https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/online-journal/speech-by-rabbi-dr-warren-goldstein-at-the-annual-yom-hashoa-ceremony>, accessed on 30 December 2019. Goldstein also co-authored a book with Berel Wein, *The Legacy: Teachings for Life from The Great Lithuanian Rabbis* (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2013), whose title implies a certain uniformity in the Litvak heritage.

¹¹³ Yosef Salmon, "The Emergence of Eastern European Orthodox Judaism," in Yosef Salmon, Aviezer Ravitzky, and Adam S. Ferziger, (eds.), *Orthodox Judaism: New Perspectives* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006), 367-379 (Hebrew); Salmon, "Alexander Moses Lapidot: A Lithuanian Rabbi of the Second Half of the Nineteenth-Century (The Evolution of a Haredi Orthodox Ideology)," in Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference 'Jewish Intellectual Life in Pre-War Vilna' (Vilnius: Mosklo aidai, 2004), 122-146.

¹¹⁴ Mordechai Zalkin, "Jewish Orthodoxy and Lithuanian Jewry," in *Orthodox Judaism: New Perspectives*, 428-446.

Apart from gleaning historical insights from Jeffrey Gurock’s works on Orthodoxy, particularly the aforementioned “Resisters and Accommodators”,¹¹⁵ at least two issues in the study of United States Orthodoxy help sharpen our understanding of the South African Orthodox Jewish community. While bemoaning American Orthodoxy’s shift to the right, Samuel Heilman identifies Haredi teachers employed at Jewish day schools and the one-year programs in Israel as responsible for this shift.¹¹⁶ Johannesburg’s more moderate Orthodox schools also employ Haredi teachers, and there is a norm of spending the post matriculation year in an Israeli institution, yet similar complaints have not emerged in Johannesburg, which has also experienced a rightward shift. The different responses provide a useful benchmark for distinguishing between the way Americans view and define right-wing Orthodoxy and the way that it is defined and viewed in Johannesburg. Adam Ferziger’s latest work, on the other hand, explores how the American Haredi Orthodox stance has softened vis-a-vis the Reform movement.¹¹⁷ Contrariwise, it is difficult to imagine reconciliation between Johannesburg’s Orthodox and Reform communities. This despite Johannesburg’s relatively small Haredi community and its marginalized Reform movement. There appears to be a greater “unbridgeable gulf” between Reform and Orthodox in South Africa than in the United States.¹¹⁸ The continuous marginalization of Reform in particular and all heterodox philosophies in general, as evidenced by the hard-line stance vis-à-vis Limmud South Africa, is explored in the final chapter.

4.3 *Religious Revivals*

Thirdly, this dissertation engages with the phenomenon of religious revivals that have witnessed non-observant, unaffiliated Jews becoming fully observant. This has occurred under the guise of what for more than half a century has referred to itself as the *Baal Teshuva* (literally, penitents or returnees) movement. Generally, unaffiliated Jews undergo this transformation as the result of contact with observant activists who are occupied in Jewish outreach or kiruv: “the act or practice of bringing secularized Jews closer to Judaism, especially Orthodox Judaism.”¹¹⁹ The scholarship on this phenomenon has been focused on

¹¹⁵ Gurock, “Resisters and Accommodators”; Jeffrey Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Jeffrey Gurock, “The Winnowing of American Orthodoxy” *Approaches to Modern Judaism I*. (Chico, CA, 1984): 41-54; Jeffrey Gurock, “Twentieth-Century American Orthodoxy’s Era of Non-Observance, 1900-1960,” *Torah u-Madda Journal IX* (2000) :87-107.

¹¹⁶ See Samuel Heilman, “American Orthodoxy: Where Are We, Who Are We, and Where Are We Going?” *Edah* 5:1 2-8.

¹¹⁷ Ferziger, *Beyond Sectarianism*, 130-150. This chapter is titled “Reform in the Eyes of the Orthodox.”

¹¹⁸ Davis Saks “Jewish Pluralism: A South African Perspective” *Jewish Affairs* 54(1) 1999, 73.

¹¹⁹ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/kiruv>, accessed on 3 January 2022.

Israel and English-speaking countries and it traces the different ways the Baal Teshuva movement has adapted itself, and how the various organizations have reinvented themselves to take up the challenges of outreach. This body of scholarship is characterized by several trends. Some researchers have focused on why secular Jews turn to religion. Basic to this are the pioneering works of Janet Aviad and Herbert Danzger.¹²⁰ While both scholars originally covered the 1970s and 1980s, Danzger updated some of his findings where he makes at least three points relevant to this study¹²¹ Against the backdrop of critiquing other scholars of Orthodoxy, he stresses the need to place the Orthodox revival in the context of a worldwide quest for more intense religious expression.¹²² Secondly he points out that in post-1980s America, the “portal of return” has shifted from the yeshiva to the community, and the Teshuva movement has been buttressed by returnees who are now veteran members of the community and who are mentors to the new returnees.¹²³ In this regard, Johannesburg seems to be following a similar path, with most returnees not entering yeshiva but typically drawn to religion by second or third generation *Baaley Teshuva*. A third point made by Danzger is that the recent Christian and Jewish revivals appeal to the Yuppie generation.¹²⁴ In an article partially profiling the trendy Tel Aviv returnees, Asaf Sharabi found similarly that his case study group consisted of “middle-class or upper middle-class educated adults.”¹²⁵ This appears to comport with the conditions in Johannesburg where religious Jews reside mainly in wealthier areas. As we shall see the geographical centre for outreach has shifted from the low middle class Johannesburg suburb of Yeoville that attracted the spiritual seekers of the 1970s to the more fashionable and expensive suburbs of Glenhazel, Sydenham and Sandringham.

Another trend in this field of research is to survey the outreach activists and organizations and their stated aims. In his article for *Commentary*, the veteran Jewish

¹²⁰ Janet Aviad, *Return to Judaism: Religious Renewal in Israel*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Herbert M. Danzger, *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹²¹ See Herbert Danzger, “The “return” to Traditional Judaism at the End of the Twentieth Century: Cross-Cultural Comparisons” in Jacob Neusner and Alan Avery-Peck (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 495-511.

¹²² *Ibid.* at 500. In note 19 at 509-510, he cites examples of Jews from the former Soviet Union who converted to the Russian Orthodox Church. Thus, even for Jews, the repression of their religion created a thirst for any religion, and not just a strengthening of their Judaism.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 496: “The tshuva (*sic*) movement continued to draw on [those] people who had already entered...Orthodoxy”.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* at 496, 500. Although twenty years later the term Yuppie has lost some of its currency, it is apparent that the upwardly mobile middle class continues to be attracted to this movement.

¹²⁵ Asaf Sharabi, “‘Boundary work’ in a religious revival movement: The case of the ‘teshuvah movement’ in Israel,” *Ethnography* 14(2): 238.

historian Jack Wertheimer claimed that some of these aims have been revised. He notes that the Chabad movement, a kiruv pioneer, and very active in Johannesburg, has redefined success as introducing newcomers to Judaism: Chabad efforts have “a non-result orientation, [even] if people don’t become frum (religious) ... Any mitzvah is a positive step.”¹²⁶ An identical insight was relayed to me by a prominent Johannesburg Chabad leader, who explained that any spiritual connection with a fellow Jew is a goal unto itself.¹²⁷ Somewhat ironically, as Chabad witnesses rapid growth in its activities, and in the number of synagogues it establishes in Johannesburg, the number of observant Jews it produces has been dropping. Yet the problem of dwindling success is not confined to Chabad. The momentum of the once powerful Ohr Somayach Johannesburg branch, despite efforts at recreating itself and appealing to the youth, seems to have slowed.¹²⁸ We will examine whether the Johannesburg kiruv movements have followed the example of many communities in the United States by retreating inwardly. As Wertheimer notes, in doing so they isolate themselves and become distant from those they once attracted.

A new development observed by Wertheimer and examined more thoroughly by Adam Ferziger is the role of the community Kollel. Traditionally a Kollel refers to a seminary for married men who engage in advanced Talmudic studies and are remunerated with a stipend. While this model has remained dominant, a new hybrid institution has been established which is called the “community Kollel”. Here in addition to the Kollel providing its members with a venue for personal Talmud study, it also engages in outreach, acting as an “informal educational institution geared toward addressing the intellectual and spiritual interests of local Jewish populations.”¹²⁹ The existence of such an institution serves for some as proof of a tendency within the ultra-Orthodox or Haredi world to be less insular and more engaged with their secular brethren.¹³⁰ A community Kollel per se does not exist in

¹²⁶ Jack Wertheimer, “The Outreach Revolution,” *Commentary* April 1, 2013 available at <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-outreach-revolution>.

¹²⁷ Rabbi Dovid Hazdan, interview with the author, Johannesburg, May 2017. This appears to be the situation in Britain as well, see Elise Berman, “Voices of Outreach: The Construction of Identity and Maintenance of Social Ties among Chabad-Lubavitch Emissaries,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48(1), 2009, 69-85.

¹²⁸ Rabbi Koppel Bacher, interview with the author, Johannesburg, May 2017. Bacher bemoaned the fact that most of the religious Jews live in close proximity to one another in the suburb of Glenhazel which, in his view, has alienated unaffiliated Jews who reside in the remoter suburbs of Johannesburg.

¹²⁹ Adam Ferziger, “The Emergence of the Community Kollel: A New Model for Addressing Assimilation,” *The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality*, Bar Ilan University – Faculty of Jewish Studies, 2006 – 5766, 12.

¹³⁰ Ferziger, *Beyond Sectarianism*, 175-194.

any real sense in Johannesburg and will not be explored.¹³¹ I will however analyse Johannesburg's Kollel Yad Shaul. At present it has become the centre of a small Haredi enclave, but in its heyday it enjoyed high levels of success when it also functioned as a full-time learning centre. Kollel Yad Shaul's students devoted themselves full-time to their studies and were chosen for their learning acumen, rather than their kiruv abilities.¹³² Although the conditions of their contracts required them to set aside an hour a day to community outreach, their main aim was to become fully-fledged Torah scholars and to spread Torah learning. The fact that they succeeded within a few years to attract dozens of families to full observance may well be because of the prevailing milieu of the 1970s and early 1980s. This model appears no longer to be viable. Yet, the success of this Kollel, in terms of numbers, was apparently much greater than that of the current Kollel. Some Kollel veterans still reminisce about the special encounter between the unaffiliated Jew and a person almost fully devoted to his Torah studies.¹³³ Whether this romanticizing of the 1970s is objectively valid requires analysis by comparing the earlier Kollel with its contemporary incarnations.

In Israel, the latest research into outreach focuses on the mass rallies normally geared toward the Sephardi population.¹³⁴ Notwithstanding the gulf that divides local South African Jews from their Sephardi Haredi Baal Teshuva counterparts, there are similarities between the two regarding mass audiences. Nissim Leon has noted that the Teshuva conferences in Israel have consciously chosen as their venue the stadium used by Maccabi Tel Aviv, Israel's most famous basketball team. This fills the formerly unobservant attendees with a strong sense of pride. In his review of the Teshuva movement, Yehuda Goodman notes the entertainment value of the regularly held conferences and performances. Both these features are present in Johannesburg. In my interview with Chief Rabbi Goldstein and in a speech that he gave elsewhere, he referred to the idea of spiritual entrepreneurship, an element of which was the importance of presenting Judaism in a "*kli mefoar*" or "magnificent vessel".¹³⁵ This

¹³¹ While Cape Town boasts a Torah Mitzion Kollel (<http://www.yeshiva.org.za/> accessed on 30 December 2021), which is involved in community affairs, it only recruits unmarried students, and has therefore had limited success.

¹³² Rabbi Shmuel Steinhaus, interview with the author, Jerusalem, February 2017.

¹³³ Mr. Ivan Ziskind, interview with the author, London, February 2017.

¹³⁴ Nissim Leon, "The Mass Assembly (The *Kenes*) in the *Tshuvah* Movement", in Emmanuel Sivan & Kimmy Caplan (eds.) *Israeli Haredim: Integration without Assimilation?* (Jerusalem: Van-Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2006) (Hebrew), 82-98; Yehuda Goodman, "The Baal Teshuva Movement and the New Religious Identities in Israel at the Beginning of the Year 2000," Discussion Paper No. 2002-15, Pinhas Sapir Center for Development, Tel Aviv University (Hebrew).

¹³⁵ Warren Goldstein, interview with the author, Johannesburg, May, 2017; See speech at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prupfVZ2CFc-accsed> on 2 January, 2022.

is why the Chief Rabbi raises considerable funds to secure the most elegant conference halls for his annual Sinai Indaba initiative. He adopts a deliberate policy of introducing the public to religious celebrities like Yonatan Razel and the singer and Baal Teshuva, Alex Clare. The idea in Israel and in Johannesburg of transferring Teshuva activities from the private informal sphere to the public domain will be explored in this study.

For English-speaking countries outside the United States, there is scant research on Orthodoxy in general and of the nascent Teshuva movement in particular.¹³⁶

4.4 *Gender in Orthodoxy*

Fourthly, this dissertation engages with scholarship on the role gender plays in Orthodox revivals. As will be seen in the final chapter, Johannesburg's brand of Orthodoxy has not completely come to terms with the greater role women now play and appears to have resisted calls for openness in this arena. One stream of research examines how female participants undergo the process of adopting full observance, colloquially referred to as the Teshuva process, and how they react to it. A second category adopts a more holistic approach to the outreach process and to female participants and professionals, with a focus on potentially affirmative elements of female empowerment. An early study that focused on the relationships between married Ba'alot Teshuva daughters and their unobservant mothers, which was conducted in South Africa, represents the first category.¹³⁷ While many of its findings appear gender neutral, at least one finding relates to body image among women. Whereas mothers and daughters enjoyed a close relationship, some mothers criticized their "daughters' covering their heads with a *shaitl* [wig] or *tichel* [headscarf] and were upset they were "concealing their beauty"¹³⁸. It appears these issues of modesty were especially stressed by the innovators so that from 1970, head coverings among the innovative movements, as well as the traditionalists and those associated with Bnei Akiva, has become commonplace in Johannesburg. An example of a controversy associated with the issue of modesty is that of the ban on listening to a woman's singing (*Kol Isha*) as will be explored in the final chapter.

Research uncovering elements of female empowerment in the Teshuva process has been conducted in at least three different settings. In her essay dealing with the weekly shiur

¹³⁶ For an example of research of Orthodoxy in the United Kingdom, see Zalkind Yaakov Wise, "The rise of independent orthodoxy in Anglo-Jewry: The history of the Machzikei Hadass Communities, Manchester," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Manchester 2006, 33. For the Baal Teshuva experience in the UK see Berman, "Voices of Outreach."

¹³⁷ See Sands and Roer-Strier. "Ba'alot Teshuvah" Daughters and their Mothers," 55-77.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 68

given by Chabad *shluchot* (female emissaries) to groups comprised chiefly of Ba'alot Teshuva attendees, Elite Ben Yosef suggests that notwithstanding Chabad's very clear gender divisions, the act of presenting and attending the shiur contains within it elements of female autonomy.¹³⁹ Nissim Leon and Aliza Lavie, who research the new female motivators, such as Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi who draws mass crowds of primarily Sephardi women of various levels of religiosity, propose that the latter create spaces of female empowerment while simultaneously reaffirming prescribed gender boundaries.¹⁴⁰ Although these female speakers are unlikely to regard themselves as feminists, the fact that they see themselves as agents for reinforcing gender roles could in and of itself be considered an empowering function. In his discussion on American Haredi female outreach activists, Ferziger profiles its "superstar", Lori Palatnik.¹⁴¹ Noting her impressive achievements as a speaker at outreach centres, synagogues and campuses around the world, and the awards bestowed upon her by the non-denominational *Jewish Women* magazine and by the Hadassah organization, he labels her work "Haredi female activism."¹⁴² He points out that the organization she co-founded, the Jewish Women's Renaissance Project, unabashedly bills itself as a continuation of the "feminist movement ... that created real social change." This is then a third example of the outreach process serving as a platform for female expression.

While Johannesburg has not produced superstar female speakers, it does have *rebbetzins* [rabbis' wives] of Lubavitch *shluchim* [emissaries] and women from other organisations, who are assertive and popular, and who address female audiences primarily on women's issues.¹⁴³ Johannesburg has also seen the growth of Rabbi Jeremy and Tehilla Abramov's Jewish Marriage Education, which trains women to teach new brides the laws of family purity, and was responsible for turning Tehilla Abramov into an international figure.¹⁴⁴ In recent years, prominent female speakers who have addressed the Sinai Indaba include Palatnik, Mizrachi, Slovie Jungreis Wolf, and the veteran lecturer from the Neve

¹³⁹ Elite Ben Yosef, "Literacy and Power: The Shiur as a Site of Subordination and Empowerment for Chabad Women," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 27(1), 2011, 53-74.

¹⁴⁰ Nissim Leon and Aliza Lavie, "Religious Feminist Discourse in Strengthening Women's Activism in Israel" *Social Issues in Israel*, 18 (2014): 30-60. Mrs. Mizrachi is indeed married to a rabbi, however the title rabbanit is probably the result of her status as speaker; yet another indication of the empowering effects of the outreach movement. (*Ibid.*, 38). For discussion see Leon and Lavie, "Religious Feminist Discourse" 38.

¹⁴¹ See Ferziger, *Beyond Sectarianism*, 195-210.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 201-205

¹⁴³ See Masha Lipskar, "The Potential the Rebbe Saw in Me" (interview) July 2014, Johannesburg https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2842569/jewish/The-Potential-the-Rebbe-Saw-in-Me.htm, accessed on 12 January 2022; Rochel Goldman, "Woman of the World - The Feminine Era". Video presentation, undated. https://www.torahcafe.com/mrs-rochel-goldman/woman-of-the-world-the-feminine-era-video_08026bafb.htm, accessed on 12 January 2022.

¹⁴⁴ See [Jewish Family Education | Building a Home According to Torah](#) accessed on 2 January 2022.

Yerushalayim outreach College for Women, Rebbetzin Zipporah Heller.¹⁴⁵ Except for Mizrahi, all speakers address a mixed audience and share the platform with popular Haredi male counterparts such as Rabbis Zev Leff, Zelig Pliskin, Pesach Krohn, and Berel Wein. As in the United States and Israel, it is doubtful these women view themselves as feminists or even female activists. Yet the fact that mixed gender audiences are exposed to powerful female speakers appears to create a special space for women.

4.5 *Global Revivals*

Finally, this dissertation also engages with research that has explored global religious revival movements in general, and the South African Christian revival in particular. This last aspect will be explored primarily in this introductory chapter. Since religious revival is a broad topic, I will confine myself to noting that a significant body of research acknowledges that the modern era not only accommodates revivals but is also partially responsible for producing them. Refuting the secularization theory which postulates that “as modes of social life became more... individualistic, religion fades from view,” Ivor Chipkin and Annie Leatt point to the “return of religion” from the 1960s onwards as evidence that “high levels ... of modernity can coexist with high levels of individual religiosity.”¹⁴⁶ Modernity may even play a greater role than tradition, as Martin Marty and Scott Appleby found: “fundamentalists... demonstrate a closer affinity to modernism than to traditionalism.”¹⁴⁷ Peter Berger, the distinguished sociologist of religion concurs, claiming that the newfound denominations that have resisted secularity are precisely those that have been most successful. In supporting his premise, he notes the late twentieth century rise of “conservative or orthodox or traditional movements ... almost everywhere,” in contrast to the decline of “so-called mainline Protestantism.”¹⁴⁸ This decline has made way for another feature of revivals, the individual-centred religion. David Martin has shown that owing to its “individualistic” approach, revivalist Evangelical movements, active in the United States, Portugal and Hungary, appeal

¹⁴⁵ See <https://www.youtube.com/user/SinaiIndaba>, accessed on 2 January 2022. The videos clearly show mixed audiences.

¹⁴⁶ Ivor Chipkin and Annie Leatt, “Religion and Revival in Post-Apartheid South Africa” *Focus* 62 (2011):39 https://hsf.org.za/publications/focus/focus-62/Ivor%20Chipkin%20and%20Annie%20Leatt_Religion%20and%20Revival.pdf accessed on 27 October 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, “An Interim Report on a Hypothetical Family” in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.) *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1991), 827.

¹⁴⁸ Peter L. Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,” in Peter L Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center 1999, 1-18, 6.

to the “educated young” and to the “middle class.”¹⁴⁹ In this vein, Berger refers to the United States Evangelicals’ “upward social mobility”, and to Opus Dei’s “market friendly openness” that has aided Spain’s economic development.¹⁵⁰ This indicates a symbiotic relationship between religious revivals and independent economic prosperity. The study will touch upon elements of modernism and individuality in the guise of anti-establishmentarianism that has characterized the outreach movements.

Regarding the South African Christian revival movements, at least two primary trends have been examined. The first is sectarianism and the basic features of the sects; and the second is the Christian sects’ position vis-a- vis the national government’s racial policies. In his survey of South African churches, David Goodhew noted that although there was a shrinkage in church attendance in established Protestant and Catholic churches, overall church attendance was not in decline. This is because of a steady but marked revival that has seen the rise of Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical churches.¹⁵¹ In explaining this revival, William Domeris indicates several features of these new movements.¹⁵² The new churches appeal to the young and are led by charismatic leaders who are less puritanical and speak more about G-d’s love, forgiveness, joy, peace and serenity; they treat the social and psychological needs of their parishioners, which fosters an “us versus them mentality”; and they tacitly induce dismissed or disgruntled pastors to build new competitive churches. As we shall see in Johannesburg’s Jewish Orthodox community, membership of the big establishment synagogues has witnessed a steep decline, but at the same time the small congregations (*shtieblach*) where members’ involvement is much greater have mushroomed in the main Jewish suburbs of Johannesburg.¹⁵³

The South African Christian revival also appears to owe its success to the position it adopted towards the racially discriminatory regime that held the reins of power until 1994. Goodhew suggests that one reason for the falling number of mainline churches was their opposition to Apartheid, which drove conservatives to seek a politically neutral gospel.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ David Martin “The Evangelical Upsurge” in Peter L Berger(ed.) *The Desecularization of the World*, 37-49, 40,47-48.

¹⁵⁰ Peter L. Berger, “The Desecularization of the World,” 11.

¹⁵¹ David Goodhew, “Growth and Decline in South Africa's Churches, 1960-91,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 30, Fasc. 3 (Aug. 2000):344-369.

¹⁵² William Domeris, "Revivalist Movements in South African Churches," *Jewish Affairs* 54(1) 1999: 19.

¹⁵³ See Norman Bernhard, “The shtieblisation of the community: good or bad?” *Jewish Affairs* 50(3),1995:77-80. Indeed, Chief Rabbi Harris bemoaned the decentralizing effect of “shtiebl-isation” (Cyril K. Harris, “The Baalei Teshuva Phenomenon and South African Jewry” *Jewish Affairs* 54(1), 1999:67-68).

¹⁵⁴ Goodhew, “Growth and Decline in South Africa's Churches, 1960-91,” 361.

Anthony Balcomb's review of the various Pentecostal churches' past relationships with the Apartheid regime, shows there were varied responses.¹⁵⁵ The most conservative was the "Church of England in South Africa," which broadly supported the government since it believed in the Biblical injunction to submit to authority. This hard-line church also supported the death penalty and opposed abortion and homosexuality. Slightly less loyalty was displayed by the Rhema Church, which shifted from political indifference to a position more accommodating of the ethos of post-1994 South Africa. While still holding conservative views, it has moderated its stance on gay rights and the like. The African Enterprise offered a third response and opposed both Apartheid and violent resistance. Because it consistently branded Apartheid as unnatural, its leaders felt free to apply the same epithet to homosexuality and abortion. This study will briefly allude to the extent to which the Orthodox community, and especially the stricter kiruv organizations, shared elements of the churches' passive acceptance of the Nationalist regime.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, in some interviews with the author, certain members of the outreach organizations conveyed the message, off the record, that Apartheid -- which encouraged ethnic and racial separation and celebrated cultural distinctiveness -- was good for Jewish identity and a boon for kiruv. Furthermore, in August, 1985, at the height of Apartheid, Rabbi Azriel Goldfein in a public speech instructed his audience to show gratitude to the South African government¹⁵⁷

5. Conclusion

Though I have been fastidious in approaching this dissertation as a careful and dispassionate scholar, I cannot claim to be a totally disinterested observer. My late father, Rabbi Mordechai Fachler, was recruited to South Africa as one of the earlier members of the Kollel Yad Shaul.¹⁵⁸ Subsequently he was involved with institutions associated with both the traditionalists and accommodators having served as a dean at the Yeshiva College Campus and as a pulpit rabbi in several large shuls. I myself lived in Johannesburg for 25 years, was educated in various religious institutions before entering Wits University. For the past twenty-three years I have lived in Israel. My background has provided me with the perspective of an insider-outsider.

¹⁵⁵ Anthony Balcomb, "From Apartheid to The New Dispensation: Evangelicals and The Democratization of South Africa", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 34(1) (2004):7-14.

¹⁵⁶ For a discussion of the rabbinate's response to Apartheid, see Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 36-46.

¹⁵⁷ Available at <https://torahdownloads.com/shiur-1029508.html> . Accessed on 2 January 2022. On the other hand, Dennis Isaacs declared "the Orthodox rabbinate was [not] deafeningly silent to the evils of Apartheid" (Dennis Isaacs, *Praise God in His Sanctuary* (Pinetown, 2000), Preface).

¹⁵⁸ For his impact on South African Jewry see Dana Kaplan, "South African Orthodoxy Today," 77.

Undoubtedly, my background provided a degree of familiarity with the more fine-grained distinctions within Orthodox Johannesburg that may have eluded an outside. Similarly, my background provided an unusual degree of access to key individuals and institutions. Many of those I interviewed are personal acquaintances, while some I met for the first time at the interview. My knowledge of my subjects notwithstanding, I have attempted to offer an account that is objective and fair. When using material derived from these oral history interviews, I have tried as much as possible to find corroborative documentary evidence. It is my sincere hope that this is reflected in this completed work.

This dissertation relies primarily on untapped archival sources from the Rochlin Archives at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, private collections of papers, oral history interviews, contemporary reports, articles and letters from the South African Jewish press, and audio lectures of those involved in the traditionalist and innovator camps. It also makes liberal use of Johannesburg's only Hebrew journal, *Barkai*, which has not been systemically used by other scholars. Owing to the fact that the contributors to this monthly were keenly aware that the readership was confined mainly to fellow intellectuals, they appear to have felt freer to express their views. This in turn provides us with seemingly candid commentary on contemporary issues. These sources, along with the academic literature cited above, guide this study and serve its primary aim of piecing together, as accurately as possible, a narrative history of Johannesburg Orthodoxy that provides fresh insights into the past. This study also aims to restore recognition to the many players and organizations whose contributions, positive and negative, have been suppressed, overlooked or forgotten. Secondly and importantly it seeks to add another dimension to the study and variability of Orthodox Jewry worldwide while also adding to our knowledge of South African Jewish history. In the broadest sense it also contributes to further understanding of the universal phenomenon of religious revival movements and their relationship with modernity.

CHAPTER TWO: RABBI ISAAC KOSSOWSKY AND THE IDEOLOGICAL DIVIDE IN JOHANNESBURG ORTHODOXY

1. Introduction

In 1924, hopes were high that Chief Rabbi Judah L. Landau's successful establishment of a Provisional Federation of Synagogues would strengthen and unify the Johannesburg Beth Din. A year later, in 1925 events took a dramatic turn with the unexpected death of the joint head rabbinical judge, Dayan Moishel Friedman, at age 63. The Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation not only lost their spiritual guide but also their representative at the Beth Din. Unprepared to have Landau exercise exclusive jurisdiction over this rabbinical court, the congregation applied to the Provisional Federation to assist it with covering the costs of a new rabbi, or *rav*, the Hebrew and Yiddish title for rabbi preferred by the congregation. They wanted this *rav* to be brought from Eastern Europe and granted with authority over the Beth Din equal to that of the Chief Rabbi, as had been the case with their deceased spiritual leader.¹ Offended by these demands, the UHC saw no need to assist with the costs of a new rabbi even if he were to occupy a seat on the Beth Din that was located at the UHC. They considered themselves unbound by the 1915 arrangement with Friedman and regarded their rabbi as eminently qualified to lead the entire community unaided. In fact, they opposed making any financial contributions to the nascent Federation, surmising that Landau's services to that organization was akin to fair payment on their part. These disputes notwithstanding, a permanent Federation of Synagogues soon came into being with the UHC representative elected as its president, and delegates representing Berea, Jeppestown, and the JOHC comprising most of the remaining executive members. The enhanced status of a permanent Federation failed to resolve the question of the Beth Din's centralized authority and as late as September 1928, the JOHC was insisting they would only accord this court full recognition once their prospective spiritual leader was appointed as its head.² Further exacerbating the Beth Medrash's dispute with the UHC was the former's plans to move its premises to Saratoga Avenue in Doornfontein, which already had its fair share of congregations, and whose population was already well served by the nearby Wolmarans Street synagogue. When the Federation dismissed the UHC's request to compel the JOHC to drop its building plans and formally join the UHC at its premises, where a hall would be provided for it, things came to a head, and the UHC seceded from the FOS. Over the next few years, the JOHC, contending for the title of Johannesburg's most prestigious congregation,

¹Mazabow, *The Quest for Community*, 167.

² *Ibid.*, 168.

erected an ornate new building, procured the services of the world famous cantor Berele Chagy, and appointed the esteemed Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky from Wołkowysk, Poland, as *rav* of its Beth Medrash. Seeing no other recourse, the UHC in 1933 reversed itself and re-joined the FOS.³ As a condition for re-joining, Landau was officially appointed Chief Rabbi of the newly expanded Federation of Synagogues of the Transvaal, while Kossowsky served as *Rosh Beth Din* and *rav* of the FOS. This move probably averted acrimonious competition while introducing some modicum of unity to the Orthodox Jewish community.

2. *Landau and Kossowsky: Differing approaches*

Based on the writings and correspondence of Kossowsky, it appears the new Rosh Beth Din introduced a novel type of Orthodoxy into Johannesburg. His approach would vie with the approach that had previously held sway in that city and would eventually undergird a future religious revival. At the time of Kossowsky's appointment in the early 1930s, Landau had already led his congregation for three decades, the last two of which he was the preeminent religious figure in Johannesburg. The community by then was probably used to his open-minded approach to Orthodoxy. Comfortable with both the Yeshiva world and that of the Jewish enlightenment or *Haskalah*, this university educated rabbi differed significantly from his new rival, whose exposure to the world beyond eastern Europe and its yeshivas was limited. As far back as 1900 upon ascending his first pulpit in Manchester, Landau delivered an exposition on the contemporary role of a rabbi. He declared that the role required one to leave the ghetto walls and become *au fait* with the new generation and its modern requirements.⁴ In lectures subsequently delivered in Johannesburg and in his conduct and leadership in various fields, most especially his role on the Board of Education, it appears that he understood the expectations and standards of the bulk of the Johannesburg Jewish population, and strove to implant a broad view of Judaism. He apparently also saw himself

³ *Ibid*, 232. In a retrospective article written for the FOS's monthly, Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz in 1959 made the tentative suggestion that the FOS was formed primarily to bear the costs of importing Kossowsky. While not entirely accurate it does show that he viewed Kossowsky's appointment as a watershed event, and as shall be shown this appears to be a valid assessment. (see Gerald Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon: The South African Rabbinate of Rabbi Dr. L.I. Rabinowitz as Reflected in His Public Addresses, Sermons and Writings*, (Johannesburg: G. Mazabow, 1999), 239 citing *Federation Chronicle*, January 1959); see also Rose Norwich "Beth Medrash Hagadol," 43.

⁴ See Judah Leo Landau, *The modern rabbi, his duties and sphere of influence: English translation of the inaugural sermon delivered in German* (Manchester: North Manchester Synagogue, n.d.).
<https://dp.la/item/5c623106459e63bd5d25d129a3cd6e16>

responsible for all members of the Johannesburg community, regardless of their level of observance.⁵

This contrasted sharply with the approach of Kossowsky. The latter appears to have viewed his role as a continuation of his position in Poland, with its strong emphasis on a strict and exclusively Orthodox lifestyle, with only slight adjustments for the lax level of the Johannesburg community. These diametrically opposed views would invariably lead to tense conflicts placing Kossowsky at odds with the establishment, who at that time appeared more comfortable with Landau's approach. As we have seen in the introduction, this clash of outlooks was not unprecedented in world Jewry, and represented divergence between what we have called the accommodators and the traditionalists, with Landau representing the first camp and Kossowsky the second. This chapter explores their early conflicts, pausing at critical junctures to reflect on their long-term significance.

3. *Kossowsky's First Impressions*

Kossowsky's arrival in South Africa in 1933 marked the first time a classically-trained Lithuanian Torah scholar and an internationally acknowledged Torah sage with a scrupulously religious personality held a senior rabbinic position in Johannesburg.⁶ Certainly, he enhanced his congregation's prestige, but it is unclear whether the congregants, let alone the community at large, was ready for this radically different style of spiritual leadership. Contemporary accounts suggest an uneasy relationship between the rabbi and his congregation. While Johannesburg provided Kossowsky a safe haven from an increasingly ominous Europe, his new community's limited engagement with rabbinic scholarship appears to have troubled him.⁷ Soon after his arrival he quickly discovered the gulf in religious observance between his new position and that which he had previously occupied in Poland. In a letter to his brother-in-law, the world renowned sage Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, concerning a *get* [Jewish divorce document] signed by someone who kept his shop open on the Sabbath (conduct which would normally render the signer invalid as a witness), Kossowsky wondered whether an exception could be made owing to local circumstances. "Desecration of the Sabbath is so rampant," he reported, that no one "would even consider it a disqualifying

⁵ See Sowden, "Chief Rabbi J.L. Landau," 32-33.

⁶ There were several individuals and small community rabbis who were alumni of well-known Lithuanian Yeshivas, but none held the same position of seniority as did Kossowsky. Rabbi Moishel Friedman, from the little we know of him arrived at a much younger age and likely did not gain the same reputation in Eastern Europe as did Kossowsky. (See Kaplan and Robertson, *Founders and Followers*, 99).

⁷ See Simon, "Orthodox Judaism in South Africa," 191, where Simon states that "Jewish scholarship was almost non-existent".

factor in a witness.”⁸ A year later he must have been even less pleased to discover that some synagogues had a loose relationship with tradition. In 1934, the Yeoville Synagogue resisted calls to remove female members from its mixed choir, and only conceded to an exclusively male choir for the smaller Sabbath morning services whose participants tended to be more observant than the larger Friday evening gathering.⁹ As a recent arrival Kossowsky must have wondered how the Chief Rabbi, who had direct jurisdiction over this synagogue, tolerated such breach of traditional Orthodoxy.¹⁰ An admirer of his, who at one time served as his English-language tutor, recalled Kossowsky’s disappointment with the overall state of affairs:¹¹

South Africa was a disillusionment to Kossowsky. He found neither the reverence nor the learning that he had expected here ... He laboured to move the community more nearly to the pattern of East European Jewry he had left but it was an unavailing struggle. Sociologically South African Jewry belonged to a different world.¹²

Indeed, Kossowsky probably struggled to establish a support base in Johannesburg. In Poland, he had been one of the heads of the ultraorthodox non-Zionist Agudath Israel movement (“the Aguda”), whose traditional *Cheder* [religious primary school] and Yeshiva system, with its resistance to secular education, he considered ideal.¹³ At that time, however, Johannesburg did not have its own Aguda affiliate. The only viable ally that existed in the city was the local branch of the religious Zionist Mizrachi movement (“Mizrachi”) which was founded in Europe in 1902 by Rabbi Isaac Reines, and which believed religion should sit at

⁸ *Ibid*, 176 citing *Ahiezzer*, Part 3 Chapter 25. A *get* is used in a Jewish civil divorce, which requires two valid witnesses.

⁹ Gus Saron, “The religious and congregational scene” (unpublished) cited in Mazabow, *Quest for Community*, 204, n. 41

¹⁰ Ironically, Landau, upon becoming rabbi of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation had banned mixed choirs at his own congregation (see Simon “Orthodox Judaism in South Africa,” 94).

¹¹ Gerald Mazabow, “Great Leaders in an Illustrious South African Past: Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky – the Embodiment of a Memory,” *Jewish Tradition*, Pesach [Passover] 2007, 12.

¹² Edgar Bernstein, *My Judaism, My Jews* (Johannesburg Exclusive Books, 1962), 32. This assessment is supported by the long-time director of the Board of Deputies (see Saron “The religious and congregational scene,” (unpublished) cited in Mazabow *Quest for Community*, 204, n. 41). Similarly, Yaacov Rubik, editor of *Barkai* asserted that Kossowsky was unable to find a “synthesis between the old and new worlds” (“The Gaon Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky,” *Barkai*, October 1951,46). Compare to Louis I Rabinowitz who offered a rosier assessment claiming that Kossowsky “strengthened the right wing of Orthodox Jewry” (Louis I. Rabinowitz, “On the Religious Scene,” *Jewish Affairs* May 1960) and asserted that Kossowsky was a “symbol of the consolidation of the community” (*Federation Chronicle* September 1978: 22).

¹³ See YouTube video “Lea Chagy Interview re Kossowsky Family,”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdtGlyV2bHw> accessed on 16 November 2021. For Agudath Israel’s political activism regarding its educational institutions see Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania*, 256-260; Isaac Kossowsky, “On Jewish Education in this Country,” (Hebrew), *Barkai*, November- December 1937, 1.

the core of Zionism.¹⁴ Judging from his writings Kossowsky harboured reservations about Mizrachi's national traditional curriculum, whose blend of religious studies with Zionism and secular subjects he considered inferior to the *Cheder* system.¹⁵ Nevertheless and despite apparently having no previous contact with Mizrachi in Europe he joined the nascent South African Mizrachi movement. Boosted by a visit by World Mizrachi head Rabbi Meir Berlin in 1931, the local Mizrachi was then attracting many community rabbis and a trickling of Lithuanian immigrants drawn to its religious message.¹⁶ Having had past ties with the JOHC and its former rabbi, the movement welcomed the new rabbi's alliance with it and appointed him honorary life president.¹⁷ In turn the honouree gave his support and mentorship to its youth affiliate, the Young Mizrachi Association which would go on to claim to be the only organization committed to spreading Torah values.¹⁸ Armed with these allies Kossowsky engaged in a head-on and somewhat provocative battle against the establishment, and at times against Landau himself. Rebuffing an implied accusation in the Yiddish press that he had not adequately exercised his influence in Johannesburg, the apparently easily offended Kossowsky argued he had single-handedly fought for Sabbath observance, family purity, and dietary laws.¹⁹ As examples he claimed sole responsibility for ending the purported practice of permitting kosher butchers to open their stores on Saturday evenings from six to nine o'clock in desecration of Sabbath in summer, and for halting the practice of accepting converts in return for payment.²⁰ Although begrudgingly acknowledging Landau's assistance, he contended that the Chief Rabbi, after being apprised of the problems and the solutions he proposed, merely quipped that he had been waiting for someone like Kossowsky to set things

¹⁴ Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania*, 115. In addition to the movement, Reines established a popular Yeshiva in Lida, Belarus, where vigorous religious studies were taught alongside a secular syllabus.

¹⁵ Isaac Kossowsky "On Jewish Education in this Country," 1.

¹⁶ Mazabow *The Quest for Community*, 148.

¹⁷ See Mazabow "Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky," 12; In 1919, a short-lived attempt to establish a Mizrachi branch in Johannesburg was chaired by Rabbi Moishel Friedman, and it used the Fox Street Beth Hamedrash as its social hall (J. Green, "Highlights, Incidents, Memories," *South African Jewish Observer* December 1962: 2).

¹⁸ See Green "Highlights, Incidents, Memories," 2.

¹⁹ Handwritten letter from Kossowsky to the editor of a Yiddish periodical in South Africa, titled "What does the Rabbi Do?" published in Isaac Kossowsky and Jacob Kossowsky-Shachor, *The Book of the Footsteps of Isaac: Essays, Speeches, Treatises and Letters* (Hebrew), (Bnei Brak: n.p., 2007), 307-308. From this and other letters it appears Kossowsky was zealous of his position, easily taking offence at anyone criticising his actions. Coming from a position where his words were treated with reverence he apparently was unable, as Bernstein suggested, to accept the laity's opposition.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 208, 211. It is emphasised that these are uncorroborated allegations and in the absence of Landau's response, they cannot be taken at face value. They do however indicate Kossowsky's unhappiness with his colleague.

straight.²¹ This thinly veiled criticism of Landau reflected a tense relationship between the two spiritual leaders.

4. *Kossowsky and the Educational Establishment*

In 1936 the Chief Rabbi co-opted Kossowsky as an executive member of the South African Board of Jewish Education. The Board, whose founding was inspired by Landau, and was the result of a joint project of the South African Zionist Federation and the Jewish Board of Deputies in 1928 to regulate Jewish education, required representation from the Beth Din.²² According to the Rosh Beth Din, he only agreed to join after Landau assured him he would not be impeded by the Board's more "progressive" members.²³ Consequently, feeling he had Landau's support, he put forward a vociferous demand at the Board's 1937 conference that all Hebrew teachers be fully observant, and that the Board withdraw its plans to appoint an American Conservative rabbi as its director.²⁴ Upset at the substance and tone of these comments, the Board's council responded by ejecting the rabbi from the hall. Protesting this perceived insult to the Federation's *rav*, prominent rabbis, reverends, and teachers purportedly departed the premises and resigned their positions.²⁵ Following this incident rumours circulated that Landau, who was absent when Kossowsky spoke, blamed the latter's alienating attitude for strengthening the Reform movement.²⁶ Affronted by this accusation, Kossowsky wrote to the Chief Rabbi asking him whether he had voiced such criticism and if so how he could have done so when Landau himself had publicly enjoyed cordial relations with a recently arrived Reform "rabbi."²⁷ The next day, after Landau admitted making the claim, Kossowsky penned another angry letter expressing disappointment with his colleague for siding with the "ignorant and brazen committee" that had dishonoured the Rosh Beth Din and desecrated God's name.²⁸ Apparently in no mood to engage with Kossowsky, whose

²¹ *Ibid.* 212. Here too, these allegations must be treated with caution.

²² Mazabow, *The Quest for Community*, 178, 182.

²³ Isaac Kossowsky, "Why I left the Board of Education" (Hebrew), *Barkai*, January-February, 1938, 7.

²⁴ Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon*, 268-269; I. Kossowsky "Why I left the Board of Education," 6.; Letter from I. Kossowsky to the Editor of *Afrikaner Yiddische Zeitung* published in Kossowsky and Kossowsky-Shachor, *The Book of the Footsteps of Isaac*, 309.

²⁵ Ben Shmaryahu, "Is this Torah, and this its reward?" (Hebrew), *Barkai* October-November 1937: 8. While this version of events is uncorroborated, it has been verified that the subsequent dissatisfaction with the Board's leadership led to the resignation of its director, David Mierowsky (see Katz, *History of Jewish Education*, 414.)

²⁶ See letters from Kossowsky to Landau dated 18 and 19 October, 1937, published in Kossowsky and Kossowsky-Shachor, *Footsteps of Isaac*, 309-312.

²⁷ Letter from Kossowsky to Landau dated 18 October, 1937, emphasis original. Dora Sowden, a great admirer of Landau, has confirmed the truth of this accusation: "He made no secret of his opposition to Reform Judaism, yet he treated the head of the Reform movement in South Africa, Rabbi Dr. M. C. Weiler as a friend" (See Sowden "'Chief Rabbi J.L. Landau," 31).

²⁸ Letter from Kossowsky to Landau dated 19 October, 1937.

impulsive style he despaired of, the Chief Rabbi declined to respond.²⁹ After two and a half months of silence, and probably feeling ignored, Kossowsky took to warning Landau that his failure to take action would compel him to resign from the Federation, and for which he would hold Landau personally responsible.³⁰ Eventually in June 1938 a brokered agreement was reached in terms of which Kossowsky rescinded his resignation and the Board committed to appointing a director affiliated with traditional Judaism.³¹ For the moment Kossowsky seemed to have ensured education would remain in Orthodox hands, but as we shall later see, his actions at the 1937 conference would not be quickly forgotten.

5. *Gradual Steps to Increased Observance*

While the Rosh Beth Din was busy battling the establishment and trying to turn it more traditionalist, his allies at Mizrachi, and other small sized organizations, were making slow but gradual inroads. In 1935 Young Mizrachi inaugurated the Hashomer Hadati youth movement, which decades later would be renamed Bnei Akiva.³² By 1938 it was attracting interested but not fully observant members from the working and lower middle classes who attended study groups and were diligent in trying to improve their practical observance.³³ It was at this time too that the movement made its first tentative steps at building its own community which initially took the form of a separate Sabbath afternoon service held at the Doornfontein Talmud Torah. It attracted members from across Johannesburg who would walk to the synagogue to attend.³⁴ In 1937 the Johannesburg branch of Chevrat Shomrey Shabbat [Sabbath Observant Society] made its first appearance. It was founded by Elchanan Griekst, an East European Jewish merchant, and while its membership included those of Lithuanian stock, among its ranks were also recently arrived Orthodox German immigrants,

²⁹ Unfortunately, we do not have Landau's direct response but in letters written by Landau to Jacob Rubik it appears that he was a little exasperated by the impulsive comments of the Rosh Beth Din (See Landau Archives, Series 3 (Correspondence))

³⁰ Letter from Kossowsky to Landau dated 2 January, 1938.

³¹ "Uniting Forces for the Sake of Hebrew Education in Africa" (communicated letter) (Hebrew), *Barkai*. June-July. 1938: 18.

³² Green, "Highlights, Incidents, Memories" p.2; Hashomer Hadati was the official name for Mizrachi's youth movement in Europe and it was founded in 1929. Bnei Akiva, on the other hand was the youth movement in Israel founded by members of Hapoel HaMizrachi also in 1929. Circa 1950 the movements merged, and worldwide the joint movement was henceforth referred to as Bnei Akiva (See Kelly Modlin, "A History of the Bnei Akiva Youth Movement in South Africa" 2003 <https://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/youth-movements/history/modlink/index.htm>, accessed on 16 November 2021).

³³ Green, "Highlights, Incidents, Memories" p.17.

³⁴ Zelik Sher "Our Shul," in S.A. *Bnei Akiva 1936-1956* (Johannesburg: Bnei Akiva Hanhala, 1956) 18. Later as we shall document, a fully independent congregation was formed.

who, purportedly, were punctilious about their Sabbath observance.³⁵ This society would encourage business establishments to close on Saturdays by offering monetary inducements to do so.³⁶ Supported by the “well-known intellectual” Harry Lourie, it seems to have failed to attract any local rabbinic endorsements.³⁷ Three years later, another group dedicated to Sabbath observance was formed in Johannesburg going by the name “Chevra Lema’an Hashabbat” [Society for the Sake of Shabbat].³⁸ While the latter two societies eventually faded from view, they appear to have made some impact at a time when the community was still far removed from a revival of any sort.

6. *The Effects of the Second World War on the Establishment and the Traditionalists*

In 1939 with the outbreak of the Second World War, Kossowsky feared for the welfare of two of his sons trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe. In 1941 both managed to escape and his younger son, Rabbi Michel Yechiel Kossowsky, together with his family, joined his father in South Africa.³⁹ The latter immediately became involved in the community and was appointed president of the Mizrachi Organization.⁴⁰ Like his father, he was steeped exclusively in the East European Yeshiva tradition and had no knowledge of English, but realizing the need to accommodate himself to the new environment, he enrolled at Wits University, where, after apparently starting from scratch, he eventually obtained a

³⁵ “Chevrath Shomrey Shabbat” (Hebrew) *Barkai* October-November 1937; In Egon Schoeman, interview with the author, (Bet Shemesh, February 2020), Schoeman provided anecdotes of German Jews who resigned from their jobs upon learning they would have to work on the Sabbath.

³⁶ *Ibid.* Unfortunately, the short article is vague about the operation of this society, but it does mention that Griekst personally assisted people to observe the Sabbath.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Harry Lourie was well known as an intellectual, who founded the Herzl Zionist Society as well as the South African Board of Jewish Education (see “Harry Lourie – Pioneer Zionist and a founder of the Record,” *Zionist Record* (Supplement) 21 November 1958, p.16).; Y. Meiri “The Jewish Soul” (Hebrew) *Barkai* January-February 1938: 13. Meiri notes that the local rabbis lacked the courage to speak about the “rampant” desecration of the Sabbath and he urged spiritual leaders to support this society.

³⁸ Letter from Zvi Ginsberg to the editor of *Barkai* (Hebrew), *Barkai* June 1957, p. 16. Not much is known about this organization, but the letter writer claimed to have been initially supported by some rabbis. There is some evidence that this organization was also involved in campaigning for Shabbat observance and complained about public desecration. Indeed, a disparaging reference was made at a Board of Education conference insinuating that Lemaan HaShabbat had drawn up blacklists of Sabbath desecrators (See “Broadly Traditional or Strictly Traditional: Heated Debate at All Evening Session,” *Zionist Record*, 9 March 1945: 11).

³⁹ Mazabow, “Kossowsky,” p. 13. Unlike his father, who was life president, his son, Rabbi Michel, played a much more active role and also served as vice president of the Zionist Federation.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

doctorate.⁴¹ At the beginning of 1942, the Chief Rabbi took ill, leaving the elder Kossowsky to share the Beth Din's bench with two likeminded yeshiva trained Dayanim.⁴²

Summing up his first decade of service in a letter to the editor of a Yiddish journal, he began by acknowledging his many detractors. He believed the reason he was disliked was due to what he considered a principled refusal to adapt to the low state of observance. While accusing the modern "rabbis" of making peace with Sabbath desecration, non-kosher consumption, intermarriage, and the failure to enforce Jewish laws of divorce, he praised himself and his fellow *rabbanim* for raising their voice in protest.⁴³ As a traditionalist, he seemed to have misconstrued the accommodators' non-confrontational approach for sympathy with the public's non-adherence to strict Halacha. This in turn led him to compare the accommodators, somewhat hyperbolically, to false prophets seeking to curry favour with their flock.⁴⁴ In contradistinction, he branded himself a true prophet who fearlessly admonished his congregation.⁴⁵ This stark analogy may have resonated with some of the journal's readership; it is doubtful it appealed to the community at large. Most likely it demonstrated that Kossowsky was not in sync with the *zeitgeist*. This may not have impinged on his status as spiritual leader of the Beth Medrash, but arguably it disqualified him from ever becoming Chief Rabbi. This created problems when Landau succumbed to illness in August 1942 and the search for a successor became urgent.⁴⁶

After unsuccessfully searching for a candidate from the United States who could replace Landau, and who would share his more modern minded tendencies, the UHC council

⁴¹ "S.A. Jewry Mourns Loss of its Orthodox Leader," *South African Jewish Observer* April 1964: 1; Jacob Rubik, "Rabbi Dr. Michael Kossowsky" (Hebrew), *Barkai*, 30 April, 1964: 1. Unlike the accommodators who received their degrees at a younger age and tended to be more worldly, there is no indication that obtaining his doctorate affected Michel Kossowsky's traditionalist worldview.

⁴² Dennis Isaacs, "Our Chief Rabbis: Past and Present" *Jewish Tradition*, Shavuot 5764: 8. As mentioned Dayanim are rabbinical judges. The associate judges were Yisrael Soloveitchik and Shlomo Rosenzweig, both of whom had immigrated from Lithuania. Soloveitchik was considered ultra-Orthodox and was associated with the tiny local branch of the non-Zionist Agudath Israel Organization (Menachem Zimmerman, "In Memory of a Sage" [(Hebrew) *Barkai*, April 1951: 26]. His appointment as a Dayan was endorsed by the then ailing Chief Rabbi (Landau archives, Series 3, Correspondence). Rosenzweig, on the other hand, was married to a South African, served as a community rabbi and appears to have adopted a more moderate approach (see Juan-Paul Burke "A man of the old school," *Jewish Life* June 2019: 18-22).

⁴³ I. Kossowsky, "What has the *Rav* done?," 209. The word "rabbi" is transliterated into Hebrew in the letter, and was deliberately written as such to show its Anglo origins and to distinguish the role of an English styled rabbi from the more traditional (Hebrew/Yiddish) *rav* (plural: *rabbanim*) whose main purpose was to improve the religious observance of their flock.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* As shall be shown later, while the accommodators recognized the reality of non-observance they did not in any way approve of it. Rather they advocated a gradual approach to effect change.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ "Chief Rabbi Juda L. Landau of Johannesburg Dies at Seventy-seven," *JTA* 27 August 1942, <https://www.jta.org/1942/08/27/archive/chief-rabbi-juda-l-landau-of-johannesburg-dies-at-seventy-seven>;

turned in 1943 to Rabbi Dr. Louis I. Rabinowitz, minister of the Cricklewood Synagogue in London and invited him to visit Johannesburg.⁴⁷ The university educated 36-year-old rabbi, who had been recommended by Britain's Chief Rabbi Hertz, received the invitation while serving as principal chaplain to the Eighth Army and would not take up his new post until two years later.⁴⁸

While the establishment UHC found itself temporarily leaderless, Hashomer Hadati, which made up the nascent traditionalist camp, was facing a bigger crisis. Depleted of its male leadership, many of whom were enlisted soldiers deployed in North Africa, the religious Zionist movement was facing the prospect of collapse.⁴⁹ Driven largely by its female staff and assisted by Kossowsky and his son, the movement managed to return from the brink. By 1943 it even managed to secure a permanent home for its shul.⁵⁰ At the beginning, many of its members were unskilled in leading the prayers and the Torah reading, so that special training had to be provided in these fields.⁵¹ Complementing the prayer services, shiurim [religious lessons] and lectures were delivered by rabbis Michel Kossowsky, A.H. Lapin and Dr. Harry Abt.⁵² These small and tentative steps in the midst of a war marked the genesis of a congregation later to be known as the Bnei Akiva Shul, which pioneered the idea of youth services around the city and was the first of its kind to provide an informal setting where prayers were conducted exclusively by its members.⁵³ As we shall see later, it became a bastion for traditionalist rabbis and was pivotal in the early stages of the revival.

⁴⁷ Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon* p.4. It is interesting that the Council initially preferred a candidate from the United States rather than from Britain to lead its Anglo style community. Ironically, it would discover two decades later, with the importation of a number of American rabbis, that the latter tended to be less disciplined than their English counterparts; David Sher, "Johannesburg's Mother Synagogue – 126 Years Young," *Jewish Affairs* Rosh Hashanah 2013: 36.

⁴⁸ Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon* p. 4, 5. Since leaving the Od Witwatersrand Congregation, Hertz, as Chief Rabbi of the British Empire had visited South Africa as part of his pastoral duties to the colonies and appears to have kept in touch. Mazabow implies that Hertz was not the first person to put forward Rabinowitz's candidature even if he warmly endorsed it. Nevertheless, Rabinowitz is quoted as saying that Hertz convinced him to take the position (*Ibid.*, .5 citing *South African Jewish Times* (hereinafter "SAJT") 17 November, 1944). As we shall see Kossowsky was under the impression that Hertz was Rabinowitz' chief promoter.

⁴⁹ Miriam Caplan, "The War Period," in S.A. *Bnei Akiva 1936-1956*, 15.

⁵⁰ Caplan, "The War Period"; Sher, "Our Shul". The shul was housed in the Reb Moishel Talmud Torah which was attached to Kossowsky's Beth Medrash Hagodol.

⁵¹ Sher "Our Shul".

⁵² Miriam Caplan "The War Period"

⁵³ See Sher, "Our Shul". In 1956 the writer claimed that Bnei Akiva was the only shul in town that ran a "full" service by its youth. This would change in later decades where the big shuls would offer a full complement of youth or alternate services which were affiliated with the parent shul.

7. *Kossowsky and Rabinowitz: An Uneasy Relationship*

At the beginning of May 1944, the UHC passed a resolution appointing Rabinowitz chief minister of its congregation.⁵⁴ A month later, the UHC council discomfited Kossowsky by informing him he would have to relinquish sole control of the Beth Din and share power with Rabinowitz as he had done with the former Chief Rabbi.⁵⁵ This succeeded in planting dissension between Kossowsky and Rabinowitz before the latter had even assumed his position. In an apparently desperate and impulsive attempt to thwart the UHC's decision, Kossowsky penned a long and bitter missive to Israel's Chief Rabbi.⁵⁶ He reported that after notifying the UHC that they had no right to offer Rabinowitz the same position Landau had held, they had replied that since the Beth Din preceded the Federation's founding, and was housed in the Great Synagogue, it was within their purview to decide who would control it.⁵⁷ Kossowsky told Herzog he disputed this interpretation, since he felt the Beth Din was the preserve of the entire Federation of which he was its exclusive *rav*, and that the UHC was only one of its constituent members. He admitted feeling distraught and confided that the only reason he avoided seceding from the Federation and taking his fellow Dayanim with him was to avoid breaking up the Orthodox community when Reform was becoming popular. He regarded the prospective Chief Rabbi to be lacking in the knowledge and experience that he and his Beth Din possessed.⁵⁸ Conceding that perhaps community officials had urged Rabinowitz to seek such a position, he argued that they were misguided and had placed too much stock on their candidate's superior command of English and ability to enhance Jewish-gentile relations. He suggested Herzog redress this imbalance by sending letters directing Johannesburg's leadership, Rabinowitz himself, or Chief Rabbi Hertz (whom he surmised was Rabinowitz's chief sponsor) to rescind the restructuring of the Beth Din. He mentioned that he had already tried pressing Rabinowitz's father-in-law, Rabbi Avigdor Amiel, the then Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, to instruct his son-in-law to withdraw from the Beth Din. Reminiscent of the testy exchanges with Landau regarding the Board of Education, he

⁵⁴ Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon*, 4 citing *Zionist Record* 5 May, 1944.

⁵⁵ See letter from Kossowsky to Rabbi Isaac Herzog dated 2 June 1946, published in Kossowsky and Kossowsky-Shachor *Footsteps of Isaac*, 203-206.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* While Kossowsky appears to have acted impetuously, it was presumably humbling to contrast the esteemed position he held in Poland where he was recognized for his outstanding Talmudic scholarship with having to share the platform with someone who had not been educated outside Britain and whose scholarship he did not respect.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* He also explained the reason the previous arrangement was acceptable was because he was a newcomer and Landau had been Chief Rabbi and Dayan for many years. Though he also considered Landau his inferior in Talmudic knowledge, he felt Landau's experience and scholarship justified his senior position on the court.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Despite his reservations he nevertheless conceded that Rabinowitz could sit as an associate Dayan with no special privileges.

concluded his letter by insinuating that this perceived slight was nothing less than a disgrace to the Torah and its worthy enforcers. As a traditionalist, for whom Talmudic scholarship was the sole qualifier for leading the Beth Din, he seemed unable to comprehend, after more than a decade with Johannesburg Jewry, that its laity considered other attributes equally important and may deem his refusal to respect their wishes an act of hubris. Kossowsky's expectation that Amiel would jeopardize his relationship with his daughter and son-in-law and actively intervene on his own behalf appears, moreover, to betray a combination of political naiveté and exaggerated self-importance. There is no indication that either Amiel or Herzog acceded to their correspondent's wishes. We do know the community was apprised of Kossowsky's grumblings and decided to defer the question of Rabinowitz's position on the Beth Din until the parties could resolve it to their mutual satisfaction.⁵⁹

On 8 February 1945, Rabinowitz arrived in Johannesburg where he addressed an informal reception at the Carlton Hotel.⁶⁰ On the 24th of that month, Mizrachi invited the new rabbi to address its second biennial conference. After stating he was not an official member of Mizrachi but a great admirer of its works, the newcomer startled his hosts by criticizing a tabled motion calling on the Zionist Federation to curb the irreligious activities and policy of the avowedly Marxist Hashomer Hatzair [The Young Guard] youth movement.⁶¹ Labelling the resolution "ill advised" he told his audience:

It is necessary for us to realize that these people work in accordance with principles which they feel to be right. We think some of their principles are wrong, but they do not. The Mizrachi must have constructive work with its own camp. It must assert itself through devotion to its own principles rather than through interference with others.⁶²

This public admonition and call for tolerance failed to persuade delegates to reject the resolution, and after they were assured it had the support of Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, the head of the Mizrachi party in Israel, they unanimously adopted it.⁶³ The resolution's far less tolerant sponsor, Isaac Kossowsky, was also unlikely enamoured by Rabinowitz's implied rebuke. It

⁵⁹ Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon*, 189, citing *Zionist Record*, 30 June 1944.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 119, citing a report from *SAJT*, 2 March 1945. For a brief description of Hashomer Hatzair, see Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* p.117; See also Beryl Baleson, "Facts and Figures of South African Zionist Youth Movements" (<https://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/youth-movements/groups/balesonb/index.htm>, accessed on 16 November 2021).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 119, quoting a report from *SAJT* 2 March 1945. See also Irwin Manoim, *Mavericks inside the Tent*, (Juta, 2019), 303 (provisional) where he describes Rabinowitz as having given Kossowsky a "public slapping down".

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 120.

probably reconfirmed his suspicions that its speaker lacked the deference owed to a senior colleague. On a substantive level the incident served to contrast the differences between the new rabbi and his open-mindedness, and Kossowsky's hard-line dogmatism.

8. *Kossowsky versus the Board of Education, Round 2.*

A week later, the Board of Education held its seventh conference with Kossowsky and his son proving again how unyielding they could be.⁶⁴ Following an eloquent speech by the soon to be inaugurated Rabinowitz, who pleaded for an education based on “traditional background and sanctity,” the proceedings quickly turned contentious.⁶⁵ Opening the debate, Michel Kossowsky, the then-president of the Mizrachi Organization, insisted that the overwhelmingly irreligious Board, should provide education on “*strictly* national-traditional” lines and not “broadly national-traditional lines” as proposed.⁶⁶ He argued that the qualifier “broadly” would water down the “national traditional” character rendering it neither national nor traditional. Isaac Kossowsky, representing the Federation of Synagogues, protested the Board's proposal “to render its services to any institution that requests it,” arguing it would leave the doors open to supporting the Reform Congregation or the non-Zionist Yiddish Folk School.⁶⁷ In his view, these institutions ought to have been excluded for failing to meet the Board's mandate of being both national and traditional, by which he understood as synonymous with Orthodox and Zionist respectively.⁶⁸ Echoing the Rosh Beth Din's words, the Mizrachi Youth's delegate, Mr. C. Gordon, “demanded” the Board provide a “real education” and exclude those who did not “educate towards a Jewish way of life.”⁶⁹ These various representations made by the Orthodox spokespersons succeeded in uniting the delegates from the various factions of the Zionist Federation and the Board of Deputies in opposition to them. Arguing, inter alia, that the rabbis' statements amounted to “clerical domination”;⁷⁰ that strict Orthodoxy was contrary to “the accepted broad principles of Jewish

⁶⁴ See Mazabow, *Reach for the Moon*, 269. The conference took place over Saturday night and Sunday, 2-3 March 1945.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ “Broadly Traditional or Strictly Traditional: Heated Debate at All Evening Session,” *Zionist Record*, 9 March 1945, 11 (emphasis original). The term “traditional” was understood as a euphemism for Orthodox Judaism.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ For more on the non-Zionist nature of the Yiddish Folk school see Katz, *History of Jewish Education*, 619-622.

⁶⁹ “Broadly Traditional or Strictly Traditional,” 16.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 11. Speech by Joseph Daleski, delegate from the Zionist Revisionist Party. It appears that this is the first time this expression is used, although based on previous encounters with Kossowsky it was probably felt beforehand.

life in South Africa”;⁷¹ and that educational facilities should be open to all who seek them,⁷² the resolutions were roundly rejected. This forceful response by broad swathes of the establishment appeared to unleash the community’s fears of a traditionalist approach. On the one hand, it demonstrated the lengths to which the traditionalists were willing to go to impose their will on a community that would not accept rabbinic dictates. On the other hand, it paradoxically confirmed the correctness of choosing a Chief Rabbi with a more accommodating outlook than that of Kossowsky’s.

9. *Rabinowitz assumes the position*

Shortly afterwards, on 3 March, 1945, the Rav of the Federation was invited as the main speaker to a reception hosted by the UHC in Rabinowitz’s honour. Praising the UHC’s new spiritual leader, Kossowsky said he found the honouree to be a “colleague with whom to work in friendship and harmony for the spiritual welfare of South African Jewry.” He congratulated the UHC “on being fortunate” to secure Rabinowitz “as its spiritual leader.”⁷³ Gracefully replying, Rabinowitz thanked Kossowsky for his kind words, and expressed the wish that the two of them work together for the Jewish community on a basis of equality, co-operation, and mutual esteem “for the great cause of the supremacy of *Torah*.”⁷⁴ This exchange of pleasantries has been interpreted by some as proof of a “new-found sense of concurrence” that led to a satisfactory resolution of the issue of Rabinowitz’s status on the Beth Din.⁷⁵ This interpretation, however, should not go unchallenged. Knowing as we now do the profound misgivings Kossowsky harboured concerning the new arrival, it is improbable he willingly conceded authority to his much junior colleague on the basis of one month’s acquaintance, some of which was mildly unpleasant.⁷⁶ Reading between the lines, the words stated by both rabbis do not necessarily show them to be of one mind. All that Kossowsky states is that he will work together for the betterment of the community, but he makes clear he views Rabinowitz’s purview as confined to the United Hebrew Congregation. The newly installed chief minister, for his part, appears to be broadcasting a message that he considers himself equal to the Rosh Beth Din and deserving of the same honour, or “mutual esteem.” Moreover, a retrospective remark by the then Chief Rabbi implies that his position

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Speech by N. Kirshner, chairman of the Zionist Federation.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 16. Speech by Gus Saron, director general of the Board of Deputies.

⁷³ Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon*, 191, citing *SAJT* 9 March 1945.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁷⁶ See for example the letter of Kossowsky to Herzog, mentioned above. It should be noted that at the time of writing his book, Mazabow was probably unaware of this letter as it was only published some years later.

on the Beth Din was not smoothly attained. Writing to the *Federation Chronicle* in 1959, Rabinowitz stated that soon after arriving in Johannesburg there was a short delay before he joined the Beth Din “for reasons over which a discreet silence is advisable.”⁷⁷ If the issue had indeed been resolved satisfactorily as stated, no silence, discreet or otherwise would be called for. Whatever the case, it is unlikely there was much “concurrence” between these strong leaders.

10. Conclusion

In June 1945, Rabinowitz was elevated to Chief Rabbi of the UHC, and co-rabbi of the Federation.⁷⁸ How this affected the personal relationship between the two co-rabbis is undocumented. Anecdotal evidence points to both a warm and awkward relationship.⁷⁹ Irrespective of which version is truer, it is indisputable that these two personalities stood at opposite sides of Orthodoxy – one a modernizer, open to a pragmatic approach that acknowledged the religious realities of Johannesburg Jewry, and the other staunch in opposing any signs of accommodation to these realities and set on maintaining unbending standards. We shall now detail events following Rabinowitz’s arrival in 1945 to trace the pattern that continued to develop between the conflicting visions for the Orthodox community. As we will see, this division laid the ground for future divisions, and ultimately a future religious revival in Johannesburg.

⁷⁷ Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon*. 239, quoting *Federation Chronicle* January 1959.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 195. Rabinowitz had been officially appointed chief minister and only after a three-month probationary period the title was changed to Chief Rabbi. This arrangement with Kossowsky was largely the same as what had existed between Kossowsky and Landau, where Landau had been appointed Chief Rabbi of the Federation, as stated above.

⁷⁹ Mazabow, “Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky,” notes a warm relationship. Compare to Rabbi Moshe Kurstag, interview with the author Telzstone, Israel, May 2017 where Kurstag noted that Kossowsky complained to Herzog about Rabinowitz’s educational background and also implied he was displeased by the fact that Rabinowitz’s wife did not cover her hair, as required by mainstream Jewish Law sources (but see Michael J. Broyde, “Tradition, Modesty and America: Married Women Covering Their Hair,” *Judaism*, 40:1 (January 1991): 79-87 who demonstrates that there were minority opinions allowing married women not to cover their hair, and that such custom was prevalent among the Orthodox in America.) There do not appear to be many sources on Rabinowitz’s thoughts on Kossowsky. As we have seen he was not intimidated by his colleague’s seniority nor did he shy away from public disagreement. Rabinowitz’s published articles however refer to him deferentially.

CHAPTER THREE: THE RABINOWITZ MINISTRY AND ITS IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

1. Introduction

From 1945 to 1961, the establishment was headed by the charismatic Chief Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz. His allies included the heads of various schools, some congregational rabbis, and some members of the Beth Din. With some exceptions, he and his allies oversaw the running of the United Hebrew Congregation and Federation of Synagogues, the Board of Education with its Jewish Day Schools and *Cheders* [afternoon Hebrew Schools], the Hebrew Teachers Training College and later the College for training ministers and rabbis (hereinafter: Ministers' Training College).¹ Apparently interested in the spiritual welfare of each individual within their constituencies, their approach was broad-based both literally and figuratively. By seeking to uplift the community and its institutions as a whole, they adopted a pragmatic and open-minded view of Orthodox Judaism. This meant that while promoting higher kashrut standards in the public sphere, a more circumspect approach prevailed when it came to individual observance.² Acknowledging the community was unwilling to undertake strict personal observance, they preferred to highlight Judaism's social and spiritual benefits.³ As part of a more "wholesome" and "patient" approach, there was a stress on promoting a particular cultural view of Judaism that emphasized aligning Diaspora Judaism with the modern State of Israel and teaching Hebrew.⁴ It was also believed that in order to cultivate religious observance the rabbis should be locally trained.⁵ Attending a traditional Yeshiva overseas, while perhaps laudable, was not regarded as a *sine qua non* for receiving ordination, and the establishment seemed to prefer a tailor-made curriculum that would train the locally born rabbi to tend to the unique circumstances of his flock.⁶ This curriculum would include subjects not primarily available to the Yeshiva student such as Jewish history,

¹ It should be noted that in South Africa the Cheders were afternoon Hebrew schools, whereas the Cheders referred to by Rabbi Kossowsky in chapter 2 were full time primary schools that taught religious subjects exclusively.

² See "You are eating Treife Food," *SAJT* 5 June 1959: 2; Rabinowitz, "On the Religious Scene", *Jewish Affairs*, May, 1960: 47-50.

³ See for instance Rabinowitz's guarded comments about Sabbath observance ("Chief Rabbi Proclaims Sabbath Year," *Federation Chronicle*, October, 1956: 1,7), and see also Newman's suggestion to teach matters of faith, Jacob Newman "The Rabbi and the community- Another point of view," *Jewish Affairs*, May, 1962: 21.

⁴ Louis Rabinowitz, "Chief rabbi's Greetings to Bnei Akiva," *S.A. Bnei Akiva 1936-1956*, 4.; Jacob Newman, "Rabbi condemns arrogance in the name of religion," *SAJT* 29 October, 1965: 7; Isaac Goss "What Should We Teach our Children" (Hebrew), *Barkai* September 1963: 5. For Rabinowitz's views on the importance of being able to converse in the Israeli pronunciation of Hebrew, see Mazabow, *Reach for the Moon*, 278.

⁵ See A.T. Shrock, "Religious Revival- A Must for S.A. Jewish Community's Survival", *Federation Chronicle* April 1957: 2.

⁶ See Jacob Newman, "Ministers' Training College in South Africa" (Hebrew), *Barkai*, March, 1962:11.

Jewish philosophy, Hebrew, and oratory.⁷ Through the vehicle of the traditional sermons which promoted an enlightened Judaism, it was hoped that some traditional practise would be observed, and gradually strengthened into the next generation.⁸ Many in the established rabbinate forcefully opposed right-wing challenges to ecclesiastical and educational institutions and zealously declared their own authority unimpeachable.⁹

At this stage, opposition to Rabinowitz within the Orthodox camp came from two groups. The first was the separatist Adath Yeshurun, which was a small and self-contained community of mainly German immigrants that was founded in 1936 and had declined to align itself to the Federation. It ran its institutions independently, while maintaining strict levels of observance, and for almost two decades up to 1954 it did not have its own rabbi.¹⁰ For the most part its tiny numbers, that were concentrated in a very specific area of Johannesburg, meant it caused few problems for the community at large, and at times was even grudgingly admired for its steadfastness.¹¹ The real threat to the establishment came from the Mizrahi party, whose rabbinic and lay members, originally inspired by the leadership of Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky, saw their influence greatly bolstered under his son Rabbi Dr. Michel Kossowsky. The latter had allies in Bnei Akiva, which in turn had partially succeeded in inducing youth from unlearned and unobservant families to become more religiously involved.¹² As we will see, their profoundest impact only came in the wake of the establishment of Yeshiva College at the end of 1950. Starting as a part time Yeshiva, the College went through various incarnations to eventually become a full time high school which aimed to replant the traditions of Eastern Europe.¹³ To that end, its Jewish studies syllabus was weighted in favour of traditional subjects such as Bible, Talmud, and Halacha.¹⁴ Moreover, its supporters criticised the Board of Education's curriculum and intimated that the heavy emphasis on teaching Hebrew as a language should be replaced with more religious content.¹⁵ Recognizing the need for nurturing a home-grown rabbinate, they argued this was best achieved by sending graduates to study in overseas Yeshivas, rather than a Ministers'

⁷ Louis Rabinowitz, "For who despises the day of small things?" (Hebrew), *Barkai*, June 1961; Rabinowitz, "Graduation Ceremony," (Hebrew), *Barkai*, August, 1961.

⁸ See Rabinowitz's comments on modernity in the context of his discussion on sports on the Sabbath in Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon*, 247.

⁹ See "Chief Rabbi's Hard-Hitting Address to Federation of Synagogue", *Federation Chronicle*, March, 1959; Newman "Rabbi condemns arrogance in the name of religion": 7.

¹⁰ David Saks "The Yekkes of Yeoville," *Jewish Affairs*, Summer 2002: 14.

¹¹ Louis Rabinowitz, *SAJT, Rosh Hashanah Annual*, September 1949.

¹² Aronson, "The South African Bnei Akiva Movement," *South African Jewish Observer*, December, 1962.

¹³ See Michel Kossowsky, "Blame Not the Youth," *Zionist Record Annual*, September 1955:11-15.

¹⁴ Jacob Vainstein, "The Power of the Talmud" (Hebrew), *Barkai*, February 1961.

¹⁵ Zwebner, "Answer to the question shaping the image of our education," (Hebrew), *Barkai*, June 1962.

Training College which they opposed for fear it would only produce “ersatz” Torah scholars.¹⁶

In this chapter we shall isolate four aspects of Rabinowitz’s view of Judaism in order to differentiate his approach from that of his ideological opponents. These four aspects are the value of teaching Hebrew; modernizing Jewish Law; engagement with the broader Jewish public; and educating the youth and cultivating leadership to ensure religious continuity. We will deal with each of these aspects separately and chronologically, highlighting the differences between the accommodators on the one hand and the traditionalists and sectarians, on the other hand.

2. *The Controversy Over Hebrew*

Like his mentor Joseph H. Hertz, and his predecessor Judah Leo Landau, Rabinowitz considered himself a “passionate Zionist” and welcomed the new State of Israel’s adoption of modern Hebrew. As a religious man and as a pedagogue he did not believe proficiency in Hebrew was enough to ensure Jewish continuity. Unlike the traditionalists, however, he regarded teaching this modern language an integral part of Jewish education.¹⁷ This tension between valuing Zionism and modern Hebrew while recognizing that the ideology and language are insufficient to ensure a religious life would cause concern within the local Jewish educational establishment.¹⁸ This would also challenge Rabinowitz who noted in late 1945 that the spoken Hebrew in Mandatory Palestine used Sephardi pronunciation which differed from the Ashkenazi pronunciation with which most South African Jews prayed. In order that there be no discrepancy between colloquial Hebrew and the Hebrew used in prayer, Rabinowitz felt all religious and educational institutions across South Africa should adopt the Sephardi pronunciation. Aware that Israel’s first Chief Rabbi, Abraham I. Kook, who had ordained him as a rabbi, had been opposed to such a move, he wrote to Israel’s Chief Rabbi Herzog asking whether South Africa should change pronunciations, and whether Kook’s

¹⁶ See M. Kossowsky, “The Bnei Akiva Yeshiva,” *S.A. Bnei Akiva 1936-1956*, 19 1956; Osher Altshuler, “Did you protest loudly” (Hebrew), *Barkai*, September 1962: 84-85, and see Rabinowitz’s complaints about rabbis who boycotted the graduation (Rabinowitz, “Graduation Ceremony”).

¹⁷ Like Hertz, Rabinowitz was wary of “religionless (sic) secular Zionism,” which produced ‘Hebrew speaking atheists’ (see Louis I. Rabinowitz, *Out of the Depths*, (Johannesburg: Eagle Press Ltd., 1951), 420-421). He did however agree with the views of his predecessor, Chief Rabbi Landau, who enshrined the teaching of Hebrew in the UHC’s constitution, as mentioned in the introduction.

¹⁸ The Board of Education was heavily influenced by its founding director, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Zlotnik and his disciple successor, Rabbi Isaac Goss. The latter served as director from 1949 – 1980 and, continuing his predecessor’s tradition he laid an emphasis on teaching Hebrew as a living language (see Myer Ellison Katz, “The History of Jewish Education in South Africa,” unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cape Town, 1980, 404-407, and see the publications by Goss cited in the footnotes there). This was a source of controversy among the more traditional rabbis and even among educators themselves as we shall see.

ruling applied here.¹⁹ Herzog replied that Kook's reasoning was unpersuasive, but nevertheless his correspondent should not implement such a change. Doing so, he argued, would encourage Johannesburg's ignorant population to scoff tradition and it would embolden the Reformist congregations there, since some in the Reform movement had already adopted the Sephardi pronunciation in the nineteenth century.²⁰ Rabinowitz apparently accepted this ruling when it was issued, but barely two years later in early 1948 on the eve of Israel's independence he decreed that all synagogues and Hebrew Schools would shortly switch pronunciation. This, he declared would "revitalize" religious life in the country.²¹ As will be shown, the idea that Hebrew would contribute to increasing religious observance would be subject to much scrutiny in the following years.

In early 1950, Moshe Swift arrived in South Africa from Britain to assume the position of rabbi of the Berea Synagogue and Dayan on the Johannesburg Beth Din.²² Soon after, he penned a letter to the *S.A. Jewish Times* attacking the Board of Education's curriculum used at his congregation's Talmud Torah (afternoon school) for its overemphasis on the Hebrew language. Claiming he did not wish to withdraw altogether from the Talmud Torah, he declared he would "eradicate" the "secular aspect of the course", would teach the "children Chumesh [Pentateuch](sic)", and would bring "G-d back to our children."²³ This statement drew a sharp rebuke from the newspaper's editor (and the Chief Rabbi's close friend), Leon Feldberg, who "wholeheartedly" concurred with the Board that teaching Hebrew was "indispensable to Jewish education now that the State of Israel has come into being."²⁴ A month later Rabinowitz himself rebuffed Swift's criticism and "challenged" the notion that the syllabus was "loaded on the secular side." He cautioned that in order to

¹⁹ Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon* 3; Isaac Herzog *Responsa Heichal Yitzhak* (Hebrew) OH 3 dated December 1945, cited in Isaac Gottlieb "The Politics of Pronunciation" *AJS Review* 32 (8) 2008: 343.

²⁰ *Ibid.* See also Joel David Weinberger, "Ashkenazim and the Sephardic Pronunciation of Hebrew" *Jewishlink* 20 February, 2020, also available at <https://jewishlink.news/features/36422-ashkenazim-and-the-sephardic-pronunciation-of-hebrew>.

²¹ Mazabow, *Reach for the Moon*, 278, quoting *Jewish Herald* 12 March 1948. Mazabow notes this innovation was "hotly debated". From the author's informal conversations, it emerges that this switch was by and large successful and was imposed in every synagogue far beyond the confines of the UHC. It should be noted that strictly speaking the pronunciation used in Israel is not purely Sephardi and as Rabinowitz himself admitted it is a "compromise between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi" but tends to be more in line with the latter.

²² For more information on Swift see Jacob Rubik, "The Great Attributes of Dayan M. Swift" (Hebrew), *Barkai*, August, 1949:14. Born in England to a rabbinical family he studied under Rabinowitz's father and also travelled abroad to Lithuania and Poland, where he enrolled at the famous Yeshivas of Mir and Ponevezh.

²³ Moshe Swift, (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 10 February 1950. Interestingly the spelling of the word Chumesh [Pentateuch] (as opposed to Chumash) follows the Yiddish pronunciation and not the Israeli pronunciation, which Rabinowitz had declared should be taught at the Hebrew Schools.

²⁴ Editorial, *SAJT* 10 February 1950. For Rabinowitz's friendship with Feldberg see Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon*, 1

“confront the reality of a Jewish State,” it is imperative “to teach Hebrew as a living language.” Otherwise, one “is encouraging the dangerous trend of dividing Israel and the *Golah* [Diaspora].”²⁵ This rigorous defence of the Board of Education, and the public scolding of a rabbinic colleague and fellow Dayan on the Beth Din, contrasted starkly with the attitude Kossowsky and his son had adopted five years earlier when the Board’s curriculum was first approved.²⁶ It is also uncertain whether Rabinowitz was fair in characterizing Swift’s objection as an expression of an attitude hostile towards Zionism.²⁷ In any event, the dispute between these personalities underlines the contrasting philosophies of Jewish education between the accommodators and traditionalists. Arguably the new Dayan viewed anything not originating from the Holy Writ as secular, whereas Rabinowitz was more willing to consider the teaching of Hebrew a formative step towards imparting a balanced Jewish education.²⁸

The debate over Hebrew’s centrality in Jewish education reared its head again in 1952. This time it was conducted between two veteran educators, neither of whom could be considered traditionalists. Dr. A. Moar, director of the Cape Board of Jewish Education took to the pages of the August edition of *Jewish Affairs*, published by the Board of Deputies, to outline his aims of Jewish education.²⁹ To preserve the Jewish community, he felt children must be “brought up in such a way that they... appreciate their spiritual ties with [their] People...and they make Jewish tradition a part of their own spiritual life.” Ideally, three values had to be imparted to the Jewish child: “Jewish religion and national tradition; the Hebrew language and national culture; and the spiritual link with Israel.”³⁰ In South Africa, where few people would likely go to Israel, and where Cheder did not provide sufficient time to teach a new language, priority had to be given to Jewish traditions. Children had to be taught about the festivals and religious ceremonies and had to be given tools to lead the

²⁵ Louis Rabinowitz, *SAJT*, 10 March 1950. *Golah*, the Hebrew word for the Diaspora, is a loaded term which was used by Zionists and denotes exile.

²⁶ See discussion at the Board of Education Seventh Conference discussed in chapter 2 above.

²⁷ This contention is supported by reports in *Barkai* that Swift had taught modern Hebrew in England and was active in the Zionist movement. On the other hand, after his return to England Swift was known for his hard-line approach and strong opposition to Louis Jacobs (see Eliot Cosgrove, “*Teyku*: The Insoluble Contradictions in the Life and Thought of Louis Jacobs”, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 2008, 128.)

²⁸ Swift was no stranger to controversy. In 1951 his reputation for being somewhat of a religious zealot was reconfirmed when he demanded that the Board of Deputies cease to engage itself in cultural activities which would legitimize the Reform Movement. Lay leaders of the Federation of Synagogues condemned his statements (see Edgar Bernstein “South Africa” *American Jewish Yearbook* Vol. 53 (1952), 394).

²⁹ Dr A. Moar, “What Should be the Aims of Jewish Education”, *Jewish Affairs* August, 1952: 8-11.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 8.

services and read from the Torah.³¹ Through transmitting these traditions, the future generation could become “the vital limbs of the Jewish congregation.”³² Reacting to this call for tradition and the concomitant denial of the Hebrew language as central to education, E. Levite, regional director of the Johannesburg United Hebrew Schools, penned a firm response to his former colleague.³³ After insinuating that Moar was blaming teachers for the poor state of observance among Jewish pupils, he claimed the former were doing a “wonderful job” in a religiously apathetic environment. Time constraints made it impossible to render children proficient in reading from the Siddur or being familiar with the Torah cantillation. Deriding Moar for his change from being an enthusiastic advocate of teaching Hebrew to his current position as promoter of a more tradition-based education, Levite proclaimed that in the shadow of the Jewish State children had to know something about Israel and had to be able to speak Hebrew. Only then would the Hebrew Schools conform to the Board of Education’s historical mission to provide a “traditional National Hebrew Education.”³⁴ Unlike the Swift - Rabinowitz dispute, G-d’s name was not invoked, and no one could be accused of religious arrogance. The debate did however show that even some of the educators did not share Rabinowitz’s view that Hebrew was “indispensable” to Jewish education and preferred to focus exclusively on Jewish tradition. At this stage, the accommodators’ Hebrew-centric approach still appeared to garner the religious establishment’s support. This was evident a few months later when in January 1953, the Beth Din ejected one of the traditionalists’ stalwarts, Moshe Swift, following his disagreements with the lay leadership and with rabbinic colleagues. Consequently, in June that year he resigned from the pulpit and returned to London.³⁵

Almost a decade later, in June 1962, soon after Rabinowitz left South Africa, the discussion concerning Hebrew’s prominence in Jewish education was revived. The traditionalist-allied Rabbi Isaac Zwebner, noting the average home was unobservant, expressed concern that children were not being exposed to authentic Judaism and this defect

³¹ *Ibid* 10-11. This prescription of creating a synagogue-centred Judaism was mentioned earlier that year in an article by Dr Harry Abt, “How to Make Judaism a Living Force”, *Jewish Affairs* January 1952: 8-11.

³² *Ibid* 11

³³ Katz “History of Jewish Education in South Africa”, 425; E. Levite “Response to A. Moar” (Letterbox), *Jewish Affairs* November 1952: 35. Levite mentions the fact that Moar was an educator in Johannesburg before relocating to Cape Town.

³⁴ *Ibid*. 36. This is an interesting paraphrase of the resolution passed in 1944, and referred to above, which called for “Jewish education based on broadly national traditional lines”. (See “Broadly Traditional or Strictly Traditional,” 16). It is uncertain whether the replacement of Jewish with Hebrew was deliberate or in error.

³⁵ Edgar Bernstein, “Union of South Africa,” *American Jewish Yearbook* Vol. 55 (1954), 334. No immediate cause for his resignation is provided but his public spat with Rabinowitz and with the Board of Deputies suggests his stridently religious approach was unwelcome.

was not being remedied by the Cheders' prioritising of Hebrew. The scarce hours available and the difficulty in teaching a language made it counterproductive. Instead, he argued, pupils needed to be taught Jewish laws and customs and be trained to read from a Siddur and Chumash.³⁶ Responding, E. Levite repeated his argument that the State of Israel's existence made it paramount for Diaspora children to be conversant in modern Hebrew.³⁷ If rabbis wished to strengthen religion, he advised that they start with the children's parents; attempting to make children religious while circumventing the adults would not work. Levite also believed there was no educational value to teaching prayer and Jewish studies via the English medium, and these could only be taught effectively in Hebrew.³⁸ In an article published three months later, the traditionalist Rev. Osher Altshuler disputed the notion that studying Hebrew would fill the gaps in Jewish education. He declared that the modern theories and methods in teaching Hebrew had failed to improve the youth's comprehension of the Jewish calendar and it was not even sufficient for them to be able to recite the *kaddish* [mourner's prayer] without stammering.³⁹ Focusing on Hebrew at the expense of teaching tradition, he surmised, had its roots in a religiously lax lay leadership and in university-trained religious leaders who emphasized Judaism's universal aspects, such as spreading "goodwill" among their gentile neighbours, to the detriment of parochial interests.⁴⁰ A year later, just prior to Chief Rabbi Bernard Moses Casper taking office, Isaac Goss, the director of the Board of Education, and one who fit Altshuler's description of the religious academic, made the diametrically opposite case. Presenting his credo on youth education, Goss opined that in fact teaching Hebrew would produce a wholesome Jew proud of his religious heritage.⁴¹ Quoting the scholar Solomon Shechter, he declared that "history had shown [that] assimilation comes precisely when the Hebrew language is abandoned." He therefore vigorously opposed any Jewish Studies course taught in English at the expense of teaching it in Hebrew.⁴² Challenging this accommodationist view on practical grounds, Rabbi Menachem Aronson, writing in November, complained that the religious level of the educated youth was far inferior to his counterpart in Israel. Without accusing Hebrew teaching of being the culprit, he nevertheless noted that the Judaism taught by the Board had

³⁶ Isaac Zwebner, "Answer to the question of shaping the image of our education" (Hebrew), *Barkai*, June 1962.

³⁷ E. Levite, "How should we teach our students" (Hebrew), *Barkai*, June, 1962

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Altshuler, "Did you protest loudly," 84-85. In Jewish tradition when a person dies the descendants recite a special mourner's prayer in synagogue, every day for eleven months.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴¹ Goss, "What Should We Teach our Children", 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*

stagnated to the point where it lagged 60 years behind England whose model it purported to follow.⁴³ Parroting Altshuler, he proposed that the only solution was to abandon sophisticated treatises on Judaism and return to promoting Torah and mitzvah observance.⁴⁴ Aronson's challenge went unanswered but the battle over Hebrew instruction appears to have elucidated the differences between the accommodators' broad and Zionist outlook, which saw language and culture as important components of wholesome Judaism, and the traditionalists' narrower perspective that viewed Judaism as primarily focused on the observance of Jewish law, with Hebrew relegated, at best, to second place. In the years to follow, the latter approach would be strengthened with the arrival of a new crop of rabbis, less sympathetic to the modern state of Israel and more willing to openly challenge the accommodators, as shall be detailed in the next chapter.

3. *Reconciling Jewish Law with Modernity*

One of the primary features distinguishing the first generation Jews born or bred in South Africa from their parents, and one which contributed to their acculturation process, was their participation in and watching of sports events.⁴⁵ Already in the early 1900s, Jewish children, who for the most part attended government schools that laid a great emphasis on playing sports and rewarded athletic skills, would mingle with their Christian counterparts on the sports fields.⁴⁶ As the years progressed, many young Jews who were the children of immigrants that were treated with "disdain" by the broader public, grew up to become national sports heroes celebrated by all.⁴⁷ At the same time, Jewish sporting clubs became a regular feature of the South African Jewish landscape.⁴⁸ Though Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz criticized these clubs for their antagonism to the most basic tenets of Judaism, he readily boasted "that there [were] few ministers, who appreciated more than [he] did the value of sport, and perhaps fewer who participated in it more than [he] did."⁴⁹ In a "sports crazy"

⁴³ Menachem Aronson, "Is there any relationship between traditional Jewry in South Africa and Torah and Orthodox Jewry in Israel" (Hebrew), *Barkai*, November 1963, 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Dora Sowden, "Transvaal Jewry 1902-1910," 225; For an amusing anecdote on the different attitudes of the fathers and sons to rugby see Jack Shapiro, *The Streets of Doornfontein*, (Johannesburg: Kaplan Kushlick Foundation, 1910), 3-4.

⁴⁶ George Aschman, "Oudtshoorn in the Early Days," in Saron and Hotz, *The Jews in South Africa* 128.

⁴⁷ Shain and Mendelsohn, *Jews in South Africa*, 157.

⁴⁸ See Edgar Bernstein, "A Bird's eye View of South African Jewry Today," in Leon Feldberg (ed.) *South African Jewry 1967-68*, 9, where below a photograph of the Herzlia Jewish Day School rugby team, the author chose the caption "Good Jews, good South Africans"; Saron, "Epilogue 1910-1955", 396-397. In recent times the Johannesburg Jewish community has published a half yearly magazine, *Soul Sports* (<https://www.soulsportsa.com/> accessed on 2 January 2022), devoted to celebrating the accomplishments of Jewish athletes and discussing the intersection between Jewish values and sport.

⁴⁹ Mazabow, *Reach for the Moon*, 230-231 citing *Zionist Record*, 18 January, 1952.

country where young Jews at that time would follow and participate in sporting activities with “religious devotion,” the Chief Rabbi’s admission of being a sports enthusiast must surely have been welcomed.⁵⁰ From the perspective of Orthodox Jewish law, problems arose when it came to observing or participating in sports activities that were played on the Sabbath. Already in 1945, shortly after Rabinowitz’s arrival, Dr. Harry Abt, a rabbinic colleague who shared the Chief Rabbi’s accommodating view on modernity, ruled that the residents of Johannesburg’s Jewish boarding school for rural students, Herber House, would be permitted to play sports on the Sabbath “although it was not with the strictest compliance of the religious requirements.”⁵¹ Nine years later, in 1954, a discussion on this point, deliberated in a much broader forum, placed the fissures between Rabinowitz and his traditionalist colleagues in sharp relief. Moreover, it exposed the latter camp’s antagonism to the view espoused by the Chief Rabbi, *viz.*, that to the extent that Judaism could meet the needs of the modern world without conflicting with Jewish Law or Halacha, a concerted effort should be made to exercise flexibility.

In February 1954 Mizrahi’s president, Michel Kossowsky was greatly distressed by the decision of the visiting Israel national soccer team to schedule some of its matches in South Africa on Saturday. It perturbed him that this would cause thousands of Jews to violate the Sabbath. Almost “singlehandedly” he led a campaign against what he considered a desecration of G-d’s name.⁵² Amidst the controversy, the Chief Rabbi was asked for his opinion. Setting aside the problems caused by attending the matches, Rabinowitz dealt with the question of playing sport on Shabbat and responded that Israel’s first Chief Rabbi, Abraham I Kook had permitted it. This prompted the Mizrahi affiliate, HaPoel HaMizrachi, to produce a cable from Chief Rabbi Herzog declaring Rabinowitz wrong and stating that when Herzog’s predecessor, Kook, had received a question from Australia about playing

⁵⁰ Shapiro, *The Streets of Doornfontein* 94-95; see also Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 10 where he mentions the great distances youngsters would walk in the 1950s in order to enjoy use of the sports fields.

⁵¹ Stuart Buxbaum, “Herber House: A Hostel for Jewish Children (Part 1),” *Jewish Affairs*, Rosh Hashanah 2019: 55. The dilemma of weighing social commitments with Sabbath observance has been ongoing until today, see Ari Shishler “South African Jewry’s Shabbos/Rugby dilemma,” *Times of Israel*, October, 2019, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/south-african-jewrys-shabbos-rugby-dilemma/>, accessed on 23 November 2021. For a discussion of similar tensions in the United States context, see Jeffrey Gurock, “Hakoah Vienna’s U.S.A. Tour, 1926 and American Jewish Pride and Priorities.” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 23 (2008): 70-86; Gurock, *Judaism’s Encounter with American Sports*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005)

⁵² H.S. Liebgott, “He was the Conscience of the Community,” *South African Jewish Observer*, April 1964, 3. As a Mizrahi stalwart it is interesting that Liebgott in recalling the events of ten years earlier made an oblique and uncomplimentary reference to the Chief Rabbi by stating that “the community and even some rabbis accepted [the Israeli team tour] with equanimity”.

football on the Sabbath he had expressly forbidden it.⁵³ Approached by the editor of the *S. A. Jewish Times* for clarification, Rabinowitz devoted an entire article to the matter. After confessing he may have misquoted Kook, he provided a Halachic exposition proving that ball games are permitted on the Sabbath. Explaining that in the case before him he was aware of the “wholesale desecration of the Sabbath involved in mass traveling to see the match,” he nevertheless thought it was important specifically now to clarify that there was no prohibition on playing sports on the Sabbath. He believed one had to “move with the times” and reject the strict interpretations of Jewish law formulated in Eastern Europe. One had also to acknowledge the “importance our generation places on sport... and the demand for a more congenial spirit of Sabbath observance ...in sunny South Africa,” and to prefer religious authorities who permitted playing sport.⁵⁴ This attitude was lauded by the weekly. Congratulating Rabinowitz for displaying “no little courage to urge change where change is necessary,” it begged those opposed not to slate the rabbi’s views “mercilessly.”⁵⁵ In issuing this decision and in explicitly distancing himself from the tradition that had prevailed in Eastern Europe, the Chief Rabbi was broadcasting his opinion that where Jewish law permitted it, changes should be made, and the lenient view should be preferred. Presumably, it was this philosophy that generally guided his thinking and therefore all his activities and statements should be viewed through its prism, even those preceding this ruling. Hapoel HaMizrachi’s response and that of the traditionalists is not recorded, but it is doubtful that the challengers of the initial permit were swayed by Rabinowitz’s article. Ideologically, as we have seen and as we shall see later, the Kossowsky family’s veneration of the East European Jewish heritage stood in stark contrast to the Chief Rabbi’s condemnation of its “puritanism” and “severity.”⁵⁶ More than anything else this issue is emblematic of the differences between the accommodators and the traditionalists and explains the continuing diverging paths of these two streams.

⁵³ Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon*, 247

⁵⁴ Louis Rabinowitz, *SAJT*, 26 February, 1954.

⁵⁵ Editorial, *SAJT*, 5 March, 1954. This incident garnered international attention and was reported in the secular and Reform oriented American Jewish press, see “S.A. Rabbis Split On Sabbath Play,” *The American Jewish World*, 12 March, 1954, 3, http://www.jpress.nli.org.il/Olive/APA/NLI_heb/?action=search&text=rabbi%20rabinowitz#panel=document and “S. African Chief Rabbi O.K.’s Football on Sabbath”, *The Sentinel*, 11 March, 1954. http://www.jpress.nli.org.il/Olive/APA/NLI_heb/?action=search&text=rabbi%20rabinowitz#panel=document.

⁵⁶ See Leon Feldberg’s remarks in the editorial, *SAJT*, 5 March, 1954. The fact that Feldberg, a graduate of Lithuanian yeshivas, who had since acculturated to the Johannesburg scene, warned that the Rabinowitz’s views would be slated suggests he was aware of the gulf between the accommodators and the traditionalists.

4. *Relating to the broader public*

In September 1949, after surveying almost five years at the helm, Rabinowitz, took stock of the religious scene in South Africa and the prospects for a revival of Orthodox religious observance.⁵⁷ Admitting that Sabbath observance in the country communities was all but neglected, he held out some hope for Johannesburg. Giving credit where it was due, he acknowledged that the congregations holding the best records were those not in the mainstream. This included, on the one hand, the unaffiliated Adath Yeshurun Congregation in Yeoville with its “100 percent retention rate of its youth [members],”⁵⁸ who had remained loyal to Jewish tradition, and, on the other hand, the HaPoel HaMizrachi services conducted by men and women constituting a “solid bloc of Sabbath observers.”⁵⁹ Regarding the level of kashrut observance, he noted a gradual reversal of the practice of serving non-kosher food at wedding and bar mitzvah functions and credited some of this change to his policy of refusing to attend any unsupervised event. He also declared that all communal dinners were now strictly supervised affairs. Ending his article, he proposed that the road to a spiritual revival would be found, inter alia in “strengthening the orthodox institutions, the Federation of Synagogues, and the admirable institutions established by the Board of Education.”⁶⁰ Rabinowitz’s faith in these institutions in general and in the educational establishment in particular was not shared by all his colleagues. Some, as we have seen, openly attacked the Jewish education system, while others, especially those from Mizrachi, felt the time was ripe to build alternatives to the educational establishment.⁶¹

In late 1954, Rabinowitz’s ally, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Newman, who had been appointed by the Board of Deputies to oversee the many rural “country communities” outside the larger centres of Jewish life, took to the pages of the Hebrew publication *Barkai* to voice his

⁵⁷ Louis I. Rabinowitz, *SAJT*, Rosh Hashanah Annual, September 1949. The subject of his article was religious revival.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* In the original article Rabinowitz misnames Adath Yeshurun, the “Adath Yisroel”. The fact that the usually meticulous Rabinowitz, a self-described historian, could have made such a careless mistake in a major article he submitted signifies an indifference towards this congregation.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Letters to the editor of the *SAJT* around that time suggest that some of the public viewed Mizrachi and HaPoel HaMizrachi as the guardians of Sabbath observance (see Kol Korey Bamidbar, “Tozereth Haaretz Open on Shabbas (*sic*)” (Open Forum) *SAJT* 5 December, 1947; (Rabbi) M. Chigier, “Transvaal Zionist Youth and the Desecration of the Sabbath,” (Open Forum), *SAJT* 19 December, 1947.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* No doubt Rabinowitz was concerned with the religious level of every member of his flock, however his emphases on public and communal functions and his conviction that strengthening the community’s institutions would lead to a spiritual revival indicates that he saw revival on the communal plane rather than on the individual level.

⁶¹ As we have shown in the previous chapter the elder and younger Kossowsky, who were both staunchly aligned to Mizrachi, had lost their battle against the Board of Education in 1944, and nothing in the intervening period suggests their faith in this organization was restored.

exasperation with the Jewish community and its scornful attitude toward the rabbinate.⁶² Understanding that most of the community was illiterate in Hebrew and would not read a Hebrew publication, he appears to have felt free to express himself through this vehicle. His piece aimed at rousing his colleagues to establish a rabbinical association which would arbitrate disputes between rabbis and their congregations, set salaries, and handle financial matters for its members.⁶³ As a starting point, he claimed that a huge gulf separated the traditionally observant rabbinate from the religiously ignorant and non-observant laity who unfairly criticized their spiritual leaders. Speaking broadly and without citing examples, he surmised that this criticism stemmed from the lay leadership's resentment of their rabbis for assuming the role of "G-d's policemen."⁶⁴ Somewhat patronisingly, he suggested that the average congregant knew deep down that their rabbi was correct and that their behaviour did not meet Jewish law standards. In an attempt to ward off their guilty consciences, they opted to defend themselves by pre-empting an attack on those who induced their sense of culpability. Conceding that at times ministers could use more tact regarding what they said and when they said it, he felt ultimately that this made no difference and whatever they did they would be susceptible to communal attacks.⁶⁵ Half a year later, in June 1955, the cultural officer of the Board of Deputies, Dr. Harry Abt, followed his colleague's lead, and, from a slightly different angle, lashed out at the lay leadership's inconsistent conduct. The latter, he claimed, had strengthened Orthodox Judaism at the organizational level, but on a personal level most did not adhere to a traditional Jewish lifestyle. They "saw to it that others can keep the Jewish dietary laws, others can observe the Sabbath" but they felt "no personal obligation" to lead an "observant lifestyle."⁶⁶ It was not enough, he argued, to celebrate Judaism by "proxy"; growth could only be attained if those who supported the community were also actively engaged therein.⁶⁷ These candid comments by establishment figures, whom as mentioned belonged to the accommodator camp, demonstrate that they were keenly aware of the community's failures and were prepared to criticize them.⁶⁸ Their adoption of lenient positions were then not based on passive submission to communal dictates. Their

⁶² Jacob Newman, "The Situation of the Rabbis and the Rabbinate in South Africa" (Hebrew), *Barkai* October 1954, 51-52.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶⁴ Newman, "The Situation of the Rabbis" 51. It should be noted that Newman introduced his piece by emphasising it was the exclusive expression of his own opinion and did not represent any other person or organization.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p 51-52.

⁶⁶ Harry Abt, "Judaism by Proxy," *Zionist Record*, (S.A. Menorah Section), June, 1955, 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*

⁶⁸ See above Harry Abt's permission to play sport on the Sabbath.

vocal disappointments went some way to debunk accusations, first uttered by Isaac Kossowsky, who had since passed away, that these “rabbis” were merely pandering to their flock.⁶⁹ Rather they believed Orthodox Judaism could be modern and inclusive without surrendering traditional laws or values.

In his 1956 Yom Kippur sermon, Rabinowitz, basing himself on readings from the Torah and the Prophets, told his congregants that Judaism considered Sabbath observance not only a religious command but also a social and moral duty.⁷⁰ Understanding the economic burdens that such observance imposed, he directed his pleas to keep the Sabbath specifically at the “women, and those men who filled their Saturdays with leisurely activities”; for those forced to work on the Sabbath he was more understanding, for as he explained “when it comes to financial sacrifice” one “must tread warily.”⁷¹ Philosophically, this sermon betrayed his view that Judaism promoted not only religious obedience but also moral refinement. Pragmatically it reaffirmed his reputation as an accommodator who understood the challenges of his community and the limits to the sacrifices they would make. Rabinowitz’s attitude was again in full view a few months later at the end of 1956.

Indicative of an “upward mobility” in the socioeconomic status of Johannesburg Jewry, Jews steadily migrated from town to the greener pastures of the northern suburbs. Following the Second World War, the occupational profile of the community shifted from one dominated by sales and production workers to professionals and administrators.⁷² This also reflected a post-war boom in the South African economy, and the advantages conferred on white workers by the imposition of Apartheid. In view of this social and geographic mobility among Jews, calls were sounded to relocate the Great Synagogue from its base in the working class suburb of Hillbrow. Responding to the suggestion that moving the synagogue to the Jewishly populous suburbs would reduce vehicular traffic to shul, the Chief Rabbi commented:

Incredulous though it may sound ... walking to synagogue has become a sign of *ultra-* Orthodoxy...If I were to feel that six Jews who at present proceed to

⁶⁹ See chapter 2 where Kossowsky distances himself from the modern English speaking “rabbis” while viewing himself as part of the traditional *rabbonim*.

⁷⁰ Rabinowitz, “Chief Rabbi Proclaims Sabbath Year”: 1,7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 7.

⁷² See Della Pergola and Allie Dubb, “South African Jewry,” 89-92.

the Great Synagogue by car would proceed on foot...I would give favourable consideration to the proposal.⁷³

Rabinowitz admitted that the idea of driving to synagogue on the Sabbath “immeasurably distressed” him, but this did not preclude him from recognizing the contemporary realities of his flock.⁷⁴ His indulgence of individual non-observance did not however extend to public violations of religious standards; here he proved far less accommodating. An example of this occurred three years later in 1959 when it was discovered that the Dvinsk Society’s tenth anniversary dinner was not supervised by the Beth Din. Upon hearing of it, and together with Michel Kossowsky, the Chief Rabbi “burst” into the dining room and warned those gathered that they were eating “treife” [non-kosher] food.”⁷⁵ This dramatic incident apparently did little to deter the startled diners, but it unmasked the Chief Rabbi’s zeal for upholding particular public standards.⁷⁶ Sounding more optimistic a year later, Rabinowitz, in May 1960, suggested there had been some accomplishments in the religious arena. Not only had the number of Johannesburg’s synagogues “trebled” over the previous fifty years but attendance there showed a marked improvement. Keeping kosher in the public sphere was on the rise and modest improvements could be felt in the private sphere. Acknowledging that observance had not yet become “fashionable” he suggested there was a “quest ...for a more wholesome and complete Jewish way of life which find its expression in observance.”⁷⁷ Two years later, barely months after the Chief Rabbi retired, Rabbi Newman put a dampener on his former colleague’s guarded enthusiasm. The public, he felt, was uninterested in the “strict religious path”, and all a rabbi could hope for was “small victories” with respect to “practical observance.”⁷⁸ He recommended that spiritual leaders should instead invest in demonstrating how Judaism leads to “personal fulfilment” and ultimate “salvation.”⁷⁹ As shall be seen, the public’s rejection of the stricter rabbis, who would arrive a few years later, and the latter’s attempt to impose new stringencies, suggests Newman’s assessment of Johannesburg Jewry was more accurate than Rabinowitz’s rosy assessment two years prior. This, and the other examples described above, show that while the Chief Rabbi and his accommodator colleagues had soberly assessed their

⁷³ *SAJT*, 9 November, 1956, emphasis original.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “You are eating Treife Food,” 2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Rabinowitz, “On the Religious Scene,” 50. His choice of words of “wholesome” and “complete” are indicative of his broad view of observance. Emphasis original.

⁷⁸ Newman, “The Rabbi and the community,” 21.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

flock's shortcomings, it did not deter them from seeking ways to boost observance within the community, a task at which they sometimes succeeded.

5. *Educating the Youth and Cultivating Leadership*

The final theme that demonstrates the difference between Rabinowitz's approach and orientation and that of his rivals relates to the field of religious education and the aims thereof. In the early fifties it was the traditionalists who took the lead in expanding education for high school youth. They offered an intense religious curriculum which on the one hand varied considerably from what was taught at the Board of Education's Kind David Schools, and on the other hand, deemphasized the study of Jewish culture. In the latter part of that decade it was the accommodators who initiated the creation of a tertiary educational institution specifically designed to train and qualify future religious clergy and functionaries against the backdrop of the realities of South African Orthodox Judaism.

In April 1950, under the direction of Rabbi Dr. Michel Kossowsky, Hashomer Hadati convened in Johannesburg and announced that plans were afoot to establish the Hashomer Hadati Yeshiva.⁸⁰ On 9 December, this educational institution was officially inaugurated at the Mizrahi Federation's Chanukah party.⁸¹ In February, 1951, Michel Kossowsky, in his capacity as Rosh Yeshiva (head of the Yeshiva) took charge of three classes consisting of 40 high school boys split between Berea's Corona Lodge and the Beth Medrash Hagodol in Doornfontein.⁸² Additionally, two groups of university students were formed, one based at Wits University's main campus, and the other at its Medical School. A few months later a class was introduced for the "working youth" which was taught by Rabbi Joseph Bronner, and a special study group for women was also established, led by Bronner's wife, Leila Bronner.⁸³ The teaching staff for all classes was comprised of a dedicated team of community rabbis who, on a voluntary basis, taught a curriculum that included "Talmud,

⁸⁰ David Saks, *Yeshiva College: The First Fifty Years*, 1. Yeshiva College's history is well documented in Saks' book so we shall confine ourselves to aspects relevant to its role in the evolution of Orthodoxy.

⁸¹ M. Kossowsky, "The Bnei Akiva Yeshiva," 19.

⁸² The boys were aged between 13 and 15 and they attended the local government schools in the morning and four afternoon sessions per week at the Yeshiva (see Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 6). The Corona Lodge was being rented at the time by the S.A. Zionist Youth and it appears they allowed the nascent Yeshiva to use it free of charge (see Kossowsky, "The Bnei Akiva Yeshiva," 19). These premises were also used by Hashomer Hadati over Sabbaths as their shul (see Zelick Sher, "Our Shul," 16).

⁸³ "The Rapid Development of the Hashomer Hadati Yeshiva," *South African Jewish Observer*, May 1951. Little mention is made by Saks (*Yeshiva College* 9) concerning initiatives that did not cater exclusively to high school students and it appears they petered out once the school functioned as a full-time high school. In Ivan Ziskind, interview with the author (London February 2017), the latter recalled attending Yeshiva College classes as a Wits University student.

Mishna, Prophets, Laws and Customs and Ethics of Judaism.”⁸⁴ Apparently no course was given in Modern Hebrew, setting it apart from the Board of Education’s United Hebrew Schools.⁸⁵ On 7 September 1951, the Yeshiva’s founder lost his father, Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky and succeeded him as rabbi of the Beth Hamedrash Hagadol and as associate Dayan on the Beth Din.⁸⁶ A month later the Mizrahi movement proclaimed, with some exaggeration, that the Yeshiva’s founding was “the greatest achievement of the movement in the history of South African Jewry.”⁸⁷

In June 1955, the *Zionist Record* reported that Bnei Akiva shul was to hold a “Tikun Shavuoth” for members to engage in “learning and rejoicing” throughout the first night of the Jewish festival of Shavuot [Pentecost].⁸⁸ Commending it for emphasising the value of Jewish study among youth whose general attendance at this Festival was “deplorable,” the weekly advised other synagogues to implement these traditional practices “instead of continuously talking about them.”⁸⁹ In August, Bnei Akiva again became the focus of this newspaper’s attention with a feature article on its winter seminar. In line with its Religious Zionist credo, the movement had reportedly balanced the morning’s religious sessions with afternoon farming activities, which included chicken runs, work in stables, and reaping “mielie fields.”⁹⁰ A week later, the seminar’s fulltime lecturer, Rabbi David Sanders, dean of the Bnei Akiva Yeshiva, and alumnus of the “anti-religious Zionist” Telshe Yeshiva was interviewed about the Yeshiva’s educational philosophy.⁹¹ Sanders stated that alongside lessons in Torah and *Shulchan Arukh* [Code of Jewish Law], he also taught Hebrew and contemporary Jewish

⁸⁴ Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 6.

⁸⁵ Unsurprisingly as a supporter of the Board, Rabinowitz had little to do with the Yeshiva’s founding although in later years he would come to its defence. (See Saks *Yeshiva College*, 15,28).

⁸⁶ See Rubik, “Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky,” 46. Michel Kossowsky did not however succeed his father as co-rabbi of the Federation which would heretofore be held by the Chief Rabbis exclusively. As a tribute to Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky, the Hebrew name of the Yeshiva was changed in 1958 to Yeshivat Beth Yitzhak (Yeshiva of the House of Isaac) (see also Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 17).

⁸⁷ “A Year of Achievement for the Shomer Hadati”, *South African Jewish Observer*, Rosh Hashanah 5712 (September 1951), 16.

⁸⁸ “Shavuoth and the Youth,” (Editorial), *Zionist Record*, 26 May 1955: 2. Also referred to as Tikkun Leil Shavuoth, and originally involving reading various scriptural passages over the night of the Shavuoth it now refers to an all-night learning session. For an example of the program on offer see details of the 1954 event, “Yeshivat Bnei Akiva Holds Tikkun Leil Shavuot,” *South African Jewish Observer*, June 1954

⁸⁹ See “Shavuoth and the Youth”, 2.

⁹⁰ “Religious Spirit at B. Akiva Seminar” *Zionist Record* (S.A. Menorah Section), 29 July 1955.

⁹¹ Elazar Mushkin, “When Unity Reigned: Yom ha-Atzma’ut 1954”, *Hakirah* vol. 13, 2012: 52. Kossowsky originally tried to secure a dean from Israel but when this failed he approached Telshe in Cleveland, which responded sympathetically and enthusiastically. (see Kossowsky, “Our Yeshiva,” 16). This, despite Telshe’s “serious disagreements with the B’nai Akivah (*sic*) youth movement” (Mushkin, 53). Paradoxically around the time its alumnus was employed by Bnei Akiva in Johannesburg, Telshe expelled Ben Isaacson, its South African student, and graduate of the Bnei Akiva Yeshiva, for fraternizing with members of Bnei Akiva, Cleveland (see Suzanne Belling and David Saks *Struggle Rabbi: The Ben Isaacson Story*, (n.p, n.d)).

history to instil in the students a “love of Israel” and a desire, ultimately to “settle there.”⁹² In contrast, the yeshiva’s head, Michel Kossowsky, a month later, under the guise of a column on the problems of the youth, indicated his institution was more locally focused. As others had noted before him, the community at large maintained a non-observant home life and this, he felt, was causing the next generation to be uninterested in communal affairs.⁹³ Even when a child evinced an interest it was met with the parents’ active discouragement of any “desire to observe Kashruth or the Sabbath.”⁹⁴ Unlike Rabinowitz and Newman, Kossowsky did not think the solution would come about by less prodding, or by reframing Sabbath and Kashruth observance in terms of social duties or personal fulfilment.⁹⁵ Suggesting the Yeshiva he founded could restore the lost Judaism of Lithuania, he declared the only way to remedy the dismal situation of the youth was for parents to enrol their children in “the highly successful project of the Bnei Akiva yeshiva.” To his mind the institution “proved what the South African boy can achieve [given] the proper environment.”⁹⁶ Michel Kossowsky, continuing in his father’s footsteps, appeared to insist that religious indifference could only be solved via the traditional route; accommodating the community’s whims was not the preferred option.

The question of how best to train religious leaders began to be a subject of debate between the accommodators and traditionalists from the mid-1950s. The former did not believe modern problems could be solved by resorting to solutions more suited to an earlier era and to a different cultural milieu. They sought, rather, to build institutions tailored especially for the community. Chief among these institutions was to be one which would educate a new type of rabbi, reverend, and community functionary.⁹⁷ Preferably it would take the form of a college with a specifically designed curriculum for training and ordaining rabbis. Owing to the accommodators’ inclusivist worldview they did not discount a traditional yeshiva trained student as a rabbinical candidate, so long as he was up to the challenge. On the other hand, Michel Kossowsky and his traditionalist allies in the Mizrachi insisted that the only institution capable of producing a rabbi was the traditional Yeshiva. A disparaging attitude to any rabbinic training unrooted in the yeshiva experience was first enunciated by Kossowsky in August 1956.

⁹² “Will South Africa’s “new Jew” come from here?” *Zionist Record*, 5 August 1955, 6. Sanders’ emphasis on teaching Hebrew may have been exaggerated considering that matriculation Hebrew was only taught over weekends (see “Yeshiva in Johannesburg” *Federation Chronicle*, March 1955).

⁹³ Kossowsky, “Blame not the youth,” September 1955.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁵ See Rabinowitz, “Chief Rabbi Proclaims Sabbath Year”; Newman, “The Rabbi and the community,”: 21.

⁹⁶ Kossowsky, “Blame not the youth,”: 16.

⁹⁷ See Louis Rabinowitz, “Rabbis or Reverends” (Hebrew), *Barkai*, February, 1958

One of the biggest problems facing this community is the acute shortage of ministers...The College for the training of Ministers, designed to overcome the difficulty, was doomed to failure “ab initio” for lack of pupils. What is required is new blood, new vigorous manpower combining the enthusiasm of youth with perfect faith and unflinching loyalty to the Torah. And most important, they must be “Learned in the Lord”, well trained Rabbonim [rabbis] or Shoctim [ritual slaughterers], Lomdim [scholars] and not some type of “Ersatz” ministers. Jewish history has shown that there was only one kind of institution able to produce that type of spiritual leadership and that is a Yeshiva. Without a local yeshiva S.A. Jewry could not hope itself to produce the required personnel from its own midst... The Bnei Akiva Yeshiva indeed was not established for the purpose of training rabbis or Shoctim. Nor was any other yeshiva, for that matter. ..However, it happens that in the atmosphere of piety and learning which permeates the Yeshiva, a percentage become attracted to the sacred cause and decide to make the religious service of the community their life’s vocation... the Bnei Akiva Yeshiva will render this major service to the Jewish community in South Africa.⁹⁸

Kossowsky’s criticisms must have touched a raw nerve with the Chief Rabbi. After all, the Mizrachi president was almost certainly aware that the Chief Rabbi had encouraged some male graduates of the Board of Jewish Education’s college for training Hebrew teachers (known as the Hebrew Teachers Training College) to study for a Minister’s diploma at Jews’ College, London.⁹⁹ Certainly, Rabinowitz would have balked at the suggestion that the then Reverend Dennis Isaacs, who had faithfully assisted him for over two years and was one of that college’s graduates, was an “ersatz minister.”¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless any annoyance he may have felt towards Kossowsky appears to have been kept at bay, for a few months later, in December 1956, he accepted an invitation to the farewell reception for four graduates of the Bnei Akiva Yeshiva. The latter were on the eve of their departure to two ultra-Orthodox American institutions: Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio and Ner Israel

⁹⁸ Kossowsky, “Our Yeshiva,” 20. Lomdim, literally “learners” are those who are competent to study the Talmud.

⁹⁹ See Louis Rabinowitz, “Ministers’ Training College,” (Hebrew), *Barkai*, January. 1958.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*; Rabbi Dr. Dennis Isaacs, *Praise God in His Sanctuary*, (Union of Orthodox Synagogues, Johannesburg, 2000), Preface. Jews’ College is discussed later in this chapter.

Rabbinical College, in Baltimore, Maryland.¹⁰¹ Rabinowitz even used the occasion to praise the boys for going to America, which he deemed a great centre of Torah learning. Mildly criticising the Bnei Akiva Yeshiva for not choosing Israel, he expressed the hope that one day it would consider the Jewish State a viable option.¹⁰² Others in the press were less sanguine about the ostensibly Zionist Bnei Akiva movement opting to send its students to the United States rather than to Israel. The *S.A. Jewish Times* in particular was mystified as to how these graduates could attend an American Yeshiva which forbade taking part in Zionist activities.¹⁰³ As it happens, the graduates would eventually either return to contribute to the community or would find their way to Israel.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, at a time when both the religious and secular community overwhelmingly identified as Zionist, Bnei Akiva Yeshiva's willingness to align itself with the non-Zionist Telshe Yeshiva, and to suffer the ensuing criticism, underscores the importance Kossowsky and his colleagues placed on traditional Yeshiva study.

Support for producing home-grown religious leaders was strong within the accommodator camp. In April 1957 South African born Rabbi Dr. A. T. Shrock, a former confidant of Chief Rabbi Landau, intimated that religious life could only be revived if its spiritual leadership were "born and bred in South Africa."¹⁰⁵ Agreeing with this notion, the principal of the Hebrew Teachers Training College, Rabbi Dr. Alter Hilewitz declared in October that together with the Board of Education and the Federation of Synagogues he was establishing a Ministers' Training College in Johannesburg.¹⁰⁶ He felt the success of the Hebrew Teachers Training College and of the King David Schools had awakened the dormant religious spirit and paved the way for establishing this College. In the course of promoting his idea, and, perhaps in retaliation for Kossowsky's strident criticisms of any proposed ministers' college, Hilewitz minimized the Bnei Akiva Yeshiva's contribution, declaring it owed its founding to the general environment created by the day school

¹⁰¹ Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 14-15. Individual graduates had gone abroad to study in previous years (see Kossowsky "Our Yeshiva" 20) but this was the first time they left as a group. Despite its name, Ner Israel Rabbinical College was a mainstream Yeshiva.

¹⁰² *Ibid* 15. He could hardly have afforded to criticize the choice of a Diaspora venue when he himself had recommended London as the ideal place for study.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 15 quoting *SAJT*, 4 January 1957. Presumably the reference is to the Telshe Yeshiva where indeed Zionist activities were, with minor exceptions, frowned upon (see Mishkin, "When Unity Reigned," 52).

¹⁰⁴ Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Shrock, "Religious Revival", 2.

¹⁰⁶ Alter Hilewitz, "College for the Training of Rabbis is being Established," (Hebrew), *Barkai*, October 1957:4. Hilewitz fit the mould of an accommodator and was also universally regarded as a Talmudic scholar and a first rate academic.

movement.¹⁰⁷ Two months later the Chief Rabbi, who supported Hilewitz's initiative, and shared his disdain for the Bnei Akiva yeshiva, devoted three columns to the proposed College.¹⁰⁸ Acknowledging that in the past a person from Eastern Europe could enter the rabbinate only if he had acquired a solid Yeshiva background, Rabinowitz averred that the contemporary western situation demanded a different model. The syllabus taught in a yeshiva had little relevance for the South African community, since it failed to offer vital courses in modern Hebrew, Jewish History, Jewish Philosophy and oratory.¹⁰⁹ Only a customised rabbinical college provided the knowledge and skills capable of producing a rabbi whose primary role was to impart spiritual guidance to South African Jews, and to perform lifecycle rituals such as funerals and weddings.¹¹⁰ In February 1958 Rabinowitz announced that the College had been established with three founding students: an alumnus of the Hebrew Teachers Training College, an undergraduate from Wits University's Hebrew Department, and a Bnei Akiva Yeshiva graduate who had studied at various yeshivas abroad. For 20 hours a week, all three would be taught Talmud, Bible, and Maimonides as well as Jewish History, and Rhetoric by the small faculty of Hilewitz, Rosenzweig and Rabinowitz.¹¹¹ The ambition of the last-mentioned to produce broader minded clergy was now reaching fruition, and he must have been quite gratified to discover that Kossowsky's former student, Ben Isaacson, had now joined his College.

Meanwhile, continuing his mission to promote exclusive Yeshiva study, Michel Kossowsky, upon returning from a trip abroad at the end of 1958, described the Orthodox revival in the United States and the atmosphere created by the Yeshivas established there.¹¹² Attributing the progress of Bnei Akiva Yeshiva graduates studying in Cleveland and

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ L. I. Rabinowitz, "The College for the Training of Rabbis: Part 1", (Hebrew), *Barkai* January 1958, 4. Rabinowitz's disparagement of the Bnei Akiva yeshiva was evident in his article on the Jewish Day School Movement published in May 1960, where he insinuated he did not differentiate between the establishment's schools and the traditionalist school. (see Louis Rabinowitz, "Jewish Day School Movement," *Jewish Affairs*, June, 1960).

¹⁰⁹ Rabinowitz, "Rabbis or Reverends", 3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* Rabinowitz' comments may not have been aimed at Kossowsky personally, but clearly he sought to distinguish his modern approach from that of Eastern Europe. For a general discussion on the difference between the Rabbinical seminaries and traditional Yeshivas see Mordechai Breuer, "Between the Seminary and the Yeshiva" (Hebrew) *Hamaayan*, Tamuz 5755 [July 1995] <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/hamaayan/beyn-2.htm>

¹¹¹ L. I. Rabinowitz, "The College for the Training of Rabbis: Part 3," (Hebrew), *Barkai*, March, 1958: 4. Interestingly both Hilewitz (see "New head of Rabbi Zlotnik Seminary," *Jewish Herald*, 17 August, 1951) and Rosenzweig (see "When Telz Was Barricaded," *Federation Chronicle*, April, 1954) had studied extensively at East European Yeshivas. Presumably, Rabinowitz who wrote an essay titled "Art of the Sermon" taught the course in rhetoric.

¹¹² "Rabbi Kossowsky reports on position of Orthodoxy abroad," *SAJT*, 3 January, 1959.

Baltimore to the education they received in Johannesburg, he thanked his yeshiva's supporters for changing the city's religious landscape despite the "mocking" that had greeted the announcement of its establishment eight years before.¹¹³ Quoting a speech by the head of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, he restated his belief that it was not enough to teach people from books. One had to create a spiritual backdrop for imparting knowledge, and that backdrop had to be the traditional Yeshiva. In February 1961, Jacob Vainstein, a Mizrahi affiliated rabbi, stated that only a Yeshiva, with its emphasis on Talmud study, could erase the last 40 to 50 years of Jewish ignorance in Johannesburg. He was pleased to note that it was the Yeshiva College that had succeeded in turning unlearned children into proficient Torah scholars.¹¹⁴

Taking the opposite approach, the Chief Rabbi, a short while later and just shy of his retirement, proudly announced the first graduation ceremony at the Ministers' Training College.¹¹⁵ Rabinowitz's source of inspiration, unlike Vainstein's, was not the yeshiva of yore but rather Jews' College of London.¹¹⁶ Founded in 1855 by the then Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Nathan Adler, this institution, modelled after the European rabbinical seminary, ordained English-speaking ministers after providing them with university-level courses in Jewish studies and related secular subjects.¹¹⁷ Unlike the typical Yeshiva with its focus on amassing and honing its students' Talmudic skills, this College adopted a much broader approach which was intended to give its graduates the wherewithal to lead their prospective congregations. As mentioned, Rabinowitz had in the past sent rabbinical students to London to study there and was pleased to report that an alumnus thereof, Arthur Super (the editor of the *Zionist Record*) informed him that the Johannesburg College with its diverse faculty, its mandatory Talmud classes and its courses in Jewish Philosophy, Hebrew, and homiletics, rivalled its London counterpart.¹¹⁸ The only thing spoiling the occasion for the Chief Rabbi was the decision by some of his rabbinic colleagues to absent themselves

¹¹³ Michel Kossowsky, "Reflections on Jewish Community in New York and in Israel," (audio), Johannesburg, December, 1958, <https://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecture.cfm/846995/rabbi-nisson-shulman/reflections-on-jewish-community-in-new-york-and-in-israel-rabbi-michel-kossowsky-1958-in-south-africa-father-in-law-of-rabbi-shulman-/>. Accessed on 15 December 2021.

¹¹⁴ Jacob Vainstein, "The Power of the Talmud".

¹¹⁵ Rabinowitz "Who despises the day of small things?"; *Idem*. "Graduation Ceremony".

¹¹⁶ Rabinowitz "Who despises the day of small things".

¹¹⁷ See Vivian David Lipman, "Jews College," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/jews-college>

¹¹⁸ See Rabinowitz "Graduation Ceremony". It is noteworthy that soon after, Super became ordained as a rabbi of the Reform movement in South Africa.

from the graduation, because the College failed to match up to a yeshiva, a fact Rabinowitz had anyway acknowledged.¹¹⁹

Dissatisfaction with this College, however, was not confined to the traditionalist critics. Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch, an American visitor to the country, who shared the Chief Rabbi's openness to modernity and who, a decade later, would go on to head Jews' College, was also unimpressed by the Training College. In a report published soon after Rabinowitz retired, the American guest, who described the Chief Rabbi's leadership as having "no equal in the rabbinic world" opined that the College's course of study did not meet the requirements for producing a full-fledged rabbi.¹²⁰ Undeterred by Rabinovitch's comments, Jacob Newman, the Chief Rabbi's erstwhile colleague and instructor at the Ministers' Training College, announced in early 1962, that the College had reached the stage where it was ready to confer *semicha* [official rabbinic ordination].¹²¹ It was Newman's view that unlike in eastern Europe where mere attendance at Yeshiva was sufficient for ordination this was unworkable in South Africa. The community's poor knowledge made it vital that its spiritual leaders be trained specifically to answer questions relevant to them. Following the German and Hungarian rabbinical seminary model, students would be required to study a set syllabus over several years before the college would grant ordination.¹²² Overcoming traditionalist opposition, Johannesburg, for the first time, was now preparing to ordain rabbis who acquired their entire education at the Ministers' Training College.

6. Conclusion

During his almost seventeen years of stewardship over Johannesburg's Jewish community, Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz left his mark in various spheres. In this chapter we have restricted ourselves to the impact he had in the field of religious observance, highlighting four dimensions. As a committed Zionist, Rabinowitz, in line with his predecessor, appears to have viewed his nationalist leanings and love of the Hebrew language and culture as part of his religious philosophy. Consequently, he felt teaching Hebrew should form a significant part of the Jewish education curriculum as it would encourage a common language between the nascent State of Israel and the diaspora community in Johannesburg.¹²³ For this reason he declared all synagogues and *Cheders* under his jurisdiction would pronounce Hebrew in

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*

¹²⁰ Nachum Rabinovitch, "Report from South Africa," *Jewish Life*, October, 1961.

¹²¹ Newman, "Ministers' Training College in South Africa," *Barkai* March 1962:11.

¹²² *Ibid*.

¹²³ Rabinowitz, *SAJT*, 10 March 1950.

accordance with the Israeli accent.¹²⁴ His detractors notwithstanding, his wholesome support of Hebrew teaching appears to have been adopted by most of the afternoon Hebrew schools and Jewish day schools. His attitude to Jewish law and its application to modern society is another aspect which distinguished his ministry. Realising that the South African Jewish mentality was quite different from that that had subsisted in Lithuania, he confidently ruled that where this new lifestyle did not conflict with Halacha, ways should be found to reconcile Judaism with modernity. In his view, healthy enthusiasm for sport need not be curtailed on the Sabbath if it did not violate any specific Jewish law, and that there was no room for a “puritanical” application of the law.¹²⁵

A third aspect differentiating Rabinowitz and his camp from their rivals was the attitude toward the largely unobservant laity. As we have seen, many of those who saw themselves as accommodators were disappointed with the level of observance of their flock and sorely wished for a more religious community.¹²⁶ Yet they adopted a pragmatic approach which understood the financial hardships imposed by Sabbath observance and advocated for a gentle and patient attitude with the stress on moral refinement and personal spiritual fulfilment.¹²⁷ They also made a distinction between public observance and private observance, and it was thanks more to Rabinowitz’s insistence than to anything else that assured strict public observance of Kashrut standards.¹²⁸

Lastly, we noted Rabinowitz’s and the religious establishment’s views on educating the youth and ensuring a future generation of rabbinic leadership, and how they differed from the views espoused by the traditionalist camp. The latter insisted that only an East European style Yeshiva could produce rabbis among the local youth.¹²⁹ In contradistinction, Rabinowitz and his academically inclined colleagues were adamant that a rabbinical college tailored to meet the Johannesburg community’s specific needs would produce a much more suitable rabbi – moderate and somewhat flexible in orientation, fluent in English, familiar with South African society and understanding of the religious practices of its Jews – than that produced by a traditional Yeshiva, where the syllabus would be largely unhelpful preparation for effective ministering to the South African laity.¹³⁰ As we shall see in the coming chapters,

¹²⁴ ¹²⁴ Mazabow, *Reach for the Moon*, 278, quoting *South African Jewish Herald*, 12 March, 1948.

¹²⁵ See Feldberg, (Editorial), *SAJT*, 5 March, 1954.

¹²⁶ Newman, “The Situation of the Rabbis and the Rabbinat in South Africa.”

¹²⁷ Rabinowitz, “Chief Rabbi Proclaims Sabbath Year”: 1,7; Newman, “The Rabbi and the community,” 21.

¹²⁸ See for example “You are eating Treife Food,” 2.

¹²⁹ See Kossowsky, “Our Yeshiva,” 20.

¹³⁰ See generally Rabinowitz, “The College for the Training of Rabbis: Part 3,” (Hebrew) *Barkai*, March, 1958.

the accommodators' approach to these aspects would be increasingly challenged in the years following Rabinowitz's ministry, but during this period it was the approach that still held sway within the establishment.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BEGINNING OF RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AND THE EVENTS OF 1965

1. Introduction

Many of those who have written about the revival of Johannesburg's Orthodox community – as well as many of those who were active participants --date the start of the process to the 1970s.¹ Considering, as we shall see, that it was only from that decade onwards that a quantifiable section of the community turned toward a more fervent practice of religion, there is some justification for choosing this start date. The difficulty with doing so is that it assumes that prior to the arrival of the outreach organizations, Orthodoxy in the city was largely religiously inert and unchanging. A simple reading of the press literature at that time demonstrates that such an assessment is at best inaccurate. Talk of revival dates back to the beginning of the 1950s, and effort to push in this direction was made by both the establishment and the Mizrachi rabbis.² These early initiatives took place within the context of the ideological divergence described in the previous chapter. For a number of decades from Kossowsky's arrival in 1933, the accommodators held the upper hand as only the Kossowsky family and a handful of Mizrachi rabbis pushed a traditionalist agenda.

Yet as the years progressed, and especially from the late 1950s, Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz's religious worldview, and the pedagogic and other activities he conducted along with his colleagues, began to stimulate dissenting voices and opinions. Originating from particular Dayanim of the Beth Din, congregational rabbis of independent synagogues, and even spiritual leaders of UHC-affiliated synagogues, this dissent strengthened the hand of oppositional voices within the growing Mizrachi movement. It also emboldened the sectarian Adath Yeshurun which was becoming increasingly conservative and was adopting stricter approaches under the uncompromising leadership of its rabbi, the Slovakian born Jacob Salzer.³ Recruited from Israel by the Adath congregation in 1954, this new rabbi, who in his youth had graduated from the prominent Pressburg [Bratislava] Yeshiva and had gained the reputation of an eminent scholar, gradually and systematically imposed strictures on his flock. Originally it was only his congregation that followed his rulings, but towards the end

¹ See *inter alia*, Gideon Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*; Dana Kaplan, "South African Orthodoxy Today;" Jocelyn Hellig, "The Religious Expression of South African Jewry.;" See also Rabbi Shmuel Steinhaus interview with author (Jerusalem: February, 2017) where Steinhaus described the early 1970s revival as "the resuscitation of the dead."

² Rabinowitz, *SAJT*, Rosh Hashanah Annual, September, 1949; Shrock, "Religious Revival"; Newman "Religious Life"; Rabinowitz, "On the Religious Scene"; Yaakov Rubik, "The War of the fathers and the sons", (Hebrew), *Barkai*, July, 1960: 1-3.

³ Saks, "Yekkes of Yeoville," *Jewish Affairs*, 57(4), Chanukah, 2002: 14-16.

of Rabinowitz's tenure, and over subsequent years, when Salzer had become de facto leader of the separatists, his influence began to be felt by the broader community, which in turn caused a fair amount of unease among the Orthodox establishment.

Rabinowitz's departure in 1961 and the appointment of his successor, Bernard Moses Casper, two years later only encouraged emergent opposition to the accommodationist position. So too did the hiring practices of larger congregations that hired charismatic American rabbis who considered themselves to not be beholden to the established institutions, and who affiliated themselves, in the most part with the traditionalist camp. Many of their followers, including members of Bnei Akiva, had limited education in traditional sources, but like their leaders they displayed a religious zeal that was impatient with the pace of change of the established rabbinate.⁴ Unlike the accommodators, these rabbinic newcomers appeared less interested in taking responsibility for the community's general welfare. They preferred instead to assume the self-styled role of guardians of strict traditional observance which they referred to as "Torah Judaism."⁵ In this vein, they concentrated their efforts on improving Kashrut and Sabbath observance among the lay leadership.⁶ Their religious zeal and opposition did not go unnoticed by the establishment which reacted to these efforts by arguing for a more temperate interpretation of Orthodoxy.⁷ This call for moderation was rejected by the traditionalists, resulting in unease between the establishment and its rivals on the right. Eventually in 1965 a serious schism emerged. Yet, as we shall see in chapter 5, that year did not mark the apex but rather the portent of a much more severe and long-lasting rift that was to affect profoundly the future direction of Orthodoxy in Johannesburg. Below we provide an account of the growing conflict between the accommodators and the traditionalists in the 1950s and early 1960s, followed by a detailed analysis of the events of 1965 which I argue are pivotal to understanding the veritable religious revolution of the 1970s.

2. The rise of the traditionalists and sectarian communities

In late 1953 Israel's Chief Rabbi Herzog visited Johannesburg and attended the Bnei Akiva shul; the services so impressed him that he considered it a great pity that it was located

⁴ The dissatisfaction with the rabbinate may be seen, among others, in Altshuler, "Did you protest loudly," 84-85; Watchman, "Bnei Akiva Gives a Lead," *S. A. Jewish Observer*, March, 1963.

⁵ The Torah is the Hebrew word for the Pentateuch, but in Orthodox circles it is often used to describe the whole corpus of Jewish Law.

⁶ See Watchman, "Bnei Akiva Gives a Lead."

⁷ See for example Rabinowitz, *SAJT*, 26 February, 1954; Newman, "The Rabbi and the community"; Newman., "Rabbi condemns "arrogance in the name of religion."

in a rented hall, and he encouraged the community to secure a permanent home. This prompted the latter to turn to the Federation of Synagogues which allocated it some large rooms at the Beth Din, and assisted its move to the more dignified, premises.⁸ With its relocation it now attracted larger crowds; complaints were actually received from the women's section that there was insufficient room.⁹ The shul's success boosted the reputation of Mizrahi and its Bnei Akiva affiliate allowing it to make inroads into the community. Three years later in July 1956, Bnei Akiva South Africa celebrated its twentieth anniversary. With 750 members nationwide, a synagogue, a Yeshiva boys' high school, and the immigration to Israel of 14 youngsters over the previous eight months, it could vouchsafe its religious and Zionist credentials.¹⁰ Alongside Bnei Akiva's success there were indications of a renewed public interest in religious observance and in Jewish studies. In October of that year, it was reported that there were more than 300 Succahs [temporary booths erected for the Festival of Tabernacles] in Johannesburg. Reportedly many were built at the prompting of King David pupils.¹¹ In the same month Yeoville Synagogue announced that attendance at the Yeoville Talmudical Circle, which entailed a weekly lecture in Talmud given by their rabbi, A. H. Lapin, had grown from three to sixteen regulars within nine months of its initiation.¹² In November, Emmarentia Synagogue announced it had been conducting a Talmud Study Circle in English on Saturday afternoons that was attracting young professionals and businessmen, providing them the opportunity of "grappling with Jewish law and its relationship to modern times."¹³

In addition to this evidence of new interest in observance, there were signs of increasing assertiveness by some already within the Orthodox fold. A new threat to the Chief Rabbi's authority came from the religious right in the form of the separatist Adath Yeshurun congregation. This self-contained and unaffiliated community of mainly German immigrants was founded in 1936 and for almost two decades operated without a rabbi. In 1954 it enlisted

⁸ See Sher, "Our Shul", 18. Presumably, Rabbi Michel Kossowsky assisted them. The connection between the shul and the Beth Din was more than just shared premises and many of its Dayanim took an active role in the spiritual leadership of the shul.

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ "Bnei Akiva Movement – 20 Years Old," *Barkai*, July, 1956.

¹¹ "300 Succahs Built in Johannesburg for Festival," *Federation Chronicle*, October, 1956: 1. This contemporary account of the number of Succahs should alert us to the unreliability of other, self-congratulatory, retrospective accounts based on personal memories which records a significantly lower total of 48 Suckahs for the late 1950s for the "entire Yeoville, Observatory, Berea area, and beyond" (see Chandrea Serebro, "80 Years of Yekkes in Yeoville", *Jewish Life*, March, 2017, <http://www.jewishlife.co.za/new/2017/03/28/80-years-of-yekkes-in-joburg/>). While the number 300 includes Suckahs erected by communal institutions, it cannot account for the wide discrepancy.

¹² "16 Who Study the Talmud in Yeoville," *Federation Chronicle*, October 1956: 3.

¹³ "30 Young Men Study Talmud in English," *Federation Chronicle*, October 1956: 3

the rabbinic services of Salzer, who was then living in Israel. As mentioned, from the time he arrived, Salzer introduced many religious stringencies that were alien to Johannesburg's Jewish community, most of whom barely conformed to the establishment's much more lenient modern Orthodox standards. These stringencies included kosher supervision of milk, setting up an independent meat supervision agency, and constructing a competing ritual bath or mikva whose standards were more stringent than those of the community.¹⁴ In March 1959, an advertisement for kosher milk under the "supervision of the Adath Jeshurun (*sic*) Congregation" prompted the Chief Rabbi to respond.¹⁵ Speaking at a Federation of Synagogues conference, he castigated those for whom "the standard of our Orthodoxy is not high enough" and who "belittle[d] and disparage[d]" the Beth Din. He advised that they stop their attacks.¹⁶ Rather than putting an end to this opposition, this speech marked the beginning of a new split which saw the traditionalists becoming increasingly more brazen in their challenges to the establishment.

The spat continued to boil over in the pages of the Jewish press. In April 1959 the editor of the *Federation Chronicle* attacked the Adath for "flouting" the Beth Din's authority.¹⁷ In response the *S.A. Jewish Times* condemned the editorial's "violent opinions" against the "ultra-Orthodox Congregation," and wondered how "an organ representing orthodoxy" could "assail the body [that] firmly upholds religious values."¹⁸ Acknowledging that the Chief Rabbi had dissociated himself from this attack, the independent weekly called on the Federation to issue a public clarification.¹⁹ Defending the Adath, in the same edition, a pseudonymous letter writer accused the Federation of exceedingly low standards of kashrut,

¹⁴ "We have never challenged the authority of the Beth Din", *SAJT*, 8 May, 1959. The Johannesburg Beth Din, like similar modern orthodox Beth Dins was not strict about supervised milk. For a general discussion on the necessity of supervising milk see "Supervised Milk", *The Jewish Chronicle* 25 November, 2016, <https://www.thejc.com/judaism/jewish-ways/supervised-milk-1.66976>. For details on the mikva see Mr. Egon Schoeman, interview with author (Bet Shemesh, Israel: January 2020). Originally, Salzer proposed to Rosenzweig, who was then a senior Dayan on the Beth Din, that his congregation would, at its own expense, renovate the Beth Din's mikva to make it compliant with the standards he required. Rosenzweig replied that these stringencies were unnecessary and refused the offer. Consequently, the Adath constructed its own mikva while agreeing to the Beth Din supervision thereof.

¹⁵ "Chief Rabbi's Hard Hitting Address to Federation of Synagogue," *SAJT*, 13 March, 1959.

¹⁶ *Ibid* It is unclear who he was rebuking, it was either members of the Adath or possibly dissatisfied elements in Mizrachi, whose voices of dissent grew louder over the years, as we shall see.

¹⁷ "Hefkeruth and Irresponsibility" (editorial), *Federation Chronicle*, April, 1959. Presumably, the editor of the *Federation Chronicle* and writer of the article was Mr. Jacob Rubik, editor of *Barkai*, for at the Federation's AGM he had been elected chairman of the editorial board (see "Chief Rabbi's Hard Hitting Address").

¹⁸ "Federation Chronicle off the rails," (editorial), *SAJT*, 8 May 1959. The label "ultra-Orthodox" was not a perfect fit for the Adath. As revealed by a young spokesman in the profile on the Adath its members were purported to "mix socially, ...go to theatres, cinemas, and listen to music" ("We have never challenged the authority of the Beth Din").

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

and for good measure accused its Ministers' Training College, of being subpar and of accommodating anti-traditional views.²⁰ A month later, the Federation acceded to pressure by publicly, albeit, half-heartedly, dissociating itself and the Beth Din from the editorial.²¹ This retraction, as noted by the Adath in its rejoinder, was "marred" by its deliberate retaining of the charge that the German congregation was responsible for "weakening the religious community and creating confusion in the minds of many."²² Issued mere months after Rabinowitz had lambasted those with purportedly higher standards of Orthodoxy for undermining the Beth Din, the similarity in language suggests his imprint in this dissociation-cum-accusation.²³

In 1960, the public donning of yarmulkes was still rare and reserved for the synagogue and study hall.²⁴ On occasions that one wore a yarmulke the colour choices were restricted to black or white. Those who were strictly observant and wished to follow the Jewish custom of covering their heads would wear a hat or cap. In July that year, the editor of *Barkai*, the Johannesburg-based Hebrew monthly, noted that a veritable religious revolution had taken place among some youth, who were nevertheless guilty of two misdemeanours. Not only were they wearing Yarmulkes in the street, but these Yarmulkes were multi-coloured and not black or white.²⁵ Overall, however, he was pleased with their zeal and hoped they would inspire others. Remarkably, he did not mention these youths' affiliation, which one may reasonably assume was to Bnei Akiva.²⁶ The same report described the editor's visit to the Federation of Synagogues youth seminar attended by more than one hundred adolescents. Here he enthusiastically declared that since leaving Lithuania as a teenager he had never felt such a spiritual high. His only complaints were that the seminar was devoid of Zionist symbolism and did not include Hebrew among the subjects taught there. This omission appears to have originated with Rabinowitz who initiated the idea of a Federation youth movement, and who wished to distinguish it from the Zionist-

²⁰ Emeth, "Federation of Synagogues should put their own house in Order," (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 8 May 1959: 19.

²¹ "Statement by Beth Din and Federation of Synagogues," *Federation Chronicle*, May 1959: 10.

²² "Adath Jeshurun Replies to Federation of Synagogues and Beth Din," *SAJT*, 5 June 1959.

²³ See "Chief Rabbi's Hard-Hitting Address," 13 March 1959 where accusations of belittling the Beth Din are made.

²⁴ See Prof. Yaacov (Julian) Katz, interview with author (Alon Shvut, Israel: November, 2019), where he mentions that though his father was observant he did not wear a Yarmulke in public. See also Egon Schoeman interview, where he admits that even the separatists at Adath Yeshurun would likewise not wear yarmulkes in public.

²⁵ Rubik, "The War of the fathers and the sons," 1.

²⁶ *Ibid*; See Solly Sacks, interview with author (Jerusalem, February, 2017) and Prof. Yaacov (Julian) Katz, interview. Both interviewees mentioned that Bnei Akiva were pioneers in proudly wearing their Yarmulkes in public.

oriented Bnei Akiva movement.²⁷ The Chief Rabbi was worried that the latter's focus on Israel was detrimental to ensuring continuity in South Africa which was his major concern.²⁸ He wanted his movement to act as a vehicle for nurturing synagogue leaders; since Bnei Akiva, for the most part, operated independently of the synagogues it was important to have a separate dedicated organization.²⁹ One can also surmise that an added advantage to founding this competing youth group was that it put distance between the Chief Rabbi and the traditionalist-oriented movement. For their part, the traditionalists did not evince much interest in joining Rabinowitz's movement.³⁰

By the end of 1961, shortly after Rabinowitz departed for Israel, Bnei Akiva and its traditionalist rabbis seemed poised to wrest the initiative from the establishment rabbis when it came to religious matters. The first signs of this were seen in Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch's aforementioned report of his impressions of South Africa. After wryly noting that graduates of the Jewish high school "know Hebrew pretty well and do not know very much else," Rabinovitch praised Bnei Akiva's "tremendous growth" and ability to attract youth from "homes completely estranged from Jewish observance."³¹ Basing himself solely on the success of this movement, he was moved to predict that the time was ripe "for a great Torah awakening in South Africa."³² In October 1962, apparently in response to traditionalist pressure, the head of the Beth Din's kashrut department conceded that there were potential problems with the certification of chickens. He explained this was because shochetim would only be paid if the chickens were correctly slaughtered and so they were reluctant to disqualify any poultry. The head supervisor even admitted that some kosher-certified restaurants did not set strict standards and those who avoided dining there were justified in doing so.³³ In March 1963, Bnei Akiva passed a resolution barring anyone not Sabbath observant from serving as an officer in the movement.³⁴ Commenting on this confident assertion, the Mizrahi organization's monthly, the *South African Jewish Observer*,

²⁷ See Mazabow, *Reach for the Moon*, 243, citing *SAJT*, 12 August, 1960. The seminar was run by Ben Isaacson, then rabbi of Krugersdorp and Rabinowitz's confidant.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Rabinowitz also suggested Bnei Akiva's Zionism was too revolutionary, (see Mazabow *Reach for the Moon*, 243).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See Prof Yaacov Katz interview. Katz mentions there was a divide between Bnei Akiva members and Rabinowitz's youth supporters who he felt were not particularly religious.

³¹ Rabinovitch, "Report," *Jewish Life*. Presumably by this time Bnei Akiva's membership had grown larger than its 750-membership recorded in 1956 (see "Bnei Akiva Movement – 20 Years Old"). We do not have statistics for 1961.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ J. Symanowitz, (opinion column), *Barkai*, October, 1961

³⁴ See Watchman, "Bnei Akiva Gives a Lead," (Communal Corner Column), *S.A. Jewish Observer*, March 1963: 2.

recommended all synagogues follow suit and disqualify any unobservant person from serving on a committee or as wardens.³⁵ In May the same newspaper criticized Ben Isaacson, a Johannesburg-born rabbi in Bloemfontein, for conducting a joint service with the local reform congregation.³⁶ The paper condescendingly suggested that if Isaacson failed to understand the damage caused by “fraternising” with Reform, he should “consult with his mentors at the Ministers’ Training College who awarded him his Minister’s Diploma.”³⁷ Showing themselves unbound from the Orthodox establishment, correspondents in the same edition rebuked Isaacson’s mentor, the former Chief Rabbi, for “irresponsibly” publishing articles in Israel critical of South African Jewry since he ought to have realized they would be republished in the non-Jewish South African press.³⁸ Appearing to hedge its bets on Rabinowitz’s successor, this mouthpiece, a few months later, “eagerly awaited” the arrival of Rabbi Bernard Moses Casper, who was noted for his “active identification with the Mizrachi movement,” and whom they hoped would provide a “spiritual uplift.”³⁹ Shortly after his arrival, the new Chief Rabbi Casper addressed Mizrachi and duly praised his hosts, but as we shall see, despite personality differences between the successive Chief Rabbis, Casper would also prove to be a staunch guardian of the establishment and a model of accommodation.⁴⁰

Appointing itself arbiter of religious observance and Zionist mores, the *S.A. Jewish Observer* in early 1964 carried two editorials condemning other organizations for not living

³⁵ The *South African Jewish Observer* was founded in the early 1950s and its editorial page described itself as the “Official Organ of the National Religious Movement of South Africa.” The National Religious movement represented the unification of the Mizrachi and HaPoel HaMizrachi movements (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Religious_Party). In *South African Jewry 1967/68* the Mizrachi Organization of South Africa is named as the publisher of this monthly newspaper (at 132). See also Marcia B. Tanzer, *The Call of Africa is Heard in Brooklyn: A Memoir about Rabbi Avraham Tanzer* (Johannesburg: Yeshiva College, 2013) where she relates how Rabbi Michel Kossowsky dismissed calls from his Mizrachi colleagues for the Federation to bar all non-observant persons from serving on a synagogue committee.

³⁶ See Watchman, “Ki MiBlomefontein Teze Torah,” (Communal Corner Column), *S.A. Jewish Observer*, May, 1963: 2. For a different version of what took place in Bloemfontein see Belling and Saks, *The Struggle Rabbi*.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Ben Isaacson was already ordained as a rabbi by 1962 (see Edgar Bernstein “South African Jewish Community,” *American Jewish Yearbook*, 64 (1963): 421) so the reference to him as a minister was probably a deliberate slur.

³⁸ “The Former Chief Rabbi and the Press,” (editorial), *S.A. Jewish Observer*, May, 1963: 6. This was not a religious issue, but the harsh criticism suggests friction between Rabinowitz and the Mizrachi. The political liberal leanings of Rabinowitz and his strident disagreement with the Board of Deputies “non-involvement” in national politics was at complete odds with Rabbi Michel Kossowsky who took the traditionalist view that it was unwise for the Jewish community to become involved in politics. Their argument lies beyond the scope of this study but it is an important distinction between the universalist world view of the accommodators and the more parochial views of the traditionalists. (See Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 40-41)

³⁹ “Baruch Haba Rabbi Casper,” (editorial), *S.A. Jewish Observer* September, 1963: 6. Though Casper shared Rabinowitz’s universalist views of Judaism, those responsible for recruiting him must have breathed a sigh of relief to discover that he adopted a much more accommodating approach to the Nationalist government and tended to agree with the Board of Deputies’ policy to shy away from commenting on politics. In this aspect his views aligned more with the traditionalist Kossowsky (See Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 141).

⁴⁰ “Chief Rabbi Says Mizrachi is Shaping Israel’s Future,” *S.A. Jewish Observer*, December, 1963.

up to the standards they deemed proper. In one case it called for the sacking of the *shaliach* [emissary] of the Habonim Zionist youth movement. Citing his purportedly negative attitude to Judaism and to the synagogue, the paper claimed his presence harmed the traditional-oriented youth for whom he served as an “emulative example.”⁴¹ In another case it chastised the “Chassidic (*sic*) shul” for failing to invite a Zionist Federation representative to the inauguration of its new building.⁴² Not only did this contravene longstanding conventions; it also displayed ingratitude to the “Zionist authorities” who had assisted Chabad in Israel.⁴³

A month later, the former Chief Rabbi, in an article penned in Israel about South African Jewish day schools, proved again he was much more of a moderate than his Mizrachi colleagues. Instead of insisting on religious and Zionist purity he opined that each ideology complements and tempers the other. For him, the school system represented, “a happy mean ... between the advocates of a purely Zionist education and of a purely religious one. The adoption...of the formula *national-traditional* avoided ... a *Kultuur-Kampf* (*sic*).”⁴⁴ His main rival and fierce critic of the “national-traditional” formula, Michel Kossowsky, died soon after at the age of 57.⁴⁵ His admirers spoke of him personally as one “who genuinely loved and was beloved of his fellowmen”, and as the “essence of forbearance and kindness.”⁴⁶ They conceded that when “waging war” to preserve Orthodoxy and “Torah Judaism,” he refused to compromise.⁴⁷ Most of those eulogising him were comforted by the fact that he had left a lasting legacy in his founding of Yeshiva College.⁴⁸ Interestingly, his Zionist activities were not highlighted, and the impression with which one was left was of a staunch traditionalist refusing to compromise especially when opposing Reform Judaism.⁴⁹ After being buried in Israel alongside the remains of his father, he was succeeded as Rosh Yeshiva

⁴¹ “What kind of Shlichim,” (editorial), *S.A. Jewish Observer*, January, 1964: 6.

⁴² “Chassidic Shul: An Omission,” (editorial), *S.A. Jewish Observer*, January, 1964: 6.

⁴³ *Ibid.* As we shall see in the 1970s, a bolder Chabad movement would take much father reaching non-Zionist measures.

⁴⁴ Louis I. Rabinowitz, “Jewish Day Schools are the Glory of South African Jewry,” *Jewish Affairs*, February 1964: 15.

⁴⁵ “S.A. Jewry Mourns Loss of its Orthodox Leaders,” *S.A. Jewish Observer*, April 1964: 1. As noted in chapter 2. Michel Kossowsky together with his father was vigorously opposed to the broad national traditional formula which was agreed upon.

⁴⁶ H. S. Liebgott, “He was the Conscience of the Community,” *S.A. Jewish Observer*, April 1964: 4; A. H. Lapin, “In the Dayan’s office,” *S.A. Jewish Observer*, May 1964: 4.

⁴⁷ Jacob Rubik, “Rabbi Dr. Michel Kossowsky of Blessed Memory,” *Barkai*, April, 1964: 1-2; “His Guiding principle,” *S.A. Jewish Observer*, April 1964: 1. A.H. Lapin, “Rabbi Michael Kossowsky- A Tribute” *Jewish Affairs* April 1964.

⁴⁸ “His Guiding principle,” 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, “The Community Pays Tribute,” *S.A. Jewish Observer*, April 1964: 4. This article reprints tributes from personalities and Jewish newspapers. Interestingly there is no contribution from Rabinowitz, with whom he served on the Beth Din for over a decade. It is of course possible the former Chief Rabbi submitted a tribute elsewhere, but the fact that Mizrachi’s official organ did not cite Rabinowitz suggests relations were strained.

by the New York-born Telshe graduate, Rabbi Avraham Tanzer who had arrived a year earlier to assume the position of dean.⁵⁰

3. *The Turning Point: 1965*

In 1965 tensions between the accommodators and the increasingly emboldened traditionalist camp reached a peak. The incidents that took place revealed two prominent features of the establishment and the accommodators who led it. One was a tendency to seek strict obedience to authority, whether in the assertion that the Beth Din should act unchallenged, or in the insistence that the Board of Education retained for itself a complete monopoly on education in the city. This insistence baffled many, including non-Jews, since it implied that the ecclesiastical and educational bodies were somehow infallible.⁵¹ A second characteristic of the establishment and its lay supporters was a tendency to brand religious views to its right as “ultra-Orthodox,” “Neturey Karta,” or “Mea Shearim.”⁵² The “ultra-Orthodox” epithet implied that the traditionalists, many of whom belonged to the Modern Orthodox and religious Zionist Bnei Akiva movement, were, like the ultra-Orthodox, opposed to secular learning and Zionism. Likewise, references to Neturey Karta, an anti-modern and vigorously anti-Zionist sect, and to Mea Shearim, the Jerusalem neighbourhood where many of that sect resided, were an attempt to associate the traditionalists with extreme and intolerable views. It is likely such insults were conceived well before 1965 and were only expressed that year out of a sense of exasperation toward the traditionalist rabbis. Yet by resorting to simplistic and inaccurate name calling, the establishment undercut its claim to represent a broadminded and accommodating Judaism.

This is not to say the traditionalist rabbis described below were beyond reproach. By putting principle before pragmatism, the traditionalists’ actions alienated important sectors of the community. Their brash style provided the establishment with ample ammunition, and the tone of their attacks made it difficult to convert new followers to their cause. Common to all the incidents, as shall be shown, is the fact that each side appeared incapable of conceding anything to its counterpart. No wonder then that not many years would pass before the misunderstandings and unhappiness of 1965 would erupt into a veritable revolution against the establishment as will be described in the next chapter.

⁵⁰ See “S.A. Jewry Mourns Loss of its Orthodox Leaders.”

⁵¹ See J.N. Katz, “Why do Rabbis rush to the Press,” (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 26 November, 1965: 4.; John Russel, “Non-Jew Comments on Jewish Law,” (Open Forum) *SAJT*, 26 November 1965: 4.

⁵² See examples above as well as A Grateful Member, “Air is Cleared on Oxford Day School” (Open Forum) *SAJT*, 3 December, 1965: 6.

The first of the flash points of 1965 occurred at Sydenham Highlands North Hebrew Congregation, one of Johannesburg's largest synagogues that catered to the fairly prosperous north eastern suburbs. The synagogue had recently appointed an American, Solomon Poupko as their rabbi. Though dressed in Modern Orthodox garb, he expressed sympathies with the anti-Zionist Satmar *Rebbe*, Yoel Teitelbaum. On the eve of Yom Kippur in 1965, the rabbi delivered a sermon where he vented his feeling about the general community. After calling Johannesburg's lay leadership "a lot of Am Haartzim- ignoramuses" and the local Jewish newspapers the "prostitution" press, he declared that "the biggest pest in this country is Zionism."⁵³ Breaking with all communal taboos, he went on to criticize the Zionist Youth for "turning fine upstanding boys and girls into storm troopers."⁵⁴ Understandably, this sermon moved many members of the congregation to voice their displeasure in letters to the press. For good measure, the letter writers added unrelated complaints regarding the rabbi's insistence that a bride present a certificate of having attended the mikva before being allowed to marry and relating to his ban against a couple kissing under the wedding canopy.⁵⁵

These reactions appeared only to harden Poupko's position. In his next sermon he attacked the *S.A. Jewish Times* for "maligning and vilifying him with misquotations and distortions" and recommended that congregants stop their subscriptions.⁵⁶ As may be expected, the next week's edition devoted two pages to letter writers taking umbrage at the rabbi's assault on the community and its devotion to Zionism.⁵⁷ This pressure prompted Poupko to issue what he referred to as an "unreserved apology," but which was criticized for not going far enough.⁵⁸ Conspicuous by its absence was any letter by any official Orthodox body condemning the rabbi for his unusual statements.⁵⁹ As a sign that some in the rabbinate were pleased with Poupko's statements and perhaps shared his disdain for the laity, Rabbi A. H. Lapin of the UHC constituent Yeoville Synagogue, walked to Sydenham to hear Poupko's second sermon and to congratulate him for it.⁶⁰ While the Mizrahi movement "deplored" the

⁵³ "Rabbi Poupko Attacks Congregants in Yom Kippur Sermon," *SAJT*, 15 October 1965: 11; Edgar Bernstein, "South African Jewish Community," *American Jewish Yearbook* 67 (1966): 452.

⁵⁴ "Rabbi Poupko's Second Assault" *SAJT*, 22 October, 1965: 11.

⁵⁵ "Rabbi Poupko Attacks Congregants."

⁵⁶ "Rabbi Poupko's Second Assault."

⁵⁷ See "Open Forum," *SAJT*, 29 October 1965: 5-6. The letters included a letter of resignation tendered to the secretary of the Synagogue and reprinted in the newspaper. (See "Sydenham Highlands member Resigns from Congregation," *Ibid*: 5).

⁵⁸ S. Poupko, "Rabbi Poupko Apologizes Unreservedly," *SAJT*, 29 October 1965: 6; "A Non-Apology Full of Reservations," *SAJT*, 5 November 1965: 6.

⁵⁹ The fact that Chief Rabbi Casper did not publicly intervene was noted and criticized by Jacob Rubik, see "Hefkeruth" (Hebrew), *Barkai* October 1965.

⁶⁰ Rabbi Poupko's Second Assault"; Puzzled "Who asked whom", ("Open Forum"), *SAJT* 29 October 1965: 5.

overt anti-Zionist statements, they too appeared unwilling to completely dissociate themselves from Poupko. Instead, they criticized the *S.A. Jewish Times* for creating the uproar and characterized the rabbi's rebuke of the leadership's low "standards of knowledge and practice" as perfectly "valid."⁶¹

Since this incident coincided with two others that were to have farther reaching effects, this particular controversy appears to have died a natural death by the end of November. Even so, the fact that an anti-Zionist rabbi could hold a position in a prominent congregation, make inflammatory statements, and be defended by a distinguished colleague without the Orthodox establishment being capable of disciplining him in any meaningful way, suggests how the latter's reach was limited and was giving way to an increasingly confident traditionalist camp.

The second incident took place in late October when Rabbi Professor Jacob Newman, apparently unprovoked, took to the pages of the *S.A. Jewish Times* charging Bnei Akiva with "fanatic presumptuousness" for enquiring into "matters of Kashruth which even learned...rabbis leave happily to the Beth Din."⁶² After wondering how a movement so lacking in "knowledge of Jewish law" could be so "audacious [as to] judge the religious leadership," he ended his piece by cautioning it to be "tolerant and respectful of the established sanctities."⁶³ In the paper's next edition Rabbi Joseph Bronner, a prominent diamond merchant, president of the Yeshiva College Council, and the national chairman of Mizrahi strongly defended Bnei Akiva from this "unwarranted attack."⁶⁴ Lambasting Newman for "deriding and disparaging" the "only religious Zionist youth movement in South Africa," Bronner turned the tables by accusing his counterpart of being guilty of compromising his religious standards. The Mizrahi rabbi expressed pride in Bnei Akiva precisely because it chose to challenge the religious authorities and remain loyal to the *Mitzvoth*. To his mind, if anyone needed a lesson in tolerance it was the "learned professor"

⁶¹ "What should be the norm?" (editorial), *S.A. Jewish Observer*, December 1965: 1.

⁶² Newman, "Rabbi condemns arrogance in the name of religion," *SAJT* 29 October, 1965: 7. The exact details of the dispute remain vague, but as we have mentioned above, since at least 1961, the Beth Din's level of Kashruth was being questioned from various quarters. It is therefore unsurprising that Bnei Akiva may have made some impolite challenges.

⁶³ *Ibid.* Literature produced by Bnei Akiva at the time suggests the movement readily acknowledged its ignorance of Jewish Law. (See *Series for Madrichim and Seniors*, (Johannesburg: Hanhalat Bnei Akiva, 1964), where it states, "many complaints have been lodged re the state of Dat [Religion] in the movement." Moreover, the level of the religious lessons contained in the booklet appears to be elementary; See also Raymond Aronson "The South African Bnei Akiva Movement," *S.A. Jewish Observer*, December 1962 where Aronson admits that even the madrichim (counsellors) came from a low level of observance.

⁶⁴ Joseph Bronner, "Tolerance for Religious Steadfastness," *SAJT*, 5 November 1965, p. 6.

who failed to appreciate the need for “religious steadfastness.”⁶⁵ Going a step further, Bronner ended his letter by portraying Newman’s attack on the faithful Bnei Akiva as a *Chilul Hashem* [a libellous desecration of G-d’s name] which, he reminded his readers was an “unforgiveable sin.”⁶⁶ Responding the next week, Newman intimated that Bnei Akiva’s “arrogance” could be traced to leaders like Bronner. Blaming the latter for causing “masses of Jewish people to despise” the “religious Zionism” Bronner represented, Newman insinuated that if anyone was guilty of desecrating G-d’s name, it was his antagonist.⁶⁷

Underlying this exchange of insults was a deeper ideological rift between the establishment and the traditionalists. On the one hand the accommodationists, despite cloaking themselves in the mantle of broadmindedness, believed that their centralized authority should not be questioned, lest it undermine communal unity. Moreover, they were sensitive to challenges to their authority by those less learned, viewing such misguided zeal as a perversion of Judaism. The traditionalists, for their part, felt that fealty to Halacha superseded loyalty to any institutional entity, especially one whose standards they considered compromising. While the public confrontation ended abruptly in early December with the warring rabbis signing a statement to “refrain” from further attacks, the drawn out and personal nature of the spat was unprecedented.⁶⁸

Even as both protagonists desisted, a lively debate between individual letter writers continued for roughly a month over the substance of the argument. Supporting Newman, one writer complained about the “pettiness and narrowmindedness of those [like Bronner] who speak in the name of Religion(*sic*).”⁶⁹ He was joined by a self-identified ex-Bnei Akiva member who argued that Bronner’s “intolerance, . . . and supercilious attitude” reminded him why he left the movement. Alleging his former colleagues were incapable of translating a “simple piece of Chumash [Pentateuch],” he thought it impertinent of them to “usurp” the rabbis’ authority.⁷⁰ Another reader accused Bronner of wishing “to create a Mea Shearim atmosphere.”⁷¹ These statements led Bronner’s supporters, in the next week’s open forum, to

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* It is noteworthy that Bronner refers to Newman as a professor (which he was) rather than as a rabbi, presumably in a deliberate attempt to undermine his rabbinic qualifications.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Jacob Newman, “Abuse and Sarcasm are poor arguments says Rabbi Dr. Newman,” (open Forum), *SAJT*, 12 November 1965: 5.

⁶⁸ “Rabbis Newman and Bronner Shake Hands,” (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 3 December 1965: 7.

⁶⁹ J. Lieberman, “A Leader of True Vision” (Open Forum) *SAJT*, 5 November 1965: 6.

⁷⁰ Louis Garb, “Why I left the Bnei Akiva Movement,” (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 19 November. 1965: 6.

⁷¹ B. L. Kaplan, “Who is Rabbi Bronner,” (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 19 November, 1965: 6. This somewhat distorted imputation of the motives of the modern Orthodox Bronner, whose wife was to go on to lecture in university illustrates the alienation some felt towards Bnei Akiva. It is reminiscent of what Kossowsky told

push back against the attack. With the exception of a conciliatory letter from Bnei Akiva's Hanhala [Management Committee] regretting the press coverage and denying it had ever "disputed any ruling of the Beth Din," many readers expressed frustration with Newman's actions.⁷² One correspondent, labelling the implied prohibition against questioning the rabbinate as "contrary to Jewish tradition," thanked Bronner for "his courage" in "bravely taking up the cause of Bnei Akiva."⁷³ Other Bnei Akiva supporters wondered how Newman could claim their movement was "fanatical" when its whole purpose was to show "what a thing of beauty Judaism could be."⁷⁴ Newman's public condemnation of the movement, they felt, would deter hesitant non-observant parents from sending their children to the only religious youth movement.⁷⁵ Correspondents from both sides were so entrenched in their positions that they appeared unable to consider the person they supported may have acted unwisely and perhaps the opposite party was justified in feeling aggrieved. Since Newman was so staunch in his defence of the establishment, his supporters felt they could overlook his ostensibly unprovoked attack and concomitant insinuation that the Beth Din was beyond reproach. Bronner's admirers, on the other hand, appeared unperturbed by the extremely personal nature of the allegations he had hurled at a prominent community rabbi, and failed to acknowledge he may have acted overzealously. This deep divide between the groups shows the extent to which the rabbis' divergent views spilled over to the broader community, creating mutual and apparently irreparable mistrust.

But the most consequential event to take place that same year was what was to be later called the "Oxford Affair." After rising to deliver his morning sermon on Yom Kippur, Oxford Synagogue's recently appointed American rabbi, Norman Bernhard, announced that as part of his agreement with the committee the latter agreed to assist him in building a new Jewish day school on the synagogue's premises. After assuring the packed congregation that he would independently raise the necessary funds, he remarked that none of the existing schools was "religiously satisfactory." To continue providing an education to his young daughters a new school was vital.⁷⁶ The announcement was reportedly received in "dead silence" as it dawned upon the gathering that the proposed school was to be of a different

Tanzer in 1963: "In South Africa, we are the Mizrachi, we are the Aguda, we are even the Neturei Karta" (Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 37).

⁷² Hanhalat Bnei Akiva, "Bnei Akiva Responds to Criticism," (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 26 November, 1965: 5.

⁷³ J.N. Katz, "Why do Rabbis rush to the Press."

⁷⁴ Raymond Aronson, "Bnei Akiva showed me how beautiful Judaism can be," (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 3 December 1965: 5.

⁷⁵ Anonymous, "Bnei Akiva is on the Right Road," (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 3 December 1965: 5.

⁷⁶ "Oxford Synagogue to Start its own Jewish Day School," *SAJT*, 15 October, 1965: 11.

character than all the other educational institutions.⁷⁷ Responding the next week to allegations in the press that the congregation was blindsided by Bernhard's announcement, Oxford's chairman argued that the Chief Rabbi had approved the initiative months before and that many parents were showing an interest in sending their children to this new school.⁷⁸ Most letter writers differed with the chairman, complaining that the committee had overstepped its bounds when it authorized the school's establishment and arguing that Bernhard was wrong for competing with the Board of Education.⁷⁹ Calling efforts to build the proposed "ultra-Orthodox day school" a threat to "the whole structure of the community," the *S.A. Jewish Times* editor appealed the next week to the "communal leadership to assert its authority" and quash the initiative.⁸⁰ It was unfathomable to him that Bernhard could "undermine" the Board of Education which was under the religious leadership of Rabbi Goss and the Chief Rabbi.⁸¹ Echoing these sentiments, Jacob Rubik, *Barkai's* editor wondered how the Board could be "kosher for Goss and Casper but *treif* for Bernhard."⁸² Rubik reminded Oxford's new spiritual leader that unlike in America, rabbis in South Africa were subordinate to a Chief Rabbi, and he implored Bernhard to nip the project in the bud. Concluding his piece, he warned the new rabbi, as the *S.A. Jewish Times* had done, that he had underestimated the opposition and that he would be stopped.

A month after the announcement, the Board of Education arranged a special meeting with Bernhard. Speaking in his capacity as the Board's honorary president, the Chief Rabbi apparently denied having sanctioned the school project. Meanwhile the Board's other members declared they would not countenance a new Jewish Day School since as far as they

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ "Oxford Synagogue Opens Jewish Day School project," *SAJT*, 29 October, 1965: 2.

⁷⁹ See Worried Member, "Stop Oxford Synagogue Starting New Day School," (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 29 October 1965:5.; I. C. Davis, "Did Oxford Membership Know of Contract with Rabbi Bernhard," (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 29 October 1965: 5.

⁸⁰ "The Oxford Day School Project," (editorial), 5 November, 1965: 8. Responding to this editorial, Mizrahi criticized the paper for labelling the prospective school "ultra-Orthodox" which it felt "discredited an attempt to educate young Jews up to standards which in knowledgeable Jewish communities would pass as a minimum of Orthodoxy" (see "What should be the norm?"). Considering that Bernhard was an alumnus of Yeshiva University and had taken courses at Columbia University (see "Rabbi Bernhard to be inducted on Sept. 19," *S.A. Jewish Observer*, September 1965) references to ultra-Orthodoxy appear exaggerated. It is noteworthy that notwithstanding the perception of Bernhard as a traditionalist, when it came to his political leanings, he tended to harbour far more liberal sentiments. Throughout his rabbinical tenure he was critical of Apartheid though not always as loudly as during the first years after his arrival. (Geoff Sifrin "The Real Cost to Israel of Missing Mandela's Memorial," 10 December, 2013, *Haaretz* ; Suzanne Belling, "Holidays: Anti-apartheid rabbi retires," 27 July, 2000, *JTA*.)

⁸¹ *Ibid.* It appears the failure by the establishment to recognize different approaches within South African Orthodoxy would lead to serious misunderstandings.

⁸² Jacob Rubik, "Hefkeruth," *Barkai*, 15 October, 1965: 1.

were concerned King David was the only viable option.⁸³ Immediately after this meeting adjourned, a larger one was called by honorary officers from the Zionist Federation, the Board of Deputies, and the Board of Education who in turn invited leaders of the United Hebrew Congregation and Oxford's management committee to attend. Despite the meeting's vocal opposition to the initiative,⁸⁴ the UHC Council, in an effort at compromise, notified Bernhard that whereas they could not provide him with a full-fledged school they could spare three classrooms serving grade 1 to standard 1. Since the Board of Education refused to run these classes, Bernhard was informed he was contractually bound to run the new school under the only other educational body, the Yeshiva College.⁸⁵

A week later the Chief Rabbi issued a statement that appeared to retract his earlier denial of having sanctioned the proposed school. Acknowledging that during Bernhard's visit to Johannesburg in April he had offered his "general encouragement" to the idea of an independent school, he reiterated that this was before Bernhard was appointed rabbi, and no formal request had thereafter been made.⁸⁶ Having not approved a specific scheme, Casper was dismayed that Bernhard had "proceeded in this matter with such unfortunate haste."⁸⁷ The Chief Rabbi nevertheless felt the school could still proceed but agreed with the Board that it had to be managed by an established educational institution. Following reports some days later that Yeshiva College had "turned down" Bernhard's application for the proposed school, the prospects for opening it the following year seemed bleak.⁸⁸ In a triumphant editorial in that week's edition of the *S.A. Jewish Times*, the editor predicted that "the only feasible course for Rabbi Bernhard" was "to abandon the whole project."⁸⁹ It did not occur to the newspaper that its reports of Yeshiva College's rejection of Bernhard may have been premature, and that the former would eventually adopt the school, which as we shall see, thrived for a decade.⁹⁰

The episode appeared to alienate Bernhard from the establishment, but in the process it gained him the support of the stricter Orthodox communities. One of these admirers, a

⁸³ Staff Reporter, "Chief Rabbi denies giving blessing to Oxford Jewish Day School," *SAJT*, 19 November 1965: 2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* This opposition prompted the resignation of its staunch supporter, Advocate David Mann.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Bernard M. Casper, "If the Demand is not there the project should be dropped," *SAJT*, 10 December 1965: 7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* The Chief Rabbi's apparent equivocation does not appear to have been a good omen for his future relationship with Bernhard.

⁸⁸ "Yeshiva College Turns Down Rabbi Bernhard's School," *SAJT*, 10 December 1965: 7.

⁸⁹ "The Oxford Affair," (editorial), *SAJT*, 10 December 1965: 11.

⁹⁰ See Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 40-41.

columnist in *Barkai*, commended him for standing up for his religious principles as a *Rav* and not a “yes man *rabbi*.”⁹¹ More than two decades after Isaac Kossowsky had defined himself in a similar way, Bernhard was beginning to assume the mantle of defender of a traditional Judaism at serious odds with the Orthodox establishment.

4. Conclusion

Within the space of a handful of months at the end of 1965, three incidents occurred within the Jewish community which arguably marked a turning point in the struggle between two competing visions of Orthodox Judaism. While shocking in its effect, the first incident -- Poupko’s crude attacks against the establishment and the Zionist movement -- probably had the fewest repercussions. A few years later, as we shall see, a new crop of rabbis would echo Poupko’s non-Zionist sentiments. But these later rabbis were completely unrelated to Poupko and the sermons he delivered at that time had limited impact. Of greater import was the second incident that resulted in a public spat in the Jewish press between representatives of the establishment and of Mizrachi and its affiliates. Unlike the Poupko incident, it does not appear to have been a onetime outburst but rather the result of simmering tensions between an accommodationist rabbinate and traditionalist rabbis. Newman and his colleagues appeared to become increasingly annoyed by complaints about Kashrut standards. They apparently felt raising these standards was unwise and ought not to come at the cost of impeaching the religious authorities’ integrity. For its part, Bnei Akiva was taken aback at the establishment’s attack on the most devout portion of the community. They appeared to construe the establishment’s reluctance to adopt higher standards as a concession to mediocrity, failing to comprehend that their rivals may have felt stringent standards would have done more damage than good. Bronner, who was not a congregational rabbi and presumably was less familiar with the laity, appeared to believe the benefits of compromise and communal unity did not justify the lax standards he perceived. While the accommodators believed the broader community’s interests trumped those of the more devout sections and had to be safeguarded at any cost, the traditionalists could not fathom any lowering of religious standards irrespective of the costs their higher standards may have imposed.

Contemporary observers of the incident would have been forgiven in thinking too much was made of the news that the Oxford Synagogue rabbi planned to build a new school on the synagogue’s premises. After all, the efforts to stop the school from proceeding --

⁹¹ L.L. Sharon, “A bit of praise”, *Barkai*, 30 October, 1965: 1.

involving meetings with the Board of Education, the United Hebrew Congregations and even with Chief Rabbi Casper -- must have seemed a disproportionate response. Likewise, Bernhard's insistence on creating a school in the face of strong opposition comes across as stubborn, considering the fact Yeshiva College was planning a primary school for 1967 that would have only delayed his children's education by one year. Looking back both parties may have intuited that the proposed school would be qualitatively different from anything preceding it. Whatever the case, the "Oxford Affair" and imbroglio over the Menorah Oxford School had a critical impact on religious life in Johannesburg.

As we will see, the school rapidly became the educational home of the separatists, and acted as a magnet for new strictly Orthodox families who were imported from abroad to spread their hitherto untested brand of Orthodoxy among the community. In turn, the school became one of the symbols of the religious revolution to which we shall turn to in the coming chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE INNOVATORS - FIRST GENERATION 1970-1985

1. Introduction

The traditionalist camp's rapid gains, enumerated in the previous chapter, and the achievements of its newest arrival, Rabbi Norman M. Bernhard, drew the attention of the leader of the separatists and *rav* of Adath Yeshurun, Rabbi Jacob Salzer. These two men -- of vastly different educational backgrounds and separated by a 20-year age gap -- discovered a mutual liking for one another which resulted in an enduring friendship and a political alliance. This alliance had deep ramifications for the religious landscape of Johannesburg Jewry. By the early 1970s they and those who followed their lead were sufficiently emboldened to not only reject the notion of accommodating the wishes of Johannesburg's non-observant Orthodox but to consciously set about launching a spiritual revolution.¹

1.1 Introduction to the Innovators

At the beginning of the new decade, two new movements were introduced into Johannesburg. These movements instituted norms and practices that were not only alien to Orthodoxy in Johannesburg as it had been practised over the preceding decades, but were also innovative. Without passing judgment on the value of these innovations, we shall refer to the movements that instigated them as the "innovators." This chapter traces the roots and activities of the first generation of innovators. To do so, it begins with a broad survey of their arrival and entrenchment. It then moves on to discuss the role they played in changing the educational landscape in Johannesburg, which will be followed by an analysis of the impact these movements had on the Jewish student population and its leadership bodies. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of two general areas of conflict between the innovators and the establishment: the attitude towards Zionism and the Holocaust on the one hand, and Kashrut on the other. These two areas are particularly important as they were formerly considered consensus issues within the Orthodox community. By outlining the innovators' deviation from this consensus we will see the extent to which these movements were genuinely innovative and revolutionary.

In its earliest incarnation, this revolution was led by two primary movements, the *Kollel Yad Shaul* and *Chabad-Lubavitch*.² Arriving in Johannesburg in quick succession, both were

¹ For the friendship and alliance between Bernhard and Salzer, see Norman Bernhard, "Original Notes of Hespel for Rabbi Salzer," 17 September, 1980, (Norman Bernhard Collection). For examples of revolution as the specific aim, see *The Kollel Yad Shaul 20th Anniversary Banquet*, where express references to a "revolution" are made by several contributors.

² The Chabad Lubavitch movement is an important branch of Hassidism. Originally based in the town of Lubavitch it espouses the Chabad philosophy. The movement refers to itself interchangeably as Lubavitch or

the products of the efforts of several dedicated individuals, and to some extent the product of the alliance between Bernhard and Salzer. At the outset Bernhard and Salzer strongly felt that Johannesburg's spiritual situation was unsustainable and in danger of ruin. Unlike more patient traditionalists, they concluded that they could not rely on change from within the existing communal organizations. New structures had to be created, and if that meant challenging the status quo, this was a price they were more than willing to pay. They probably also understood that the proposed challenge would best be led and instigated by outsiders with few loyalties to local institutions. It is therefore no accident that in the early years the British rabbi, Mordechai Shakovitzky and the Canadian native, Rabbi Mendel Lipskar were the most prominent personalities shaping the two outreach movements.

While the two movements differed in approach--the Kollel more unabashedly separatist in its attitude, and Chabad, more savvy about communal politics and consequently willing to partner with mainstream organizations -- both were considered non-establishment organizations. Both shared a neutral, if not apathetic, attitude towards Zionism that set them apart from the strongly Zionist local Jewish community and alienated them from the traditionalist Mizrahi movement.³ Arguably, this contrarian quality in part accounted for the popularity that these movements rapidly acquired. The spiritual seekers of the 1970s were apparently looking for something different from the Judaism they were raised with. The zeal transmitted by the foreign-born Kollel Fellows and Chabad emissaries was very appealing. Admittedly only a small minority of the community became observant as a result of the innovators' influence, but these early Baalei teshuva or returnees still accounted for several hundred souls which certainly impacted the community at large. Presumably, the mainstream Orthodox movements -- accommodators and traditionalists alike -- appreciated the innovators' successes and the resultant increase in religious practices and customs among the community. This appreciation was, however, likely offset by the ways that these new movements sometimes undermined the existing religious authorities. These challenges were not confined to the learned leaders of the movements but oftentimes was the product of their followers.⁴ On balance, and with these nuisances eventually forgotten over time, the

Chabad and both names will be used in this study (see Naftali Lowenthal, "Lubavitch Hasidism," *The YIVO Encyclopaedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, available at https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/lubavitch_hasidism). For a broader overview of Hassidism, see Joseph Dan "Hasidism Teachings and Literature," in *The YIVO Encyclopaedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, available at https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hasidism/Teachings_and_Literature

³ See section on "The Innovators' Clash over Zionism and the attitude to the Holocaust."

⁴ As will be seen below, the actions of the Kollel and of Chabad were severely criticized by Rabbi Moshe Kurstag and former Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz, respectively.

innovators made, and to an extent still make, a significant contribution to the religious community, as we shall show in detail below.

2. *Founding and History of the Kollel*

2.1 *The Early Years*

At the beginning of 1966, amidst considerable communal opposition, Bernhard opened his new primary school with ten pupils distributed over three classes, which included his daughters, and several children from Adath Yeshurun.⁵ That same year, Salzer, unsatisfied with Yeshiva College's religious education, opened Toras Emes [True Torah] boys' high school. Like Bernhard's primary school, Toras Emes attracted a small number of pupils and was motivated by the need to educate its founder's children.⁶ Notwithstanding their puny size, these schools' existence demonstrated it was possible to provide an intensely religious and strictly Orthodox Jewish education and to persist despite the general community's hostility. The schools' relative success induced the rabbi of the Adath and his colleagues to extend this experiment with education to the spiritual training of young adults. At the advice of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Broide (a visiting emissary from the Hebron Yeshiva), with the encouragement of his brother-in-law (Mr. Zvi Lieberman) and the enthusiastic backing of Bernhard, Salzer in March 1966 launched a twice weekly study program, housed at the Adath Yeshurun.⁷ On the one hand, the program offered advanced Talmudic discourses for communal rabbis and learned laymen who had studied at the premier Yeshivas of pre-war Europe and Israel.⁸ On the other, alongside the advanced courses, Salzer and others delivered public lectures specially tailored to the less educated among the broader community. This new venture, which ran for only a few hours per week and appealed to both scholar and layman alike, was ambitiously called the Kollel, a title traditionally reserved for a postgraduate rabbinical seminary for married yeshiva students studying on a communal stipend. In fact, in the mid-1960s across the strictly Orthodox Jewish world, the institution of a Kollel was at its early stages and no thought at that time had been given to such an institution playing an outreach role of any sort. Yet Salzer and Lieberman appeared to view

⁵ See statements by Rabbi Norman Bernhard at the "Mini Conference, Torah Academy, 1991," (Norman Bernhard Collection); David Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 50; Marcia Tanzer, *The Call of Africa is Heard in Brooklyn*, 76. The Adath's involvement in Menorah Oxford was not limited to its student body and much of its administration and teachers were drawn from the Adath, and later from the Kollel Yad Shaul.

⁶ See generally Rabbi Gedalya Sternstein interview with Gideon Shimoni, Johannesburg, 1996.

⁷ Chanan Coblenz, "The History of the Kollel" in *Kollel Yad Shaul 20th Anniversary Banquet*; "Chief Rabbi launches new Torah Group," *Zionist Record*, 7 April, 1966. Despite its name the Hebron Yeshiva was located in Jerusalem (see <http://www.chareidi.org/archives5760/kedoshim/arbroid.htm>)

⁸ See "Invitation to Torah Study," *Zionist Record*, 11 August, 1967; Rabbi Moshe Kurstag, interview by author (Telzstone, Israel, May, 2017); Rabbi Shmuel Steinhaus, interview by author, (Jerusalem, February 2017).

their Kollel as a quasi-halfway house between a full-fledged yeshiva and an ordinary Talmud study circle, which had already seen incremental growth in Johannesburg, as noted in the previous chapter. Perhaps for that reason, this Kollel garnered the support of Chief Rabbi Casper, who, a few weeks after its founding, was asked to deliver the official opening address. Playing on the Hebrew word “Kollel” which denotes both a small-knit community and something “all-embracing,” Casper declared his desire that the institution would “spread the knowledge and message of the Torah among all sections of the community” and in turn introduce the youth to the “treasures of Jewish learning.”⁹ Despite these expectations, the Kollel was only partially successful in its mission. While successfully attracting older learned men to its high-level study environment -- which was maintained by lectures from overseas emissaries who felt at home in the strictly Orthodox confines of the Adath Yeshurun -- it struggled to draw members of the broader community.

In 1968 the Kollel began publication of a bilingual journal of scholarly Talmudic articles. The English section contained contributions from the Chief Rabbi and Salzer, whereas the Hebrew section contained essays from among others, Rabbi Moshe Kurstag, the then assistant lecturer at the Ministers’ Training College, and Rabbi I. Grossman of Jerusalem who lectured at the Kollel on his visits to South Africa. Reviewing the appropriately named *HaKollel* [The Kollel] journal in his monthly column, Dr. Harry Abt -- his staunch accommodator credentials notwithstanding -- praised the journal for breaking “entirely new ground in South African Jewish life.” He hoped it would lead to interest in the Kollel’s other activities.¹⁰ In similar but far more enthusiastic tones, the London based ultra-Orthodox weekly, *The Jewish Tribune*, viewed this publication as evidence of there being “every chance that Johannesburg may yet become a leading Torah Centre in the Diaspora.”¹¹ While the *Tribune*’s hyperbole, typical of an Orthodox weekly, cannot be taken at face value, and while the periodical itself did not gain a broad readership in Johannesburg, the fact it was published reveals the ambitions and optimism of its founders.

At the same time, Salzer and Lieberman realised that the Kollel’s programme was not having the effect on the broader community they had hoped for. They proposed instead that the Kollel should live up to its name and recruit married Yeshiva students from overseas who would engage in full time learning.¹² Since the envisaged plans effectively rendered Adath

⁹ “Chief Rabbi launches new Torah group.”

¹⁰ H. Abt “Latest Periodical.” *Jewish Affairs*, April 1968.

¹¹ “South Africans Publish Journal,” *Jewish Tribune*, 1 May 1968.

¹² For full details of these aims see “The Growth of Torah in South Africa,” *Jewish Tribune*, 19 December 1969.

Yeshurun unable to continue hosting the Kollel in the long run, an appeal was made for new premises. Answering this call, Rabbi Koppel Bacher, a stalwart supporter of Salzer who had studied for many years at the Chabad Yeshiva in Crown Heights, New York, offered the free use of his late father's home, which was located on Urania Street in the nearby suburb of Observatory.¹³ As a gesture of thanks for this kind offer, the Kollel was renamed the Kollel Yad Shaul in memory of the venue's previous owner Mr. Shaul (Solly) Bacher. In September 1969 it was officially dedicated at a grand ceremony on its premises. In addition to a few words by Chief Rabbi Casper the audience was treated to a speech by the guest speaker, Rabbi Joseph Wineberg from New York, an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who opened his address by reading out the Rebbe's personal blessings for this new venture.¹⁴

In view of the fact that within the space of a very few years a fair measure of tension would come to the fore between Kollel members and the burgeoning Chabad movement, it was somewhat a quirk of history that the Kollel's initial home was provided by a staunch disciple of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and opened with the latter's blessings.¹⁵ It is also noteworthy that when both the Kollel and Chabad were at their stages of infancy in Johannesburg, Casper, the official leader of the Orthodox establishment enjoyed cordial relations with them. It could then not have been predicted that serious disagreements would soon place a dampener on this relationship.

The Kollel continued its regular public shiurim in Talmud and Jewish ethics while raising funds to recruit fulltime students from overseas. The latter, it declared, would serve as Fellows of the Kollel, who would be supported by bursaries so that they could learn undisturbed.¹⁶ These aims would come to fruition a year later when the fulltime Kollel was officially launched. Lieberman and Salzer sought to recruit Kollel members from the small town of Gateshead in the northeast of England. This remote town boasted a Yeshiva founded in 1929 that was led by famous rabbis who had fled Eastern Europe. It was also home to one of the oldest Kolllels, founded by the world renowned Rabbi, Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, with

¹³ See Koppel Bacher, interview by author, (Johannesburg, May, 2017). Bacher made this offer after apparently being assured by Salzer that the proposed faculty would include Chabad affiliated students; Bernhard, "Torah Academy Mini Conference."

¹⁴ "Kollel's New Home is Dedicated," *SAJT*, 12 September, 1969

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Rabbi Yossi Salzer, interview by author, (Johannesburg, May, 2017). Salzer stated that notwithstanding the Kollel's later attitude, his father (Rabbi Jacob Salzer) enjoyed warm relations with the Lubavitch movement and was fond of its Rebbe; See also Egon Schoeman, interview by author, Beth Shemesh, Israel, January 2020, where Schoeman mentioned that Rabbi Salzer had written to the Lubavitcher Rebbe on some personal issues.

¹⁶ See "The Growth of Torah in South Africa"; "Kollel's New Home is Dedicated."

the aim of cultivating the finest Talmudic scholars.¹⁷ Contemporary reports described Gateshead's learning environment as British Orthodox Jewry's "very own Oxbridge."¹⁸ For Lieberman and Salzer, both alumni of pre-World War Two East European Yeshivas, its reputation as the bastion for training English Talmudic scholars in traditional learning would have been reason enough to render it the ideal option.

There were, however, also personal reasons for this choice. Salzer had sent his daughters to the equally renowned exclusively female Gateshead Jewish Teachers Training College,¹⁹ and two of them had married Gateshead yeshiva graduates. Having previously visited the town, Salzer was deeply impressed with its Kollel and the impact it had had on the local community.²⁰ Like his independent Adath congregation, the Gateshead Jewish community was openly non-Zionist, and did not feel beholden to the United Kingdom's Chief Rabbinate. In fact the Gateshead Kollel's founders' insistence that their institution be free from the purview of Britain's established Orthodox institutions earned them the enmity of the then Chief Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz, who attempted to thwart the formation of that Kollel.²¹ It is quite possible then that this element of anti-establishmentarianism appealed to the founders of Johannesburg's Kollel, who were themselves ardent separatists.

With these considerations in mind, Zvi Lieberman, in December 1969 flew to the United Kingdom on his mission. On the 21st of that month at a meeting attended by, among others, the then *Rav* [head rabbi] of Gateshead, Rabbi Bezalel Rakow, a decision was made to appoint Rabbi Mordechai Shakovitzky, the son of the previous Gateshead *Rav* as Rosh Kollel [head of the Kollel].²² As a youth activist for the Yad LeAchim [Hand to my Brother] anti-missionary organization, and as a community rabbi in Leeds, Shakovitzky understood that the prospective position would not only involve intensive learning, as was the norm at a traditional Kollel, but would also require a fair amount of outreach.²³ In fact, a condition for being a member of the Kollel was a commitment to learn one hour a day with members of the

¹⁷ For a history of the Gateshead Yeshiva, see <https://gyalumni.org/history-of-the-gateshead-yeshiva/>, accessed on 6 December 2021 ; for a history of the Gateshead Kollel see <http://gatesheadkollel.weebly.com/history.html> , accessed on 6 December 2021.

¹⁸ Harriet Sherwood, "Torah on Tyne: how Orthodox Jews carved out their very own Oxbridge," *The Observer*, 22 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/22/gateshead-torah-on-tyne-britains-orthodox-jewish-community>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ See Steinhaus, interview.

²¹ See Esther Solomon, "Rabbi Dessler's View of Secular Studies and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*," *Pardes*, 24 (2018): 122.

²² Chanan Coblentz, "Chronicle of Events", *The Kollel Yad Shaul 20th Anniversary Banquet*.

²³ Rabbi Boruch Grossnass, interview by author, Johannesburg, May, 2017.

community and to deliver public lectures on a weekly basis.²⁴ This commitment was likewise accepted by the two others selected as future members, or fellows, at that meeting: Rabbis Eliezer Chrysler and Avraham Hassan. Chrysler served at that time as a teacher at the Gateshead Boys' High School and Hassan was a young recently married yeshiva student unable to find a Kollel in England that would admit him, but desirous of furthering his Talmudic studies at a postgraduate level. These three founding members were to be joined by two other young rabbis who had already been in Johannesburg for a number of years: Rabbis Mordechai Korn and Shmuel Steinhaus. Korn, originally from London, had been employed by the Adath Yeshurun to run their youth programs but his recent independent decision to become a Satmar Hassid put him at odds with the congregation. Steinhaus on the other hand was a Gateshead Yeshiva graduate and a son-in-law to Salzer who had been brought to South Africa in 1968 to teach at Toras Emes. It was agreed that the five rabbis mentioned above would constitute the Kollel's first year intake, and they would officially begin studies in September, 1970.

2.2 *The Launching of Kollel Yad Shaul*

On 26 May 1970, the Kollel hosted an official reception for the supporters of the venture to view the premises for themselves. At the same time, several thousand letters were posted to known Jewish addresses to acquaint the public with the Kollel and its aims.²⁵ During August of that year the British-based members of the Kollel arrived in South Africa, readying themselves for launching the institute. On 2 September, which corresponded to 1 Elul (the date on which Yeshivas worldwide began their academic year) the Kollel was officially launched, and fulltime learning commenced.²⁶ On 12 September, a function was held at the Berea Synagogue, introducing the public to the Kollel's new fellows. Addressing the audience were Shakovitzky, Chief Rabbi Casper, who appeared to remain a strong supporter of this institute, and Berea's rabbi, Dayan Irma Aloy, who was also a senior member of Chabad. The theme of the speakers was the importance of a fulltime Kollel for South African Jewry.²⁷

At the Kollel itself, the fellows' main concern was their devotion to self-study and self-growth. They agreed among themselves that in the study hall only matters of Torah

²⁴ See Steinhaus, interview; Rabbi Eliezer Chrysler, interview by author, Jerusalem, May, 2017.

²⁵ Coblenz, "Chronicle of Events." Unfortunately, we lack information on the names of these original supporters, nor are we aware of the method selected for posting these letters, or the extent to which this campaign succeeded in raising funds.

²⁶ "Kollel welcomes new head," *SAJT*, 11 September 1970.

²⁷ Coblenz, "Chronicle of Events."

learning could be discussed; any mundane issue including outreach would have to be taken outside.²⁸ This heavy emphasis on unadulterated Torah study was premised on an ideology that proclaimed that the mere fact that Torah was being learnt in the city left an indelible mark on the spiritual welfare of the community. It also stemmed from a belief that whoever seriously imbibes the Torah, which, metaphorically has been likened to water, can reach beyond his saturation point, and literally become “drenched in Torah”, which then spills over and nurtures the immediate environment.²⁹ It was strongly contended that only a consummate Torah scholar could serve as a role model for others to follow, otherwise one had no business engaging in kiruv *rehokim* [outreach to those who are remote (from religious observance)].³⁰ Whether this philosophy had any practical impact or not, the Kollel witnessed unprecedented growth that went far beyond the expectations of the founders themselves. This despite the relatively little time the fellows devoted to public activities.

In early 1971, after becoming oriented with his new community, Avraham Hassan decided to place a small advertisement in the classified section of Johannesburg’s *Star* newspaper, inviting young men and women to come to the Kollel to hear public lectures on Jewish topics. The first week following the notice’s placement a crowd of around twenty non-observant but curious post high school youth came to the Kollel to hear these lectures. Hassan’s public address based on Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato’s *Essay on Fundamentals*, proved to be popular with the students.³¹ The fact that the content and delivery of the address were set out in a lucid and organized form, and that through the lens of Kabbala [Jewish Mysticism], it sought to explain, how the world operates, rendered it appealing to the early 1970s generation of seekers. The latter would certainly not have encountered such works from more conventional congregational rabbis who traditionally shied away from studying Kabbalistic literature, let alone teaching it.³² The audience’s exposure to literature that

²⁸ See Steinhaus, interview.

²⁹ Michael Karp, “We Came, We Learnt, and We Taught,” *The Kollel Yad Shaul 20th Anniversary Banquet*; see also Grossnass, interview.

³⁰ Literally “bringing closer those who are distanced [from Torah].” Nowadays it is referred to simply as kiruv, and is part of the modern parlance of the Jewish Orthodox English-speaking world. Kollel’s philosophy continues to be a major point of contention and, as we shall see, goes against the ideology of organizations such as Chabad and, internationally, Aish Hatorah, who encourage young and minimally learned individuals to engage in active outreach.

³¹ Rabbi Avraham Hassan, interview by author, (Manchester, February 2017); for an online version of an English translation of the cited work, *Essay on Fundamentals*, see <http://www.anzarouth.com/2008/08/1-blessed-creator.html> accessed on 6 December 2021.

³² There is a longstanding tradition cited by one of the commentators to the *Shulhan Arukh* [Code of Jewish Law], (Shabtai Cohen *Yoreh Dea* 346:6), that one should not study Kabbalah until the age of 40. Admittedly this would not have applied to Luzzatto’s works which, though based on Kabbalah, do not use heavy Kabbalah language and

purported to uncover the world's mysteries probably accounted for its attraction. This factor, however, does not fully explain the Kollel's appeal to the students. After all they were also drawn to lectures on a variety of topics ranging from Talmud study to Rabbi Dessler's discourses on Jewish ethics, to the contemporary polemical discourses of the ultraorthodox American rabbi, Avigdor Miller.³³ Ironically, the last two mentioned works, which so appealed to these university students with their high level of secular knowledge, emphasised the primacy of pure Torah learning to the exclusion of secular studies.³⁴

The students not only came back for more, but their numbers multiplied so quickly that within half a year twenty five lectures were being delivered by Kollel faculty on a weekly basis and at various venues.³⁵ It appears that part of the reason for the lectures' popularity could be credited to the persons delivering them and the religious sincerity they exuded. Unlike other rabbis in Johannesburg, these wore Haredi [ultraorthodox] garb, were unabashed in their criticism of anything they considered remiss within the local Jewish community and its rabbinate, and preached a conservative and parochial traditionalism which they labelled "authentic" Judaism.³⁶ Being in their mid-twenties to early thirties, the Kollel fellows established a rapport with their students which was strengthened by the introduction in June 1971 of the first Shabbaton [Religious weekend getaway] for adults.³⁷ In conjunction with Yeoville Synagogue and the Aday Yeshurun, sixty male and female Wits students spent an entire Shabbat with the Kollel faculty and guest rabbis listening to various classes and participating in question and answer sessions.³⁸ Apart from its lecturing activities, the Kollel, under Hassan's initiative, also started a non-profit bookshop and lending library to acquaint students with literature considered vital for their growth. Through these activities,

are considered standard fare for scholars. Nevertheless, it probably would not have been taught elsewhere in Johannesburg.

³³See Izak Rudomin, "Jewish Education in South Africa," https://www.academia.edu/44397055/Torah_education_and_outreach_in_South_Africa, accessed on 6 December 2021; For information about Dessler see Solomon, "Rabbi Dessler's View of Secular Studies." It must be admitted that Dessler's works also contained elements of mysticism. For more on Avigdor Miller see Miriam Samsonowitz, "The Rov Who Turned Baalebatim Into Bnei Yeshiva," *Deiah Vedibbur*, 30 May, 2001, <http://www.chareidi.org/archives5761/nasso/NSOfeatures.htm>, accessed on 6 December 2021.

³⁴ See Solomon, "Rabbi Dessler's View of Secular Studies."

³⁵ Coblentz, "Chronicle of Events."

³⁶ See articles in *The Kollel Yad Shaul 20th Anniversary Banquet*, and in *The Rabbi Grossnass Legacy Dinner Brochure* where many references are made to "authentic" Judaism. See Hassan, interview.

³⁷ "Johannesburg's First Shabbaton" *SAJT*, 2 July 1971. It is probably true that this was the first time a Shabbaton was run for young adults of this cohort, however Bnei Akiva had long beforehand held Shabbatons and camp Shabbats for the younger age group.

³⁸ *Ibid*; Coblentz, "Chronicle of Events."

this institute, by the end of 1971 saw its reputation grow steadily, while it readied itself for more ambitious projects.

In January 1972, a decision was reached to create a Monday evening learning program at the Kollel's premises instead of spreading the talks over various venues throughout the week.³⁹ The evening would comprise two learning sessions, each offering a selection of lectures, separated by a break during which students either mingled or paged through the books displayed by the Kollel bookshop, which sold them at specially discounted prices.⁴⁰ The program proved popular and, according to contemporary reports, participants would be hard-pressed to find available parking spaces on the sleepy Urania Street and surrounding blocks, which were now filled with the cars of some 80 to 100 weekly participants. This number would swell to 200 when guest speakers were featured.⁴¹ Aside from the Kollel fellows, lectures were also given by the founding dean of Yeshiva College, Rabbi David Sanders. The latter developed a close friendship with Shakovitzsky and, unfettered by the demands of his former employer and its Mizrahi affiliated committee, he presumably felt freer to espouse the more strictly Orthodox views of his alma mater, Telshe Yeshiva. Possessed of a dynamic personality and expert oratorical skills, his classes became one of the of the learning program's main attractions.

At this stage of the Kollel's development, Bernhard was also intimately involved and he too would, on occasion, deliver lectures. As he had already established a reputation as an accomplished pulpit rabbi, his lectures were also warmly received. In addition to these rabbis, another speaker who played an important role during these sessions was Ivan Ziskind. Born in Benoni, and having qualified as an architect at Wits, he went to Durham University in the early 1960s with his young wife to do post graduate studies in town planning. He took residence in the nearby town of Gateshead, where for the first time he was exposed to its ultra-Orthodox community, and to the then young yeshiva student Mordechai Shakovitsky. Upon his return to South Africa, he became a member of the Adath Yeshurun and was heavily involved in the Kollel's founding. He was very welcoming to the Kollel fellows and encouraged them in their outreach activities. To facilitate the success of the learning program he saw it his duty, as a layman with more learning experience than the average participant, to elucidate concepts the British Kollel rabbis had difficulty communicating to their South

³⁹ Coblenz, "Chronicle of Events."

⁴⁰ See Hassan, interview.

⁴¹ Steinhilber, interview and interview with anonymous members of the Kollel, Johannesburg, December 2019; Coblenz, "Chronicle of Events."

African audience. He therefore placed himself in front of the lecture hall and whenever he felt ideas were too vaguely enunciated, he would ask the lecturer clarifying questions which would make it clearer for the rest of the audience. Those attending the program were drawn to its intense atmosphere and established close relationships with all the fellows generally and with Ivan Ziskind and Avraham Hassan in particular who were considered the “powerhouses” of the group.⁴² Years after the inauguration of this program many recalled feeling an electric atmosphere permeating through the large and eclectic crowd that overflowed the lecture rooms. Reflecting on the dramatic effect the Kollel had at that time, Bernhard commented that the Kollel’s arrival was “like water hitting parched soil”.⁴³

2.3 *The Kollel Community*

At the same time as the Kollel was drawing crowds of students and other interested parties, it was also undergoing structural changes from a small five-member learning institute into a full-fledged independent congregation. Originally consisting of Shabbat observant local residents drawn to Shakovitzky’s style, the congregation very rapidly attracted non-observant university educated members who had tasted the Monday night sessions and were apparently unfazed by the strict rules practiced by this ultra-Orthodox community. Unlike other communities which turned a blind eye to members arriving by car on the Sabbath, the Kollel maintained the practice of actively discouraging anyone not arriving on foot from partaking in the services. During prayer times a strict dress code was enforced and men over the age of bar mitzvah were expected to wear a hat and jacket.⁴⁴ The Israeli Sephardi pronunciation, introduced by Rabinowitz into South Africa more than two decades earlier, was strongly disapproved and anyone leading services was not permitted to use such pronunciation.⁴⁵ Generally speaking there was an insistence on very high standards of Kashrut, and congregants were expected to rely exclusively on the Adatah’s supervision guidelines.⁴⁶

⁴² Grossnass, interview; Tatz, interview by author, London, February 2017.

⁴³ Rabbi Bernhard, interview with David Saks, Johannesburg, 17 June 1997 (cited in Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 312, n97). It is noteworthy that in the early 1970s student activism against Apartheid was at its peak, and while many Jewish students were devoting themselves to this struggle, and this is true especially in relation to the Student Jewish Association of the University of Cape Town, whose *Strike* magazine chastised Jewish entrepreneurs for compliance with Apartheid, many of Johannesburg’s Jewish students were probably seeking an escape from this harsh reality. These esoteric lectures may have offered a welcome refuge.

⁴⁴ Gary Lewenstein, “Tribute Article,” *The Rabbi Grossnass Legacy Dinner*.

⁴⁵ For Rabinowitz innovation in changing the pronunciation, see chapter 2; This practice at the Kollel was reported to the author anonymously by a former member thereof.

⁴⁶ As we shall show later, the fight to preserve the independent Kashrut supervision of the Adatah was led by prominent members of the Kollel.

These rules notwithstanding, in less than a decade the community became home to approximately 200 congregants every Sabbath, around 80% of whom were newly religious.⁴⁷ One of the main attractions was the invitations for Shabbat meals extended by fellows and core members to the less observant.⁴⁸ Of the more notable lay congregants who opened his home every Shabbat to large crowds was the aforementioned Ivan Ziskind, who went so far as to add rooms to his own home to accommodate the weekly influx of guests.⁴⁹ As one of the Kollel's founding members, Ziskind was concerned with both outreach and with the success of the learning institute cum congregation. He wished to ensure the Kollel would remain true to its ideals and that the policies set by the Rosh Kollel would continue without interference by any lay leader tempted to temper some of Shakovitzsky's innovations. To this end Ziskind had, at the outset of the Kollel's founding, insisted that all aspects, spiritual and administrative, of the prospective community be run almost exclusively by the rabbi. In a country where all Hebrew congregations were managed by elected committees who appointed their spiritual leaders and cantors, it was unprecedented for such committees to surrender their power and control to their clergy. Retrospectively, Ziskind attributes this innovative new model, which gave almost total autonomy to the spiritual leader, to the success in maintaining remarkably high levels of observance. Indeed, the model was later adopted by many other new communities and small shuls or *shtieblach*.⁵⁰

At the end of 1973 and beginning of 1974, a second batch of students arrived from Israel and the United Kingdom, including Rabbis David Weil, Mordechai Fachler, and Chaim Shein.⁵¹ The last mentioned, who was born in Bloemfontein and had spent a considerable period of time studying at the Gateshead Yeshiva, was the first South African-born and bred member of the Kollel faculty. This new batch buttressed the older one, some of whose members had left, introduced new classes at the ever-popular Monday night shiurim, and joined their fellow faculty members in delivering public lectures at Wits University and at various army camps.⁵² Over the course of 1975 the Kollel continued to expand its presence

⁴⁷ Marilyn Segal, "A return to Judaism," *The Star*, 17 October 1979.

⁴⁸ In Tatz, interview, the latter commented that the mere exposure to a Friday night meal at a religious home had a tremendous impact on those attending, who wished to emulate this atmosphere.

⁴⁹ See Ivan Ziskind, interview by author, London, February 2017. Mr. Ziskind has had a very large influence in the religious revival and the impact he has had on many is alluded to in Akiva Tatz, *Anatomy of a Search*: (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1987).

⁵⁰ Ziskind, interview. There are downsides to this model, and it bears noting that it sometimes acted as an enticement for various rabbis to begin their own autonomous community, which invariably fractured the pre-existing communities.

⁵¹ Coblenz, "Chronicle of Events."

⁵² Clare Stern, "Long search ends at the Kollel," *The Star*, 19 May, 1979.

with the opening of an afternoon nursery school; a Beis Yaakov [House of Jacob] girls high school named after the worldwide network of Haredi girls' schools, which catered to Kollel families who had contemplated leaving the country for lack of adequate education for their daughters; and a part time seminary for women.⁵³ This seminary was also named the Beis Yaakov program and was created to dispel the myth that the Kollel was only interested in educating "chauvinistic men." Inviting "mature young ladies" to participate in "serious and deep Sunday mornings," it offered three courses. The day would commence with a beginners' course on the Pentateuch and classic commentaries presented by David Sanders, followed by discussions on prayer by Mordechai Fachler. The last series of talks was given by Shakovitsky and titled "An Approach to Life." It introduced the female students to the philosophical writings of Eliyahu Dessler that are contained in *Michtav MiEliyahu* [A Letter from Eliyahu].⁵⁴ A year after its launch, this program was extended from its original four weekly hours to seven hours spread over two days: Sunday morning and Wednesday evening.⁵⁵ In addition to these programs, young men and women were encouraged to seek a serious learning environment and to travel to Israel to study at the nascent Yeshivas for the Baal Teshuva [newly religious] such as Ohr Somayach for men and Neve College for Jewish Women.⁵⁶ Outside the Kollel's premises, its faculty was also having an impact on Johannesburg at large and by June, 1975 the Kollel faculty and its ad hoc lecturers were delivering a total of fifty three weekly shiurim and public lectures.⁵⁷

As we shall see below, Shakovitzky, along with other Kollel fellows, had gradually built a dedicated student following at Wits University. To cater to these students, Shakovitzky, in early 1976, visited Israel with the express purpose of finding a candidate to head a yeshiva for them, which would be run under the Kollel's auspices. Calling on old friends from his Yeshiva days, he received a positive response from Rabbi Boruch Grossnass,

⁵³ "It's back to the Bible and Judaism for these girls," *SAJT*, 7 March 1980; Brian M. Levin, "Kollel Praised", letter to the editor, *SAJT*, 12 March 1976; *30th Anniversary of Beis Yaakov Girls High School*. For more on the international network of Beis Yaakov Schools and its founder Sarah Schenirer, see Deborah Weissman, "Sarah Schenirer", *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/schenirer-sarah>, accessed on 8 December 2021.

⁵⁴ Kollel Newsletter, (Johannesburg), 11 October 1975; Many of Dessler's writings were translated under the title *Strive for Truth*, (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2004). As mentioned earlier, Dessler put a premium on pure Torah learning to the exclusion of secular studies (see Solomon, "Rabbi Dessler's View of Secular Studies"). These writings were also popular for incorporating and formalizing mystical ideas based on the Maharal of Prague, and though less mystical than Rabbi Hassan's lectures, these lectures also afforded an opportunity to discover more mystical elements. (see Esther Solomon, "Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler: Not Quite the Musar Traditionalist," *Daat* No. 82 (2016): CV-CXXXII).

⁵⁵ See "It's back to the Bible and Judaism for these girls."; see also Coblenz, "Chronicle of Events."

⁵⁶ Grossnass, interview.

⁵⁷ Coblenz, "Chronicle of Events."

the son of a well-known Dayan on the London Beth Din. The latter welcomed the opportunity to head his own Yeshiva that would be specifically tailored to the pedagogic needs of the South African Baal Teshuva.⁵⁸ After visiting South Africa in August 1976 to discover what was in store, Grossnass settled down in Johannesburg in December 1976. Soon after, he established the Ohr Yisrael Yeshiva at the Kollel's premises in Observatory which opened its doors in January 1977 with ten fulltime and part-time students.⁵⁹ The student body was primarily made up of those who had a minimal Jewish background but had been introduced to Talmud study through Shakovitzky's classes. Presumably unable, for whatever reason, to go to Israel to strengthen their knowledge, they attended this new Yeshiva that had been specially created for them.⁶⁰ As is common among such institutions, it concentrated mainly on Talmud studies, with the bulk of classes given by Grossnass. Other Kollel members taught classes on Jewish law and Jewish ethics. Unlike the Kollel, which provided a stipend for its fellows, this Yeshiva was funded by the tuition and boarding fees charged to the students.

While the Yeshiva's student body and Kollel fellows continued to enliven the Kollel as a whole, its regular lay participants sought to move the institutions to new premises in the less affluent suburb of Yeoville. It was believed that this would attract young married couples who could more easily afford the flats available there.⁶¹ Thanks to the generosity of a donor, the Kollel in March that year acquired new premises at 26 Frances Street in Yeoville. This premises, which would henceforth be referred to as the Kollel Beis HaMedrash (House of Study), provided daily and Shabbat minyanim [services].⁶² At the same time, the Observatory venue continued to house the Kollel faculty and Yeshiva students, as well as the Monday night program. A few months after the Kollel embarked on this voluntary split of venues, and just before Grossnass's first year in Johannesburg had completed, Shakovitzky, made a sudden announcement. After seven years at the helm of the Kollel he was leaving for Israel.⁶³ He named Grossnass his successor and acting Rosh Kollel. So Grossnass, who had come to South Africa solely to teach new students, found himself the head of an institute he had never

⁵⁸ See Avraham Hassan, "Tribute Article," *The Rabbi Grossnass Legacy Dinner*; Lewenstein, "Tribute Article."

⁵⁹ "Largest post matric Yeshiva," *Zionist Record*, 24 February, 1978. The part-timers were still completing their secular studies at Wits or UNISA.

⁶⁰ Hassan, "Tribute Article."

⁶¹ Lewenstein, "Tribute Article."

⁶² Coblenz, "Chronicle of Events."

⁶³ "Rosh Ha-Kollel goes on Aliyah", *Jewish Herald* 3 October 1977. The suddenness of the departure caused many to speculate on the exact reasons for leaving. Officially, it appears it had to do with the education of his sons. Others have anonymously speculated it is related to a souring relationship with the Kollel's initiator, Salzer who was upset with Shakovitzsky for not vociferously supporting Adath's meat supervision, which (as shall be seen later) had become a bone of contention for the Adath. Apparently Shakovitzsky felt that too much association with the Adath would have harmed his donor base, which would have caused the Kollel to suffer in the process.

intended to run. This sudden change of personnel was to have a profound effect on the Kollel's future direction.

Left in the lurch by Shakovitzky's departure, and untrained in fundraising or in kiruv activities, Grossnass felt frustrated.⁶⁴ He realised he could not juggle his position as sole head of the Yeshiva with the responsibilities unexpectedly placed upon him to preserve the Kollel's functions as an institute for higher learning and as a growing Baal Teshuva community. In January 1978, the student body at the Yeshiva had swelled to 30 fulltime and part-time students. This forced Grossnass to invite Rabbi David Greenberger, who had originally come to South Africa under the auspices of the Yeshiva College, to deliver a parallel Talmud shiur.⁶⁵ The next month, Grossnass invited Rabbi Chanoch Ehrentrau, then head of the Sunderland Kollel, to come to South Africa to lecture, and at the same time to provide his assistance in raising funds for the Kollel.⁶⁶

Presumably upon Ehrentrau's advice, and with the counsel of Rabbi Bernhard (who despite his full time involvement in the Oxford Shul and Lubavitch Foundation, volunteered his time to assist Grossnass with the Kollel), the new Rosh Kollel implemented the idea of a businessman's shiur.⁶⁷ Providing Jewish businessman with a lecture devoted specifically to them, it created an unspoken financial commitment.⁶⁸ Starting as a fortnightly event it quickly proved popular enough to become a weekly feature, hosted at the offices of a prominent congregant and attorney, Michael Karp.⁶⁹

In July 1978, one of the Kollel's founding members, Shmuel Steinhaus, returned from a stint in Israel to take over as community rabbi of the Kollel Beis Hamedrash, relieving Grossnass of one of his positions. Half a year later in January 1979, Rabbi Moshe Shirken, a former Capetonian who had left South Africa for Israel in 1960, was appointed associate

⁶⁴ Grossnass, interview.

⁶⁵ See Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 64; Coblenz "Chronicle of Events."

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Grossnass, interview. The interviewee spoke highly of Ehrentrau and of Bernhard's assistance in introducing him to the skill of fundraising. It did not take long before Grossnass himself became a consummate fundraiser. It is noteworthy that despite some tension between Kollel and Chabad at that time over the future of Menorah Oxford (which will be recorded later) Bernhard gave of his time to the Kollel. It is not unlikely that this had to do with the latter's close friendship with Salzer, who as the Kollel's founding president was probably concerned with its future.

⁶⁸ From the businessman's perspective we may speculate that the attention showered upon them by these rabbis probably stoked their egos and gave them a sense that, independently of the communal organizations, they were building institutions that was preserving Judaism for the future generations.

⁶⁹ Coblenz "Chronicle of Events." Karp was a fierce advocate for the Kollel, later assisting them in their troubles with the Beth Din. Grossnass was not the first person to deliver a businessman's shiur: it had already been done by Kollel-affiliated David Sanders in 1975. However, he probably was the first head of an institute to do so. As we will see this model was later mimicked, with much success, by other organizations and especially Ohr Somayach.

Rosh Yeshiva, allowing Grossnass the opportunity to concentrate on his role as head of the Kollel.⁷⁰ Possessing the rare qualities of a returnee to Judaism who was also a respected Torah scholar, Shirken proved to be a popular choice. Concomitant to the latter's arrival, the Kollel's management realised that, with all its focus on community growth and with its shrinking Kollel faculty, its emphasis on outreach was suffering. To that end, a campaign was launched to reinvigorate the Monday evening sessions by branding it "the largest team in Africa dedicated to Adult Torah Education."⁷¹ The lecturers included Rabbis Fachler, Glazersohn, Greenberger, Grossnass, Hassan, Katz, Steinhaus, Shirken and Sternstein as well as Ivan Ziskind, and cumulatively they delivered 13 weekly lectures. Barely a year later, with the departure of many of the key speakers, the revamped program quickly fizzled out.⁷²

At the beginning of 1980, the Bacher family reclaimed their Observatory home, forcing those programs still being held in Urania Street to relocate to Yeoville.⁷³ Thanks to the generosity of Rabbi Shalom Mirkin, the latter's property situated at 22 Muller Street, Yeoville -- one block down from the Kollel Beis Hamedrash -- was offered as the new home for all the Kollel's operations that were previously conducted in Observatory. This meant the Mirkin residence was now the new premises for the Kollel's fellows, the yeshiva students, the Kollel bookshop and a new tape lending library, where borrowers could hear recorded shiurim from local Kollel faculty as well as specially recorded lectures from internationally acclaimed Orthodox speakers.⁷⁴

The financial toll, suffered in the wake of the physical readjustments and relocations, prompted members of the Kollel and the Adath to convene a meeting with a group of Johannesburg businessmen to form the South African Torah Foundation. Billing itself as an "umbrella organization" set up to fund "prominent Torah institutions," it was directed by Shirken and chaired by the founder of Bic pens, Bennie Schreiber.⁷⁵ Other members of its

⁷⁰ MS, "Rabbi Shirken's Long Path," *Zionist Record*, 19 October 1979. Coblenz "Chronicle of Events."

⁷¹ Kollel Yad Shaul Public Booklet, "'79 Invitation to Torah '79'; "Invitation to Torah," *Zionist Record* 9 March 1979.

⁷² Fachler would take up a position as dean of the Menorah Girls High School (Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 64) Hassan would return to England to take up a position in Manchester in 1980; Shirken would return to Israel, followed by Glazersohn soon after.

⁷³ It appears the initial loan period for the house was ten years. As mentioned, a few years earlier the lay community had already established its own synagogue in Frances Street, Yeoville.

⁷⁴ Coblenz "Chronicle of Events." The move into the new premises was finalized in January 1981. It is interesting to note that the Mirkin residence in Houghton had served as the first permanent residence for the Yeshiva College (Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 8). Thus, Mirkin was responsible for housing two of the most prominent Jewish institutions.

⁷⁵ "Formation of S.A Torah Foundation," *Jewish Herald*, 19 August, 1980. The proposed institutions were all under the Kollel Yad Shaul.

executive included Solly Krok, the proprietor of Twins Pharmaceuticals; Anthony Spitz, the shoe manufacturer; and catered food wholesaler, Mervyn Chipkin. Its stated aim was to enlist 250 subscribers who would commit to contributing R 1,080 per annum, starting from April 1981.⁷⁶ It is uncertain as to how successful this venture was or why such leading philanthropists would want to get involved. Public statements suggest they were impressed by the quantity and quality of shiurim, and by the active ventures undertaken by the Kollel, and all on a tight budget. It appears also that rabbis like Grossnass and Shirken had taken extra care to nurture these philanthropists which would explain Schreiber's effusive description of the Kollel faculty's "ability...to associate with members of the business community and to be of service to them at all times and in all circumstances."⁷⁷

Not long after the Foundation was formed, Shirken suddenly departed. To fill his absence, Grossnass hoped that with the Foundation's financial support, and with Ehrentrau's help he could lure the world famous Halachic decisor, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch to take over as associate Rosh Kollel. It was anticipated that a personality of his stature would attract an entirely new batch of Kollel fellows. Though an arduous process, it appeared to have borne fruit in 1981 when Sternbuch arrived together with ten new scholars.⁷⁸ Owing to personality clashes and Sternbuch's independent style and insistence on complete separation between the Kollel Fellows and the rest of the community, the arrangement barely survived the year before the two parted company.⁷⁹ A month later Sternbuch established his own community, which he called the Vilna Gaon Torah Centre as a rival to the Kollel.⁸⁰ Battered by this experience, Grossnass ceased to look for another substitute and assumed the role as the full-fledged Rosh Kollel. Since then, for more than four decades he singlehandedly ensured the institute's hallways would be filled by qualified Torah scholars who would devote themselves to fulltime learning.⁸¹

Following the establishment of an independent Torah Centre by Sternbuch and his followers, the Kollel suffered its own internal breakdown. Originally amicably divided into

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Bennie Schreiber, "Message from the Chairman of the South African Torah Foundation," *Kollel Yad Shaul 20th Anniversary Banquet*.

⁷⁸ "Kollel Welcomes Rabbi Sternbuch," *SAJT*, 28 September 1981; In Grossnass, interview, the latter stated that Ehrentrau was the one who recommended appointing Sternbuch since the two men were brothers in law.

⁷⁹ Kurstag, interview.

⁸⁰ Brenda M. Shein, "New Yeoville Torah Centre," *Zionist Record*, 14 January 1983. Sternbuch's community eventually became relatively large and independent, and of the new communities it was the most oppositional to the establishment. It failed, however, to remain intact for more than two decades and for all intents and purposes it has been dissolved.

⁸¹ For an overview of Grossnass's time at the Kollel, see generally *Rabbi Grossnass Tribute Dinner*.

two venues a block apart from each other -- one for lay congregants, and the other for past and present Kollel Fellows -- many members wanted to see more interaction between the two communities. Apparently, meetings were held to discuss the situation and most voted in favour of better integration.⁸² Consequently, many congregants who had attended the Kollel Beis Hamedrash left the Frances Street venue and attended the larger Muller Street premises, still referred to as Kollel Yad Shaul. A minority of congregants at the Beis Hamedrash opposed this integration, and with their rabbi they officially split off from their parent congregation to form a new entity referred to as Kollel Agudas Achim [Association of Members]. By the early 1980s, the once united community had now effectively split into three independent entities, likely weakening their appeal. In 1985 the tension between the two Kollel congregations boiled over, resulting in physical fights, rumour mongering, and police involvement.

Rabbi Meir Rogoznitsky, the spiritual leader of Agudas Achim who had been recruited from Britain in 1982 to serve as principal of the Kollel affiliated Shaarey Torah [Gates of Torah] Primary School, decided he had had enough. He vented the emotions he and his congregation felt toward the Kollel Yad Shaul and its leadership in a spirited letter:

Almost from its inception has the Yeoville Baal Teshuva Community been wracked by dissension. Whether it was towards Mizrachi, Lubavitch or even its own Rabbonim [rabbis] the intolerance was the same. Rabbi Shurkin (*sic*), Rabbi Sternbuch, Rabbi Chrysler, Rabbi Saunders (*sic*) [are] some of the victims of a hierarchy bereft of Kovod Talmidei Chachomim [respecting Torah sages], determined to dominate the innocent minds and lifestyle of the new generation. An intolerance breeding myopia and self-righteousness as if the Shechinah [Divine Presence] recognized only one spot in Johannesburg.⁸³

Without overlooking the subjective nature of the allegations contained in this letter, it likely rang true for many of those, insiders, and outsiders, who encountered what was purportedly an intense and demanding atmosphere created by the Kollel Yad Shaul. This intensity, coupled with the fact that the core community was located in Yeoville, restricted the influence of the Kollel on the wider community. Throughout the 1980s this core Kollel

⁸² It is difficult to find any record of the split and the author has relied on anonymous sources for his information, which should therefore be treated circumspectly.

⁸³ Letter from Rogoznitsky to his congregation, 4 April, 1985, (the Hebrew date 13 Nissan 5745 appears in the original document) (Beth Din Archives).

community remained a place of serious learning with many of its previous programs continuing unabated.⁸⁴ It also initiated a new programme that involved Kollel members meeting weekly with other congregations to study.⁸⁵ Yet this failed to reverse the Kollel's declining influence. Ironically, the decline was aided by emulation: several *shtieblach* mimicked its model in the more affluent neighbourhoods of Sydenham and Fairmount. As we shall see, many of those involved in later kiruv organizations were the direct or indirect students of the original Kollel fellows. Yet by the mid-1980s the Kollel as an institution was no longer a central player in Johannesburg's Orthodox community.

3. *The Founding of Chabad- Lubavitch in South Africa*

As early as 1911, immigrants who came from Hassidic homes, primarily from the Lithuanian Chabad town of Rakeshik, established their own synagogue in the Johannesburg city centre.⁸⁶ Twenty years later, following a broader pattern, they moved to Doornfontein. In 1961 the synagogue once again had to relocate since the property it occupied was being expropriated by the municipality.⁸⁷ Thanks to the generous compensation received by the city council in 1963, the Chassidic shul was able to build a magnificent edifice at the edges of Yeoville which it occupied until the turn of the twenty first century. Up to the early 1970s, it appears that the Hassidic identity of the congregants was more cultural than strictly observant. While they prayed from the same prayer books as other Lubavitcher Hassidim, and referred to their Lithuanian brethren as *Misnagedim* [literally: opposers, a general term applying to all non-Hassidim], their Jewish knowledge, observance, and mode of dress appears to have been indistinguishable from the average South African Jew.⁸⁸ Their spiritual leader was Rabbi Alter Hilewitz, a distinguished Talmudic scholar, who, as mentioned earlier, served as principal of Johannesburg's Hebrew Teachers Training Seminary and its rabbinical seminary. By all accounts, however, he was not a charismatic figure. Though he had solid Hassidic credentials, he does not appear to have attempted to spread the mystically

⁸⁴ "Kollel helps out in Bloemfontein," *South African Jewish Herald*, 12 April, 1983.

⁸⁵ See "Project SEED: Chanukah SEED Programme Kollel-Waverley-Germiston," (n.d., c. December 1983). Quite likely the relationships forged in these sessions introduced new and sorely needed sources of income to the Kollel.

⁸⁶ "Chassidic Shul moves from Doornfontein to Berea," *SAJT*, 9 June, 1961; See also Rabbi Yossy Goldman, interview by Gideon Shimoni in Johannesburg, 21 June, 1999.

⁸⁷ "Chassidim Must Move Out," *Jewish Herald*, 30 May 1961.

⁸⁸ See "Chassidic Shul moves from Doornfontein to Berea." From pictures of the clean-shaven men, it is clear that none of the congregants wore Hassidic garb. In Rabbi Dovid Hazdan, interview by author, (Johannesburg, May, 2017), and in Bacher, interview, and in Chrysler, interview the interviewees disclosed that the small group of observant Lubavitchers preferred to pray in more religious settings such as the Aduth (and later also the Kollel) as well as Bnei Akiva.

based Hassidic teachings.⁸⁹ While it would appear that most congregants were not troubled by this, the ardent Chabad Hassid Koppel Bacher, whose family had had a long time association with the Congregation, was not satisfied.⁹⁰ His years studying Hassidic philosophy in the United States convinced him of the need to align the synagogue with what he considered a more authentic Hassidic outlook. To do so would necessitate replacing the academic Hilewitz with a Chabad emissary who could introduce the broader community to the teachings of the leader of the Chabad movement, the Lubavitcher Rebbe [Grand Rabbi] Menachem Mendel Schneersohn.

In 1968, along with a committee of distinguished rabbis, Bacher extended an invitation to his friend (and a personal emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe) Rabbi Shmuel Lew to visit South Africa on a four-week tour.⁹¹ The latter's subsequent talks and lectures to schools and universities across South Africa appears to have made a deep impression on his listeners. During his trip, Lew informed members of the Jewish press that he intended to lay down the foundations for establishing a Chabad branch in South Africa. He was cautious to add that the "movement" would not "interfere with existing movements" but would "add supplementary information, and personal contacts in order to fill the vacuum of contemporary Judaism."⁹² In 1969, Bacher invited another emissary of the Rebbe to this country. This time it was his mentor Rabbi Joseph Wineberg who, as mentioned above, used his visit to Johannesburg to dedicate the new Kollel Yad Shaul, which was based at the Bacher family home.⁹³

At the same time as Bacher was working toward a stronger Chabad presence in Johannesburg he found an increasingly reliable ally in the form of Rabbi Norman Bernhard. Before accepting his position at Oxford Synagogue in 1965, Bernhard, who was originally associated with the conservative wing of the Yeshiva University shared his concerns about relocating to South Africa with Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik, the yeshiva's head. The latter in turn, suggested he consult with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The ensuing first conversation, in which the Rebbe dispelled Bernhard's doubts about moving to Johannesburg, left an indelible mark. Over the next decade Oxford's rabbi continued a long-distance correspondence with

⁸⁹ See Bacher, interview.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* In fact, as mentioned, he was a close confidant of Rabbi Salzer and regularly attended the Adath Yeshurun, where he felt more comfortable with its level of observance.

⁹¹ Azariah Mureinik, "Rabbi Lew Made Deep Impact", *Zionist Record*, 6 September 1968. The committee consisted of the aforementioned Chabad Hassid, Irma Aloy; his two Israeli sons-in-law Sholom Ber Gurarie, a Chabad Hassid and rabbi, and Moshe Kurstag, a fulltime lecturer at the Rabbis Training School and an original member of the part-time Kollel, and Norman Bernhard.

⁹² "Lubavitch to Establish Movement in S.A.," *Jewish Herald*, 6 August, 1968.

⁹³ "Kollel's New Home is Dedicated."

the Rebbe while concomitantly making arrangements for the recruitment of the latter's emissaries to Johannesburg. During that time, he also provided immeasurable assistance to the nascent Lubavitch movement. By 1976, Bernhard's personal transition was complete, and he formally changed his garb to become a full-fledged Hassid and an important asset to the future of Chabad, as we shall see.⁹⁴

The opportunity to recruit someone on a permanent basis presented itself in 1970 when Hilewitz retired.⁹⁵ This was not necessarily an easy task, for according to Chabad protocol it required the express approval of Rabbi Schneersohn. Upon succeeding his father-in-law at the helm in 1951, the latter began to pursue his goal of initiating Jewish outreach across the globe. As a result, any Lubavitch rabbi going overseas to spread the Chabad philosophy would be doing so in his capacity as the personal emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. After some two years, and with significant help from Bernhard (who appears to have been instrumental in securing the Rebbe's assent), Bacher located the person willing to implement the plans to which Lew had alluded.⁹⁶ The arrival in early 1972 of the 24-year-old Rabbi Mendel Lipskar as the new rabbi of the Chassidic shul and the official Chabad emissary to Johannesburg marked a turning point for the establishment of an independent Lubavitch movement in South Africa.⁹⁷

3.1 Rabbi Lipskar's arrival and initial impact

Mendel Lipskar was born in Toronto to a prominent Lubavitch family and educated exclusively in Hassidic institutions. He came to South Africa full of anticipation and overflowing with "effervescent" energy.⁹⁸ Already in his late teens he perceived that the victorious outcome of the Six Day War had instilled the spirituality-seeking non-observant Jew with a sense of exuberance about Judaism itself. It was with this understanding and expectation that he embraced his task of spreading Jewish learning and observance among his host community and beyond.⁹⁹ Merely weeks after his arrival, Lipskar together with Dayan

⁹⁴ Mrs. Joan Bernhard, interview by author, August 2017, Jerusalem.

⁹⁵ See "Hilewitz, Alter," *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Available online at Encyclopedia.com. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/hilewitz-alter>.

⁹⁶ See "Rabbi Lipskar celebrates 40 years", where Lipskar thanks Bernhard for his efforts in recruiting him.

⁹⁷ See Rabbi Mendel Lipskar, interview by author, (Johannesburg, May 2017). Lipskar explained that in those days the protocol was that the Lubavitcher Rebbe would only send an emissary if the host country sent a request. In this case Bacher made the request some time before, and Lipskar was the first person to receive the Rebbe's express approval.

⁹⁸ See Rabbi Dovid Hazdan's address to the International Kinnus of Shluchim, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jw9wHC3iZI>, accessed on 5 December 2021.

⁹⁹ See Lipskar, interview.

Irma Aloy -- chairman of the Chassidim shul and an “ambassador” for Lubavitch -- hosted a public meeting to discuss the attraction of the youth to Chabad Hassidic philosophy.¹⁰⁰ The evening proved to be a success and earned Lipskar the reputation of being a serious and engaging speaker. The combination of Lipskar’s willingness to seemingly speak on any topic in Judaism, his rhetorical skills, and the interest of various organizations to host him, gained him a busy speaking schedule.¹⁰¹ In his early years he was invited by Jewish organizations across the board, including the Zionist Federation.¹⁰² Concurrently, he used his energies at the Wits University campus to engage young Jewish students in debates over the meaning of Judaism.¹⁰³ Those he encountered were invited to his home on a Thursday night where he would hold informal gatherings or *Farbrengens*. These normally consisted of a shiur followed by open and intimate discussions on Hassidic thought, which was supplemented with liquor to lighten up the evening.¹⁰⁴ In the context of the early 1970s this relaxed and convivial mode of communication proved effective in recruiting his initial band of followers.

During Lipskar’s first years there were very few Lubavitch Hassidim in Johannesburg who were born into Chabad families. Those who were given a Hassidic education included the children of some of the committee members who had invited Shmuel Lew in 1968, as well as a trickling of others. In the latter category was Dovid Hazdan, the son of a Russian-born Lubavitch rabbi. In the early 1970s Hazdan was in his early teens. Like other observant Chabad Hassidim, he did not attend the Chassidim shul but was a member of the Bnei Akiva congregation, whose congregants were primarily Sabbath observant. Having never left South Africa and having never been exposed to the charismatic American Hassidim, Lipskar’s arrival was eye opening for him.

It was 1972 and it was Rabbi Lipskar’s first Yom Kippur [Day of Atonement] as rabbi of his community. That morning, in walked a man, with a huge Afro hairstyle, wearing hippie jeans and an open shirt. All the old men stared at

¹⁰⁰ “Youth follow Chassidus,” *Zionist Record*, 9 June, 1972; “Who’s Who in South African Jewry,” in Leon Feldberg, *South African Jewry 1967-68*, (Fieldhill Publishing: Johannesburg, 1968), 171.

¹⁰¹ See Lipskar, interview, in which he stated that when he first arrived he was asked to speak about and to provide lessons on everything including teaching people to read Hebrew.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* Over the years, as we will later show, the Lubavitch movement, like the other innovators, had an ambiguous relationship with Zionism, but at the early stage it appears there was little tension.

¹⁰³ Almost immediately after arriving in South Africa, Lipskar gave lectures to the students and attended meetings about their welfare (see “Minutes of Meeting of South African Jewish Board of Deputies, held on 12 March 1972” (SAJBD Archives)).

¹⁰⁴ See Hazdan, interview; In a video presentation by Lipskar, he mentions that the Lubavitcher Rebbe would present his emissaries with a bottle of *mashke* [Liquor] which was to be used in the *farbrengens* in their destined country. See https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo/aid/3376055/jewish/Rabbi-Mendel-Lipskar.htm, accessed on 8 December 2021.

him disapprovingly, as they could not believe someone would have the gall to come to synagogue dressed like he was. Unperturbed, the rabbi, who in recent weeks had befriended this new guest, went up to the wardens and directed them to ask him to open the ark. The scene of the ark flanked at one side by a distinguished gentleman sporting a top hat and at the other side a person with dishevelled hair that seemed to attract a swarm of flies around him proved too much for the genteel crowd. They thought their rabbi was crazy to countenance such disgraceful conduct. As for Lipskar, since he was new on his job, he held his tongue. The following Yom Kippur, after a year of silence, he decided to address the matter. By doing so he came prepared to take on the senior congregants, who appeared to have pined for the style and manner of his predecessor and were somewhat resentful of Lipskar's youthful and less cautious approach.¹⁰⁵ He told his congregation that during the Temple era two goats were brought before the High Priest, which were indistinguishable in their value and appearance. Their different fate was sealed by casting lots which would decide which one was sacrificed on the altar and which one was thrown off a cliff in the desert. He then turned to his flock and scolded them for their indignant and judgmental attitude that they, dressed in their three-piece suits, displayed towards someone else in much more casual attire. He asked them who had really distinguished themselves since the last Yom Kippur. While they had remained stagnant in their Judaism this hippie was now learning in a Yeshiva in Boston and had completely altered his lifestyle. He then ended his sermon by wondering how they could have dared point their fingers at the young man. As Rabbi Lipskar took his seat I and the other young teenagers of the tiny band of observant Hassidim felt we had undergone a formative experience.¹⁰⁶

It was probably the first time the youth had heard a pulpit rabbi who directly challenged his congregation to act as better human beings and as better Jews. The fact that Lipskar was only in his mid-twenties, was dressed in Hassidic garb rather than in a tailored suit, and was fearless in the face of his congregants (many of whom were easily double his age) must have dismayed some of the veterans while delighting the adolescents. Years later the latter who

¹⁰⁵ In anonymous interviews with the author interviewees recall a meeting at Chassidim shul where his suitability as a rabbi was openly discussed and people were encouraged to come and show support for Lipskar.

¹⁰⁶ See Hazdan interview.

once comprised his small core of followers still speak of being “mesmerised” by this talk and attribute it and other talks to their becoming keen volunteers for Lipskar’s outreach activities in Johannesburg, and for eventually becoming emissaries themselves.¹⁰⁷

3.2 Chabad’s outreach philosophy and its application in Johannesburg

The outreach Lipskar and his early followers inaugurated was of a different nature and magnitude than that to which Johannesburg had been exposed in the previous two years by the Kollel and its community. This was due, *inter alia*, to the philosophical differences separating Chabad from the other non-Hassidic communities. Chabad’s philosophy, though spanning two centuries, was greatly honed by the thoughts and actions of their most recent Rebbe. Even before assuming the leadership of his movement in 1951, the latter had spoken of the need and importance of outreach.¹⁰⁸ For him it was not merely ensuring Jewish continuity or introducing a more authentic Judaism. Indeed, the purpose of this outreach was not primarily aimed at the complete observance of those one encountered. Rather, echoing ideas rooted in the Tanya, the monumental and mystical work written by Chabad’s founder, Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the new Rebbe viewed spreading Jewish identity and practice to non-observant Jews in more cosmic terms.¹⁰⁹ In Chabad Hassidic thought “each action in fulfilment of God’s commandments constitutes an eternal union with the divine, irrespective of what was done a moment before or a moment after.”¹¹⁰ In a novel interpretation of Maimonides, the Rebbe believed that by doing one mitzvah each individual has the capacity to “overbalance himself and the whole world to the side of virtue.”¹¹¹ It follows, from both sources that the performance of one mitzvah is a “transformative act.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁷See Hazdan’s address to the International Kinnus of Shluchim. After studying abroad, Hazdan became a rabbi himself and returned to South Africa. In Johannesburg he occupied a senior rabbinical post and concurrently served as headmaster of Chabad’s premier educational institution, the Torah Academy.

¹⁰⁸See letter from the Rebbe to unnamed addressee, 9 March, 1944, https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default_cdo/aid/66594/jewish/A-Positive-Conversation.htm accessed on 7 December 2021.; Letter (no. 492) from the Rebbe to unnamed addressee, May 1949, https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default_cdo/aid/2279241/jewish/The-need-for-spiritual-outreach.htm, accessed on 7 December 2021.

¹⁰⁹ For references to “cosmic” effects, see for example, Mendel Kaplan, “The Mitzvah Campaign of Tefillin” (audio) https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3023053/jewish/The-Mitzvah-Campaign-of-Tefillin.htm, accessed on 5 December, 2021.

¹¹⁰ Philip Wexler and Eli Rubin, “The Lower Half of the Globe”: Kabbalah and Social Analysis in the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Vision for Judaism’s American Era” in Brian Ogren, (editor), *Kabbalah in America Ancient Lore in the New World*, (Boston: Brill, 2020), 304.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* quoting Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Teshuvah [Penitence], 3:4. See also Elimelech Silberberg, “The Tefillin Campaign in Halacha,” (audio), https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/3710078/jewish/The-Tefillin-Campaign-in-Halacha.htm, accessed on 5 December 2021.

¹¹² Wexler and Rubin, “The Lower Half of the Globe”, 304.

According to this worldview, it made little sense to expend large resources to obtain full observance by a relatively small group of people when the same resources could be more efficiently spent by persuading a wider audience to follow a few additional commandments. Moreover, Schneersohn considered it crucial to introduce Jewish observance to as many unaffiliated Jews as possible as he saw their re-identification with the Jewish people as part of the redemptive process. After comparing the coming of the messiah to the Revelation at Sinai, he cited the homiletical work *Deuteronomy Rabbah* which states “that were the Jews [at Mount Sinai] to have been lacking even one individual -- even one on the lowest level -- the Divine presence would not have been revealed at the Giving of the Torah.”¹¹³ Pursuant to this interpretation, the Rebbe surmised that the messiah could likewise only appear if every single Jew, irrespective of his or her level of observance, had been taught to identify as a Jew. It followed then that it was vital to educate as many Jews as possible in basic Judaism for no one knew if and when the critical number would be reached to induce messianic redemption. This led the Rebbe in 1967 to launch his first worldwide mitzvah campaign, directing Chabad organizations and emissaries to set up booths for laying Tefillin [phylacteries] by any Jew identifying as such and agreeing to do so.¹¹⁴ This was followed over the next decade by campaigns that included encouraging women and their daughters to light candles on the Sabbath eve. These campaigns probably placed Lubavitch in contact with more Jews than any other Orthodox organization.

Loyal to his Rebbe, Lipskar was eager to implement this type of outreach. Soon after the High Holidays and still in his first year, he arranged for a mobile Sukkah which he parked outside the popular Checkers supermarket in Yeoville in 1972. Assisted by the youth of his community, he approached any person exiting the supermarket and ask them whether they were Jewish. If the person answered affirmatively, and if he appeared positively inclined, they would offer him to shake the four species as is customary during the festival. This public and assertive approach was foreign to South African Orthodoxy.¹¹⁵ This type of activity expanded over the years to become a hallmark of Chabad and was regularly featured in the Jewish and general press. Other initiatives included a public sukkah in the centre of town;¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Letter (no. 492) from the Rebbe to unnamed recipient, May 1949.

¹¹⁴ Kaplan, “The Mitzvah Campaign of Tefillin”; Silberberg “The Tefillin Campaign in Halacha.”

¹¹⁵ See Hazdan, interview.

¹¹⁶ “Central city Sukkah did brisk “business,” *SAJT*, 15 October 1980; “City Sukkah Succeeds,” *SAJT*, 22 October 1982. “Central City Sukkah,” *SAJT*, 23 September 1983.

an annual Purim festive meal and Purim activities for children;¹¹⁷ blowing the shofar at various hospitals for Jewish patients and doctors;¹¹⁸ touring the length and breadth of the country during the summer holidays in a giant mobile caravan known as the Mitzvah tank;¹¹⁹ lighting a giant Chanukah menorah in one of the central malls of Johannesburg;¹²⁰ and arranging a parade with impressive floats on the minor holiday of Lag B'Omer.¹²¹

On the whole these activities appear to have been welcomed by the community at large and received positive notice in Jewish newspapers.¹²² Criticism of Chabad did occasionally appear in the press, as we shall discuss later, but rarely was it focused on these energetic initiatives. Chabad was also involved in many educational innovations, but did not set out to produce Torah scholars, certainly not out of the unaffiliated.¹²³ In contradistinction to the Kollel's belief that only those involved in fulltime learning were qualified to engage in outreach, Chabad believed that the emissary and other outreach workers could ill afford to advance their own knowledge at the cost of less engagement with the non-observant. A decade before Chabad's involvement in South Africa, the Rebbe specifically criticized those who prioritized study over outreach. He asserted that since the previous Rebbe, Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn, sacrificed his personal growth for the sake of the Jews at large, there was no excuse for an aspiring Torah scholar not to make a similar sacrifice.¹²⁴ Following suit, Lipskar was also critical of those movements in Johannesburg that he felt could have been more energetic in their educational endeavours.¹²⁵

3.3 *Rabbi Goldman and the Chabad House*

Aside from running outreach activities, Lipskar also set about building his own congregation. Initially he did not imagine that his congregants were ready for full observance

¹¹⁷ OH, "Lubavitch Discotheque", *Zionist Record*, 31 March 1978; "Grand Affair", *SAJT*, 12 March 1980; "Lively time at Lubavitch Purim dinner," *Zionist Record*, 3 April 1981; "Lubavitch Parcels for Purim," *SAJT*, 11 March 1981.

¹¹⁸YG, "A hectic month," *Zionist Record*, 10 November 1978; "Blowing Shofars for the Sick," *SAJT*, 24 September 1982.

¹¹⁹ "The Trek of the Mitzvah Tank," *SAJT*, 18 January 1978.

¹²⁰ "Chief Rabbi to Light up Chanukah candles," *The Star*, 8 December 1981. "Large Crowds at Chanukah Festivities," *The Jewish Herald*, 5 January 1982; "Festival of Lights," *The Citizen*, 3 December 1982.

¹²¹ "Join the parade!" *Zionist Record*, 2 May 1980.

¹²² See for example, Russel Sadowsky, "Jolly Shofar Blowers (letter to the editor), *Jewish Herald*, 26 October 1982.

¹²³ Later, upon setting up their own educational institutions, they eventually established a Yeshiva, but that was a decade later (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lubavitch_Yeshiva_Gedolah_of_Johannesburg).

¹²⁴ Letter from the Rebbe to unnamed recipient July 8, 1965 https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default_cdo/aid/2201431/jewish/On-the-Urgent-Need-to-Spread-Torah-to-All-Jews.htm, accessed on 7 December 2021.

¹²⁵ See Lipskar, interview. Interestingly, though he differs with Ohr Somayach on philosophical grounds, Lipskar is impressed with many of their initiatives.

and for adopting the rigorous Hassidic lifestyle and garb, yet a fair number appeared to have done so. Looking back, he attributed the success of this period to the conservative nature of South African society at that time and its strict emphasis on group differences. Since Jews were classified as white but felt uncomfortable among the Afrikaans and English-speaking populations, he surmised that it drove a higher than usual number to a fuller embrace of Judaism.¹²⁶ Others point to the fact that many of the newly observant members who joined Lipskar's Hassidic congregation were formerly associated with the Kollel who preferred the rabbi's fewer demands and less intensive study schedule. Naturally, this caused friction between the two innovator movements, but the tensions do not appear to have left any lasting marks.¹²⁷

Lipskar's growing congregation diverted his attention from his larger outreach projects. Realising he needed an assistant, he reached out to his former New Yorker study partner, Rabbi Yossy Goldman, who agreed to join him in 1976.¹²⁸ Soon after Goldman's arrival, Lipskar charged him with opening and directing a Chabad House in Yeoville. This venue was to serve as the centre for designing outreach projects, aimed at all Jews, irrespective of their level of observance.¹²⁹ Almost immediately on becoming director, Goldman launched a Jewish radio hour, the "Jewish Sound", which aired Sunday evenings on shortwave Swazi radio. He featured Israeli and Hassidic songs, as well as excerpts of Jewish plays, which were read in this new emissary's mellifluous radio voice.¹³⁰ Not only did this showcase Chabad's pioneering spirit, but since it was exempt from paying hosting fees to Swazi radio owner Izzy Kirsh, it also presumably managed to earn Chabad modest revenue by selling advertisements on the show.¹³¹ These funds would come in handy for Goldman's other technological innovations which included the development of the *Torahphone*. Every week Goldman recorded a one-minute message on the portion of the week or other Jewish Holiday that could be accessed by any telephone across Johannesburg.¹³² In-person programs

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Former Kollel members have anonymously described Chabad's "poaching" of Kollel members. In Bacher, interview, Bacher admitted to this, but analogized it to young people shopping for different ideas.

¹²⁸ See Yossy Goldman, "Being a Shaliach in South Africa" (video presentation) at https://www.torahcafe.com/rabbi-yossy-goldman/being-a-shliach-in-south-africa-video_ffd94a747.html, accessed on 7 December 2021.

¹²⁹ Mendel Lipskar, "Transcript of Speech on Chabad's Activities" (SAJBD Archives), undated.

¹³⁰ David Brown, "You do have to be Jewish", *The Star*, 22 September 1976; "The Jewish Sound is Catching On," *Jewish Herald*, 5 October 1976; Advertorial, "The Jewish Sound: Sixth Anniversary Supplement," *SAJT*, 8 October 1982. This report states that many of the Jewish Sound's features were copied by radio stations across England, Australia, and the United States.

¹³¹ See Rabbi Yossy Goldman, interview by author, (Johannesburg, September, 2019).

¹³² "Torahphone two years old," *Jewish Herald*, 8 February 1983.

at the Chabad House included weekly lectures in ethics and Hassidism for a co-educational group of young adults, special classes for the elderly, and the annual gender-segregated day camp for school children.¹³³ These initiatives were not reliant on technology but were distinguishable from those of other institutions by their savvy branding and careful appeal to the public.¹³⁴ This marketing strategy probably attracted some wealthy backers. Even if some programs charged fees, these would not have been sufficient to cover this scale of activities. Certainly, Lipskar and Goldman understood, like Chabad emissaries the world over, that fundraising was part and parcel of their mission. Even so, exact information as to the sources of the funding is unavailable.

In 1986, with the Rebbe's blessings, Goldman officially left Chabad to assume the position of rabbi of the Sydenham Highland North Congregation, a synagogue that probably had the largest attendance in Johannesburg.¹³⁵ While it appears that nothing overtly Lubavitch was introduced to this synagogue, it is noteworthy that most of the other rabbinical staff at that shul were themselves attached to Chabad. Furthermore, this position most likely paved the way for Goldman to become chairman and later president of the South African Rabbinical Association for many years.¹³⁶ In any event, Goldman's departure from Chabad activity coincided with the geographical expansion of Chabad. Whereas most Lubavitchers during the 1970s were concentrated in the Yeoville and Observatory areas, many gradually migrated north to Orchards and Sydenham, especially after Chabad's premier educational institution, the Torah Academy, was established in that area in 1981. Since the school also housed an attractive synagogue, it became popular with the Chabad members and, in a matter of a few years, its number rivalled that of the original Chassidim shul in Yeoville. This migration, which accelerated during the mid-1980s, arguably marked the end of the formative period for the Chabad movement in Johannesburg. From the beginning of the 1970s Chabad played a major role in the revolution of Orthodox life in Johannesburg. In the decades that followed, as we shall note in a later chapter, it continued to grow as a strong faction of the Orthodox observant community, but its role appears to have assumed a very different character.

¹³³ "Project T.E.A.C.H Teaches," *Zionist Record*, 10 December 1982. "Engaging the Ageing," *SAJT*, 25 June 1982. "Johannesburg's First Jewish Day Camp," *SAJT*, 19 June 1979.

¹³⁴ For example, the public lectures were called T.E.A.C.H (Torah Education at Chabad House).

¹³⁵ See Goldman, interview. Though Goldman had left Chabad, the synagogue that employed him permitted him to continue broadcasting the Jewish Sound, which he did, for the next twenty years.

¹³⁶ Goldman, interview.

In concluding this outline of Chabad's history and founding, it is important to revisit an aspect unique to Chabad that was not found in any of the other Orthodox camps in Johannesburg.¹³⁷ This was attachment to the Lubavitcher Rebbe. As mentioned, his outreach philosophy accounted for the movement's emphasis on reaching as many Jews as possible.¹³⁸ The attachment each emissary feels toward the Rebbe (who passed away more than a quarter of a century ago) is a source of major division between Chabad and the other organizations. The heads of the non-Hassidic movements have all had their mentors, whom they occasionally cite as inspirations. Lipskar and Hazdan, by contrast, constantly remind their audiences of the continued impact that their relationship with the Rebbe has had on them.¹³⁹ Goldman has even argued that the Rebbe's assurances that South Africa would remain a hospitable place for Jews was responsible for sustaining Jewish life in the Republic throughout tumultuous 1980s and 1990s.¹⁴⁰ In the sections which follow, where we analyse the general impact of the pioneering innovators on the broader community, the Rebbe's shadow looms large in all controversies involving Chabad.

4. The Early Innovators and their impact on education.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, battles were fought between the accommodators and traditionalists over the character and content of Jewish education. Whether the disputes were conducted at annual conferences of the South African Board of Jewish Education or whether they took place in the pages of the Jewish press, they were an ongoing feature of the tussle for influence and control between these two camps. While the traditionalists managed to carve out a niche for themselves in the Yeshiva College schools network, this was apparently insufficient for the innovators. The next two sections outline the attitudes, achievements, and internal conflicts of the innovators with respect to primary and high school education, as well as university students.

In August 1966, having already established the independent Menorah Oxford school at his synagogue, Bernhard called for a reformation of the South African Board of Jewish Education. Attacking its educators for being "impersonal, detached, non-committed and superficial," and questioning the lack of religious content and the curriculum's focus on

¹³⁷ Chabad's interactions with the general community, and with the other innovator movements, will be discussed in a separate section, below, in this chapter.

¹³⁸ Hazdan, interview; Bacher, interview. Many lament the fact that there the success nowadays is more limited.

¹³⁹ See https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo/aid/3376055/jewish/Rabbi-Mendel-Lipskar.htm, accessed on 7 December 2021; Hazdan address to international Kinnus.

¹⁴⁰ Goldman "Being a Shaliach in South Africa"; Yossy Goldman, "The Miracle of South Africa", available at <http://myencounterblog.com/?p=2038>, accessed on 7 December 2021.

Hebrew and Zionism, he demanded that the final arbiters of Jewish education be the Chief Rabbinate and independent rabbis.¹⁴¹ Echoing these sentiments a year later, Chief Rabbi Casper, proving more critical of the Board than his predecessor, called for more rabbinic input into Jewish education.¹⁴² In 1968, Bernhard and Casper, among other rabbis, opposed proposed plans to hold the Board's 1969 three-month standard 9 Israel Ulpan (Hebrew Learning Course) at the secular Sde Boker College in the south of Israel.¹⁴³ The rabbis felt Jerusalem would be more appropriate as it was the religious and cultural heart of Israel and would leave a deeper impression on the Ulpan's participants. While the Chief Rabbi, as was his wont, expressed his displeasure tactfully, using proxies to convey his message, Bernhard adopted a more confrontational approach.¹⁴⁴ As he had done three years earlier when announcing his new school, Bernhard used the occasion of Yom Kippur to attack the proposed plan and to criticize the Board for its disregard of the "rabbis' opinions and Orthodox sensibilities."¹⁴⁵ This caused Ivan Greenstein, chairman of the Board and member of Oxford synagogue, to register his protest by leaving synagogue midway through the sermon. Sympathising with his actions, his colleagues at the Board declared Bernhard *persona non grata* for his fiery talk.¹⁴⁶ It appears that the *S. A. Jewish Times* once again sided with the Board and condemned the rabbis for acting as "demigods."¹⁴⁷ Judging from the letters printed in the paper, its readership also opposed Bernhard's antics, with some wondering why he did not return to the United States.¹⁴⁸

A few weeks later, Rabbi Baruch Zaichyk, another American import and firm traditionalist associated with Mizrachi, attacked the United Hebrew Schools (UHS) which was in charge of its Talmud Torah [afternoon school]. Describing the leadership of the latter institution as "potbellied, cigar smoking ignoramuses," Zaichyk expelled the UHS from his synagogue and established an independent Cheder.¹⁴⁹ Following suit in the early 1970s, Bernhard, who was not only director of the Menorah Oxford School but also head of Oxford's afternoon Cheder, seceded from the UHS, replacing its teachers with fellows from

¹⁴¹ "Record crowd hears problems facing the modern Jew," *S. A. Jewish Observer*, August 1966.

¹⁴² See Katz, "History of Jewish Education," 458-460.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 459-460. Despite the fact that religious facilities were available, it was felt this did not provide an overall religious experience.

¹⁴⁴ See letter from Archie Peck, director of the Federation of Synagogues, Open Forum, *SAJT*, 15 November 1968.

¹⁴⁵ See John Hurwitz, "Our rabbi has the right to speak," (open Forum), *SAJT*, 1 November 1968.

¹⁴⁶ "Board of Education declares Rabbi Bernhard persona non grata," *SAJT*, 15 November 1968.

¹⁴⁷ "Putting our spiritual house in order" (editorial) *SAJT* 15 November 1968.

¹⁴⁸ See "An Open Letter to Rabbi Bernhard", *SAJT* 15 November 1968; Archie Mirvis, "Mr. Greenstein's courageous action", *SAJT*, 15 November 1968.

¹⁴⁹ "Emmarentia breaks with United Hebrew Schools," *SAJT*, 22 November 1968

the Kollel.¹⁵⁰ Among those hired were Rabbis Avraham Hassan, Jeremy Abramov (the future founder of Ohr Somayach Johannesburg), and Mordechai Fachler. The interaction between the Kollel fellows and the pupils bore fruit a few years later when this Cheder's graduates, many of whom came from the northern suburbs, entered university, and assumed leadership positions in the Jewish student movements. Some maintained a close relationship with their Kollel mentors.¹⁵¹

In 1972 the Transvaal Education Department produced a syllabus for the compulsory teaching of Christian religious education in government schools. Acceding to the requests of the Chief Rabbinate, specific permission was granted to any non-Christian student to be excused from these classes.¹⁵² Problems arose over the next few years when the exempted Jewish students were left with no structured programme during religious instruction periods. To remedy that situation, Chief Rabbi Casper established the Department of Religious Education under the auspices of the Office of the Chief Rabbi. He appointed Rabbi Chaim Shein as director of this department. As mentioned earlier, Shein was the first South African-born fellow of the Kollel, and he strongly associated with its ultra-Orthodox mission. To Casper's credit, he recognized Shein's creative talents and his keen understanding of his fellow South Africans to the extent that he overlooked Shein's Kollel associations. For his part Shein respected the chief rabbi and the working relationship was a warm one. By 1977, through Shein's efforts 2,000 students in over 12 high schools, primarily in Johannesburg, were receiving printed assignments monthly.¹⁵³ This Department was initially assisted by the Pedagogic Centre of the South African Board of Jewish Education whose facilities were used to print the materials. In July 1978, owing to the Department's growth, it merged with the Pedagogic Centre and Shein was appointed Director of the combined organisation. Informal education, provided under one umbrella to both the government and Jewish schools was now effectively under the direction of an enthusiastic product of one of the innovator movements. It would be wrong to assume Shein had a completely free hand in designing the syllabus, and there is reason to believe he deferred to the Chief Rabbi and to the Board. At the same time, it is unlikely that his worldview did not colour the assignments set by him, and it is noteworthy

¹⁵⁰ See "United Hebrew Schools file," (SAJBD archives); Hassan, interview; Jeremy Abramov, interview by author, (Jerusalem, May 2017). While Emmarentia referred to their afternoon school as a Talmud Torah, and Oxford as a Cheder both were formerly under the United Hebrew Schools and were essentially taught the same curriculum.

¹⁵¹ See Hassan, interview.

¹⁵² Katz, "History of Jewish Education in South Africa," 636-637.

¹⁵³ *Ibid* at 639, citing Shein, HM, "Report of the Activities of the Department of Religious Education."

that in contrast to the heavy emphasis laid on teaching Hebrew in the King David syllabus, the Hebrew language does not feature in the Religious Education syllabus.¹⁵⁴

The Kollel was not the only innovator movement to have impacted informal Jewish religious education. In the late 1970s, South African-born Rabbi Julian (Yaacov) Katz, who was a member of Bnei Akiva in his youth, was recruited from Israel to serve as the head of the newly inaugurated Jewish Studies department for the King David Schools, and to be in charge of both formal and informal education. Having sent his children to the Lubavitch Torah Academy school he struck up a relationship with Chabad House director Rabbi Yossy Goldman who he enlisted to produce many of the department's informal education materials.¹⁵⁵ The influence that the innovators had on Jewish education would only expand in the next decades, but already during the 1970s and early 1980s they were indirectly impacting a new generation of school pupils.

Yet the most consequential influence of the ultra-Orthodox movements on education came through the establishment of their own institutions. Originally, Bernhard's Menorah Oxford catered primarily for Adatah Yeshurun members, with Rabbi Salzer acting as the unofficial Halachic [Jewish law] guide for the school.¹⁵⁶ In 1976, a decade after Menorah's establishment, its student population was evolving. Six years after the Kollel's establishment, and four years after Lubavitch was introduced, the school now catered to children from the Adatah/ Kollel community, children from the Chabad community, and a third group of nominally religious local Jews. This mixed student body generated tensions. Purportedly Salzer and his Adatah congregation opposed a split, preferring to view the school as a "multifaceted religious community with legitimate variations."¹⁵⁷ Less accommodating was the Kollel camp, who worried that Bernhard's move to Chabad would mean that their children would be fed a Lubavitch diet.¹⁵⁸ They also disapproved of the number of irreligious children allowed admission, worrying that they would negatively influence their own children.¹⁵⁹ Following tense meetings between representatives of these factions, the school gradually divided into two. The new Lubavitch-run Torah Academy maintained the premises

¹⁵⁴ The five-year syllabus consisted of eight topics on Jewish History, nine on Jewish Festivals, seven on Jewish Symbols and Concepts, eight on Israel and eight on Jewish Thought, Past and Present (*Ibid.* at 640, note 5).

¹⁵⁵ Professor Yaacov (Julian) Katz, interview by author, (Alon Shvut, Israel, December 2019).

¹⁵⁶ Bernhard, "Original Notes of Hespel for Rabbi Salzer."

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Exceptions in the Kollel camp's agitation against Menorah, included Hassan who sympathized with Bernhard's attempts to accommodate the Kollel community, and avoid a split. (see Hassan, interview).

¹⁵⁹ Bernhard, "Mini Conference Torah Academy 1991."

at Oxford, while the Kollel-affiliated but independent Shaarey Torah school relocated to a house next-door to the Kollel's Frances Street Beis Medrash.¹⁶⁰

This split paved the way for Chabad's role as an independent player in the field of education, emboldening it to expand. In 1981, Bernhard together with Lipskar purchased a 22-acre property in the upmarket Jewish suburb of Orchards.¹⁶¹ To fund payment of these new premises, the Chabad movement engaged in an ill-timed scheme involving borrowing foreign currency at low interest rates and reloaning it at higher interest rates. With the Rand's collapse a year later, the scheme proved disastrous and although it almost resulted in financial ruin Chabad tenaciously held on to avoid foreclosure.¹⁶² Since its inception and in contradistinction to Shaarey Torah, Torah Academy has billed itself as a "school for all Jewish children," and, true to its motto, has maintained a very liberal admission policy as far as the observance of its student body is concerned.¹⁶³ At the same time, it has educated a whole generation of home-grown Lubavitch rabbis, some of whom have become emissaries overseas while others have served the South African Jewish community. Similarly it produced a crop of educators who were schooled where they now teach.¹⁶⁴ Torah Academy and Shaarey Torah continue to thrive decades later; the latter has been taken over by Ohr Somayach, Johannesburg.

5. The Innovators and their impact on the university student

The success of Kollel's Monday night program and, to a lesser extent the popularity of Rabbi Lipskar placed the innovator movements in contact with many students. It did not take long before Hassan, Shakovitzky, Lipskar and others were invited to give lectures at Wits University's main campus and at its medical school. Hassan devoted himself to philosophy and ethics classes, Shakovitzky to Talmud for beginners, and Lipskar to Hassidism. As early as March 1972 the National Committee for Student Affairs (comprised of members of the Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation) recognized the movements' contributions by

¹⁶⁰ Lipskar, interview.

¹⁶¹ See Nachman Bernhard, "The Rand will go up," https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2187233/jewish/The-Rand-Will-Go-Up.htm, accessed on 7 December 2021; Suzanne Belling, "Plaque at Torah Academy in Honour of Rabbi Bernhard," *South African Jewish Report*, 2 February, 2017, <https://www.sajr.co.za/news-and-articles/2017/02/02/plaque-at-torah-academy-in-memory-of-rabbi-bernhard>.

¹⁶² It was however not always successful in paying its building contractors, leading to a row with the original builders (see Ryan Zulberg, interview by author, Johannesburg, September, 2019).

¹⁶³ See "We don't invite people to join us on our terms: Interview with Rabbi N M Bernhard," *Wellsprings Cheshvan* 5746 [November 1986]: 4-5 where Bernhard states that 30% of the students do not come from observant homes. See also http://torahacademy.co.za/TA_new/themes/TA_new/about.html

¹⁶⁴ See Hazdan's address to the International Kinnus.

inviting Ivan Ziskind and David Sanders from the Kollel, along with Mendel Lipskar from Chabad, to discuss matters relating to Jewish students.¹⁶⁵ Aside from these invitees, Rabbi Bernhard, who at the time was involved in both the Kollel and Chabad, was also in attendance, but in his capacity as a representative of the Zionist Federation. Asked to comment on the situation at Wits University, where student participation was weak, Ziskind suggested that “ways be found to bring rabbis and Orthodox Jewish personnel onto campus to provide facilities for students.” Adding his thoughts, Sanders emphasised the need to recruit inspirational leaders. Agreeing with both, Lipskar stated that Jewish student organizations need not be focused on the social scene but should serve as a forum for intellectual discussions.¹⁶⁶ He added that the most successful guests on campus were the rabbis. Representing the student body, Harold Waner, chairman of the National Student Jewish Association (SJA), commended the influence of the rabbis and religious speakers. For its part, the Wits SJA committee praised the “highly successful” Shabbaton that had taken place in conjunction with Kollel Yad Shaul, and announced that the latter’s rabbis had been delivering lunch time shiurim [informal lectures] in Jewish philosophy, ethics and Talmud.¹⁶⁷

In a move that had the Kollel’s fingerprints all over it, the Wits SJA -- which was constitutionally nonpartisan -- registered its official opposition to admitting the Maginim Reform Youth Movement as a member of the Zionist Youth Council.¹⁶⁸ This action apparently enraged Gus Saron, the long-time director of the Board of Deputies, who oversaw Jewish student activities.¹⁶⁹ Since Saron was keenly aware of the Kollel’s influence on the students this incident alienated the Kollel from the Board and from other establishment institutions.

At the end of 1973, the Kollel’s allies, with the help of an apparently reluctant Bnai Brith established a Hillel House in Muller Street, Yeoville. It served both as a residence for students and as a social centre that provided shiurim by Kollel members.¹⁷⁰ Rabbi David

¹⁶⁵ “Minutes of Meeting of South African Jewish Board of Deputies, held on 12 March 1972,” (SAJBD Archives).

¹⁶⁶ Presumably Sanders and Lipskar intuitively understood that in a campus where anti-Apartheid activism was occupying the minds of many Jewish students, they were offering a mental and emotional escape for the many students who could not face the anguish of having to fight against an evil regime. It is no wonder then that such refuge would have added to its popularity.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ “Minutes of meeting of Wits SJA, July 1972,” (SAJBD Archives).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* Interestingly this disapproval of Reform was probably confined to the Wits SJA. The other SJA campuses almost certainly opposed it. See Report of University of Port Elizabeth Jewish Student Newspaper, September 1972, which condemns Bnei Akiva’s similar call to ban Maginim. The editor in that report accused Bnei Akiva of acting as religious zealots in Meah Shearim. (SAJBD Archives)

¹⁷⁰ See letter from Gus Saron to the Board of Deputies 7 December 1973. Saron mentions the fact that Hillel House was established by the “strictly orthodox.”

Rosen, who then served as the student advisor for the Board of Deputies, disparaged these shiurim as “irrational esotericism.”¹⁷¹ The students appeared to think otherwise and in 1975 they collaborated with the Kollel to launch a program at Wits University dubbed the “Kollel Campus.” Comprising five weekly shiurim, the programme included lectures on Talmud and on Prophets by Hassan, a course on “Man and G-d” by Sanders and a course on “Freedom of Choice” by Shakovitzky.¹⁷² In August that year, Sanders gave a public lecture on campus attracting a crowd of 500 students, and in its wake an unprecedented 200 people gathered at the Kollel to hear the same speaker on the eve of Tisha B’Av which at that time was not generally observed in Johannesburg.¹⁷³

At the beginning of 1977, in addition to the five shiurim on main campus, members of the Kollel gave an additional three shiurim at the Medical School. That year, Kollel’s most active member on campus, Avraham Hassan, was officially appointed Wits University’s Jewish students’ chaplain.¹⁷⁴ In 1979 the Jewish student organization (now renamed the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS)) announced a daily lunch shiur with a schedule that included a twice weekly Gemarra (*sic*)[Talmud] class as well as weekly lectures on contemporary Torah living, Jewish ethics, and mysticism. The speakers are not named but presumably most were given by the Kollel, with the notable exception of mysticism which was probably given by a Chabad rabbi.¹⁷⁵

While the innovators’ neutral stance on Zionism is discussed below, it is important to note here that at a SAUJS seminar held that year panellists were invited to debate the subject of “Israel as an Alternative.” Arguing for the Religious Zionist view, Julian Katz, who, headed Jewish Studies at King David, found himself pitted, inter alia, against an unnamed “religious non-Zionist,” who took the view there was no need to immigrate to Israel as a Jew was free to practise his religion anywhere in the world.¹⁷⁶ The speaker’s name is unpublished and the view he expressed could have been articulated by either a Kollel or Chabad representative, but the fact that such a view was accommodated and tolerated within the confines of the purportedly Zionist SAUJS organization is an indication of the inroads made by the innovator movements.¹⁷⁷ The next year, 1980, Avraham Hassan, the apparently

¹⁷¹ Report by David Rosen to South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1974, (SAJBD Archives).

¹⁷² See *Contact: A Publication of the Kollel Yad Shaul*, Johannesburg, Pesach 5735.

¹⁷³ *Kollel Newsletter*, 9 August 1975.

¹⁷⁴ Coblenz, “Chronicle of Events.” It appears this was an unpaid position.

¹⁷⁵ SAUJS Chairman Report, 1979, (SAJBD Archives).

¹⁷⁶ SAUJS Seminar, April 1979 Report, (SAJBD Archives).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* While this was a national seminar, the speakers were all from Johannesburg, and it was only Wits that had such an intensive shiur line-up.

underpaid and overworked chaplain, announced he was leaving his position to relocate to Manchester where a more lucrative chaplaincy position awaited him.¹⁷⁸ Reacting to this announcement the disappointed student leadership, while acknowledging that some in the mainstream organizations considered Hassan “overly religious,” praised him for his “dedicated work, ...open home and understanding ear.”¹⁷⁹ With Hassan’s departure, and the subsequent failure by any other Fellow to fill his position, the Kolloel’s grip on the university students at the beginning of the 1980s apparently began to weaken.

In August 1981, the establishment cautioned that there was a lack of Zionist sentiment among some of the Jewish students. This phenomenon was partially attributed to unnamed irreligious “radical left-wing groups,” but “non-Zionist religious elements” were also blamed.¹⁸⁰ It was these elements presumably, who, by the year’s end, were presenting five shiurim per week, given alternately by members of the Kolloel and of Lubavitch.¹⁸¹ With Kolloel unable to replace Hassan, it appears Chabad stepped into the breach. In 1983, a lecture series on Hassidism was held at Wits Campus.¹⁸² It included talks by Rabbis Bernhard, Lipskar and Goldman as well as the attorney and Chabad adherent, Charles Mendelow. Under SAUJS’s auspices a Shabbaton also took place at Chabad House, and it seemed like this Hasidic group had the potential of becoming even more popular. At the end this did not pan out, and Chabad too saw its impact recede. One reason for this may be attributed to Chabad’s decision to send its day campers on an outing to an army base during the winter holidays in 1985. Apparently, it never occurred to anyone at Chabad House that barely months after a state of emergency had been declared by the Apartheid regime, news of a visit by a conspicuously religious Jewish organization to one of the Nationalist Government’s tools of oppression, may have placed SAUJS in a quandary. After SAUJS “virulently” attacked Chabad’s leadership for organizing the trip, the latter responded indignantly to the student organization’s criticisms. Mocking the concerns, an anonymous Chabad representative suggested either SAUJS had a “very big axe to grind with Lubavitch,” or “were extremely nervous about their call up for National Service.”¹⁸³ With their insensitive response, the Lubavitch organization seemed to

¹⁷⁸ “Wits Students want full time rabbi,” *Jewish Herald*, 10 February 1981.

¹⁷⁹ SAUJS National Committee: “Memo: Purpose Request for Salary for Campus Rabbi,” 22 December 1980. (SAJBD Archives).

¹⁸⁰ SAUJS National Report, August 1981 (SAJBD Archives).

¹⁸¹ “Minutes of SAUJS National Conference, November 1981,” (SAJBD Archives).

¹⁸² “Talks on Hassidism, SAUJS Report, c. 1983,” (SAJBD Archives).

¹⁸³ “My Dear Worrier,” *Wellsprings*, Cheshvan 5746 (November 1985):2. In light of the fact that many Jewish students conscientiously objected to military service, accusations they feared fulfilling their duty must have sounded grating to some of their ears. (see Shimoni, “South African Jews and the Apartheid Crisis” *American Jewish Year Book 1988*, 88: 21-25; Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 144- 146; Letter from Evan Robbins,

broadcast the message to the student community that its outreach was strictly on its own terms; no apologies necessary. Such an attitude presumably did not sit well with the student population. Eventually, by the decade's end, the void created by the decreasing influence of the Kollel and Chabad was filled by Ohr Somayach, which, as we will see, became the dominant force among university students.

6. The Innovators' Clash over Zionism and the attitude to the Holocaust.

As has been well documented, South African Jewry strongly identified with the world Zionist Organization almost from its inception. All over the country and especially in Johannesburg, there were various Zionist movements and parties; Zionism functioned as a civil religion for South Africa's Jews.¹⁸⁴ Overwhelmingly the lay and rabbinic leadership of the Orthodox institutions were strongly Zionist. Mizrahi played a vital role as a constituent party in the Zionist Federation with its one-time chairman, Rabbi Michel Kossowsky having assumed the position of vice president of the Federation. Moreover, its affiliated youth movement, Bnei Akiva, educated towards and encouraged many of its members to immigrate to Israel. As with many Jewish and Zionist-oriented communities, Johannesburg's community was much affected by the Holocaust.¹⁸⁵ In this section we shall explore the degree to which the innovators diverged from the consensus on Zionism and on the Holocaust, and the ramifications of their divergence.

On Friday 25 March 1972, Rabbi Norman Bernhard was "out of town" and thus unable to officiate at his synagogue.¹⁸⁶ Since there was a bar mitzvah that week, he asked Rabbi Eliezer Chrysler, a Kollel Fellow, to deliver the sermon at Oxford Synagogue. Shortly before he was about to preach, Chrysler was approached by the senior warden who asked him to recite the customary Prayer for South Africa and Israel. Claiming unfamiliarity with this prayer, he declined the offer and another official recited it instead.¹⁸⁷ He then delivered his sermon, which was good enough for the congregation to invite him back to give that afternoon's lecture, but not quite good enough to quell the ill-feelings of those who perceived

Cape Town Jewish Conscientious Objectors Group to Shalom Hartman Institute, 4 September 1989 (a copy of which is in the author's possession.)

¹⁸⁴ For the intense Zionist sentiment among South African Jews, see Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*; Gitlin, *A Vision Amazing*.

¹⁸⁵ For the role the Holocaust played in the collective memory of the Jewish community and the importance attached to it see, Shirli Gilbert, "Jews and the Racial State: Legacies of the Holocaust in Apartheid South Africa, 1945–60." *Jewish Social Studies*, 16, no. 3 (2010): 34.

¹⁸⁶ Norman Bernhard, "Oxford Synagogue Shabbat Hagadol Incident," *SAJT*, 21 April 1972.

¹⁸⁷ In Chrysler, interview the former insisted he had a speech stammer and did not wish to recite an unfamiliar prayer.

his actions as an insult to the Jewish State.¹⁸⁸ Immediately after services ended, these disgruntled members engaged their guest rabbi in private conversation and the latter admitted harbouring certain reservations about the Prayer for Israel. This admission was not well received, and as word got out, the Jewish press began hounding the Kollel, an institution which for the previous two years they appear to have virtually ignored.

First to respond to reports was Rabbi Bernard Casper, who until then appeared warmly disposed to the Kollel, having served as its honorary president. The Chief Rabbi wondered why any spiritual leader would dissociate himself from a prayer which “not only bears the sanction of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel,” but “also links us directly with the overwhelming number of praying Jews in Israel.”¹⁸⁹ Answering his own question with more than a touch of irony, he suggested “Kollel scholars are usually untrained, inexperienced and unqualified in the field of pulpit, synagogue or pastoral work,” and so perhaps it is “unfair to expect them to engage in such activity.” Unsurprisingly this condescending and thinly veiled attack on the Kollel’s integrity did not go unchallenged. Bernhard, though nominally under the Chief Rabbi’s authority, rigorously defended Chrysler and the institution he represented. After praising the Kollel for devoting “tremendous ... time and energy to educating the Jewish People,” he regretted “this unique institution is being jeopardised by a false rumour originated in ignorance, ill-will or simple misunderstanding.”¹⁹⁰ He accepted Chrysler’s explanation that he was unfamiliar with the text, but argued that even if this reluctance stemmed from theological grounds, it would be unfair to “make the recitation of a specific prayer the sole criterion or gauge of an individual’s ... attitude towards Israel.”¹⁹¹ Following Bernhard’s lead, the Kollel Executive committee wrote to insist that the Kollel was “unequivocally and enthusiastically pro-Israel.”¹⁹² Asserting the Kollel’s right to be “non-political” and implying its objections to the prayer were theological, the executive expressed

¹⁸⁸ See Bernhard, “Oxford Synagogue Shabbat Hagadol Incident.”

¹⁸⁹ “More about that Oxford Incident,” (Letters to the Editor), *Zionist Record*, 5 May 1972. Though Casper called into question the Kollel’s fealty to the State of Israel, he was probably aware their objections were theological but was angry they disrespected Israel’s Chief Rabbinate. The fact he was acquainted with the theological issues may be seen in an article he himself penned on the subject, see Bernard Moses Casper, *Broadcasts and Papers*, (Keren B.M.C.: Jerusalem, 1992), 160.

¹⁹⁰ Bernhard, “Oxford Synagogue Shabbat Hagadol Incident.”

¹⁹¹ *Ibid* Though defending the Kollel’s right not to recite the prayer, Bernard stated: “I myself recite the Prayer for Israel, regularly and without any mental reservations.” Years later, after becoming a full-fledged Chabad Hassid, Bernard changed the unequivocal statement declaring Israel theologically to be the “initial sprouting of the redemption” to an entreaty that it “*should be* the initial sprouting of the redemption.” By then no one protested.

¹⁹² “Statement by the Executive of the Kollel Yad Shaul of Johannesburg,” *SAJT*, 21 April 1972.

the hope that Israel would find peace “under the banner of the Messiah [and] full redemption.”¹⁹³

Rather than putting the matter to rest, the attempted justifications appeared to have provoked more anger. In its biting letter to the editor of the *Zionist Record*, Bnei Akiva’s executive body indignantly questioned how the Kollel could claim “sincere and devout affection” towards Israel while a member of its faculty “refused to make a prayer for that same country.”¹⁹⁴ Its interpretation of the incident indicates it dismissed Bernhard’s clarifications. It apparently could not accept Chrysler’s objection was to the specific prayer and did not necessarily indicate a general reluctance to pray for Israel’s welfare.¹⁹⁵

If Bnei Akiva thought it could create a united Zionist front against the Kollel it was sorely disappointed. The Kollel received strong support from Johannesburg’s youth who had come into contact with it at Wits. Writing to the press, chairman of the Students Jewish and Zionist Association at Wits University, Harold Waner, denounced the Kollel’s accusers. After gushing that “anyone attending any lecture or discussion given by the Rabbis of the Kollel” would “at once be imbued with the love generated for the Land of Israel”, the chairman lashed out at critics who claimed otherwise.¹⁹⁶ Those seeking to “discredit” this extremely devoted institute, he argued, were “either doing so through lack of factual information or sheer vindictiveness and malice, the latter being beneath contempt.”¹⁹⁷

Yet by the beginning of the 1980s, the tide was turning. By this point the Kollel’s faculty retained few direct contacts with the students. With their former defenders having graduated, the Kollel found it increasingly hard to fend off periodic charges of anti-Zionism. Yet, it appears most organizations were able to overlook this, and while disapproving these sentiments, the damage does not appear to have been lasting. On the other hand, Bnei Akiva, with whom the Kollel shared much in terms of Jewish observance and vigilance, appear to have remained less forgiving. The tensions created in the early 1970s between the Religious

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Hanhalat Bnei Akiva, “The Oxford Incident,” (Letters to the editor), *Zionist Record*, 5 May 1972. In Hassan, interview and in Chrysler, interview, both expressed how taken aback they were by Bnei Akiva’s vehement response. They did not realize how deep the resentment then was.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* The contentions are based on the overwrought tone of the letter and its references to Talmudic statements equating living in the Diaspora with having “no G-d.” Furthermore, the *ad hominem* attacks on Bernhard, and on his explanations, suggest an unwillingness to accept any argument but their own.

¹⁹⁶ Harold Waner, “Dynamic Jewish Way of Life,” (Letters to the Editor), *Zionist Record*, 5 May 1972.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Zionist establishment and the ultra-Orthodox communities appears to have taken longer to heal.

In early 1980, Rabbi Mendel Lipskar was asked at a conference about Chabad's attitude towards Zionism. After declaring that "Lubavitch maintained a constant identification, defence and support of Israel," Lipskar conceded its stance was not identical to conventional Zionism.¹⁹⁸ This proclamation would probably have gone unchallenged were it not for the former Chief Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz. Assuming that the Lubavitcher Rebbe set Chabad's policy on Zionism, Rabinowitz investigated whether the Rebbe himself qualified as a Zionist or as pro-Israel. The Rebbe's insistence on retaining "every inch of the divinely promised land" did not prove he was a Zionist; all it did in Rabinowitz's opinion was render him a "veritable extremist."¹⁹⁹ Such views, he cautioned, did not amount to "anything approaching recognition of the reality of the State of Israel." Based on a "masterly address" by historian Gideon Shimoni, Rabinowitz went on to accuse the Rebbe of "discouraging Aliyah [immigration to Israel]" from South Africa.²⁰⁰ As an example, he cited a letter writer from Windhoek who sought the Rebbe's advice whether he should immigrate to Israel. Responding, the Rebbe instructed his questioner to stay put and not immigrate to Israel despite his son being unmarried and having little prospect of meeting a Jewish mate in the tiny Namibian Jewish community. Even more "upsetting" for Rabinowitz than the Rebbe's rejection of Zionism and Aliya was the latter's reason for instructing others not to go to Israel. It was based on an assurance he delivered to Bernhard that South Africa would remain safe "because the Messiah would come before the catastrophe."²⁰¹ He wondered how this great rabbi, barely three decades after the Holocaust, could not have learned from the mistakes of the European rabbis before him, and assure anyone of the safety of any country outside of Israel.

Rabinowitz's critique prompted "distressed" Chabad representatives to respond to this "unwarranted attack on a highly revered sage and leader" by asserting "that no one in the world is in closer touch with the realities and needs of Israel as the Lubavitcher Rebbe."²⁰² Backing this claim, they pointed to the fact that Prime Minister Begin had consulted with the Rebbe before negotiating with President Carter. Whether this statement disabused anyone of

¹⁹⁸ "Lubavitch Views on Zionism aired at Academy '74," *Jewish Herald*, 5 February 1980.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Louis Rabinowitz, "The Rebbe on Aliyah," *Jewish Herald*, 17 March 1981

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² "Open Letter to Rabbi Rabinowitz from the Lubavitch Foundation," *Jewish Herald*, 7 April 1981.

the “misimpressions” caused by Rabinowitz, it did not clear Chabad entirely of the charge of anti-Zionism.

Barely two years later, Lipskar found himself, once again, dispelling the “confusion and misrepresentation” that surrounded perceptions of the Lubavitch attitude towards Israel.²⁰³ Curiously his speech virtually confirmed Rabinowitz’s allegations. Stating that Lubavitch did not “foster the established Zionist attitude” that the establishment of a Jewish government was an end unto itself, he insisted that redemption would only come about in its “totality” with the messiah’s arrival, and until then “we are still in *galut* [exile].”²⁰⁴ For this reason, as he admitted, Lubavitch did not view immigration to Israel as “beneficial for everybody.” Playing on the Hebrew word “Aliyah” -- which in Zionist parlance means immigration to Israel but literally translates as an ascendance -- he suggested that for the Rebbe it was more important that there be an “internal Aliyah”, an internal ascendance, which meant “producing large families and outlawing abortion.” It is hard to imagine Chabad’s senior emissary thought this would win over mainstream Zionists. Perhaps by 1983 the movement no longer felt a need to make any concessions and were determined to defend their Rebbe’s integrity no matter the costs.

In April of that year Mr. Zalman Levy, the editor of the Johannesburg based Yiddish journal, *Dorem Afrike*, received a letter from Israel from the former Ghetto leader, Chaika Grossman.²⁰⁵ Purporting to contain a transcript of a Yiddish talk given by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, it contained a passage stating that during the Second World War the Jewish People was like a body with a poisoned limb, and G-d in his capacity as doctor amputated this limb by bringing about the Holocaust. After reading this article, Louis Segal, a Pretoria resident, and a Yiddish writer and poet, decided to translate the Rebbe’s words.²⁰⁶ Readers of the translation, which included Holocaust survivors, were bothered by its contents, and requested that the Rebbe’s emissary in Johannesburg come to Pretoria. Lipskar accepted the invitation, and at the end of February 1984 he addressed the B’nai B’rith Pretoria chapter with the

²⁰³ “Explaining “A Lubavitcher,” *Jewish Herald*, 15 March 1983.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* This appears to be a reference to and rejection of Rabbi Herzog’s description of the State of Israel as “the initial sprouting of the redemption.”

²⁰⁵ See “Lubavitch Rumpus: Rabbi and B’nai B’rith Now Silent,” *Jewish Herald*, 13 March 1984; Louis Segal, “Translation of the Rebbe Still Unexplained,” (Letters to the Editor), *Jewish Herald*, 20 March 1984.

²⁰⁶ See Segal, “Translation of the Rebbe Still Unexplained,” where he mentions he tried to locate the original Yiddish transcript, but was unsuccessful, and in the end he used a translation rendered into Hebrew by loyal Hassidim from Kfar Chabad.

purpose of explaining the Rebbe's intent.²⁰⁷ An acrimonious discussion ensued in which Lipskar referred to Segal's translation as "silly" and "filled with inaccuracies."²⁰⁸ He also stated the Rebbe's words should not be taken literally, and that the latter did not view the Holocaust's victims as a poisoned limb. According to Lipskar, it would be more accurate to say the Rebbe considered the era a time when the entire body of the Jewish People was contaminated, and so to avoid disease from spreading, G-d severed one of the limbs. Rejecting this creative reinterpretation and responding from the floor, Segal insisted the original talk referred specifically to a "poisoned" limb. He then asked whether this limb included martyred new-born babies, as well as Yeshiva and Hebrew school students. A Holocaust survivor stormed out of the meeting. Zalman Levy declared that any non-Jewish priest who had made similar statements to those of the Rebbe would rightly be branded antisemitic. Fortunately for Lipskar he was not without his defenders. Sitting in the audience were Rabbi Sydney Katz, then spiritual leader of the Pretoria synagogue, and his wife Jill, both of them ardent Lubavitchers.²⁰⁹ While Jill cautioned the crowd they were unqualified to "interpret the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe," her husband appeared to take the idea of the Rebbe's infallibility further by declaring that "the believer does not question and the unbeliever gets no answers."²¹⁰ It was on this contentious note that the meeting adjourned.

Less than four decades after the Holocaust ended it is perhaps unsurprising that press reports of this meeting elicited strong responses. One letter writer commented that after reading the report she was "filled with alternating feelings of disbelief, dismay and disgust."²¹¹ She could not fathom anyone, regardless of his "title," rationalizing the Holocaust as being a "cleansing operation" by G-d. Another reader was more upset by Mrs. Katz's opinion that laymen be barred from interpreting the Lubavitcher Rebbe's pronouncements and that only rabbis were qualified to interpret the Holocaust.²¹² To him such an approach appeared "unnecessarily authoritarian." He proposed that everyone should have the right to assess the "moral and spiritual problems raised by the Holocaust." The original instigator of

²⁰⁷ See "Tempers Flare at Meeting on Holocaust," *SAJT*, 2 March 1984; "Holocaust "Explanation" inflames audience," *Zionist Record*, 9 March 1984.

²⁰⁸ "Tempers Flare at Meeting on Holocaust."

²⁰⁹ See Jill Katz, "The Rebbe's Care for Jews in South African Prisons," available at https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2494792/jewish/The-Rebbs-Care-for-Jews-in-South-African-Prisons.htm, accessed on 7 December 2021.

²¹⁰ It is unclear in whom the believer is meant to believe in this case. Possibly the rabbi was saying that belief in G-d would lead to the Rebbe's interpretation. From the context of the report, it sounds as if Katz is asking the crowd to unquestioningly believe in the Rebbe's words. This is presumably the impression readers would have received.

²¹¹ Bagley, "Reader Voices "Disbelief, Dismay and Disgust."

²¹² G. Reznik, "Laymen and the Lubavitcher," (letters to the editor), *SAJT*, 23 March 1984.

this episode, Louis Segal, was also perturbed by the events. He wrote to complain that Lipskar had flippantly characterized his translation as “inaccurate” without troubling to indicate what exactly was mistranslated.²¹³ Moreover, he objected to Rabbi and Mrs. Katz’s attempt to disallow discussion of the “meaning” of the Holocaust. “In spite of our *inferior* layman’s brain” he wrote, “we do not require the superior brain of a Lubavitcher Rebbe to explain and interpret” the Holocaust.²¹⁴

Common to his complaint, and that of the other correspondents, was a frustration with Chabad’s representatives who not only refused to entertain any criticism of the Rebbe, but also appeared ready to launch *ad hominem* attacks on anyone disagreeing with their revered leader. This sentiment was probably not alleviated by Lipskar’s statements in a post-meeting interview where the emissary made no conciliatory gestures. Instead, he questioned the “motives” of those who disagreed with him and accused them of “creating discord out of the Holocaust.”²¹⁵ Whether Lipskar thought an aggressive accusation would gain him new adherents, is doubtful. Whatever the case, his strategy seems to have worked and soon enough the Jewish press declared the entire event a “storm in a teacup.”²¹⁶ For that moment, at least, Chabad’s unconditional veneration of their Rebbe appeared vindicated, and it seems that only very occasionally has this devotional aspect proved detrimental to the message Chabad has hoped to broadcast.

7. *The Innovators and the Kashrut Authorities*

As we have noted in the introductory chapters, already by 1915 a unified Beth Din had been established for Johannesburg. Admittedly it took time for this body to become respected by all factions of the Johannesburg community. The establishment rabbis representing the Anglo congregations had to work in close cooperation with those representing the newer immigrants in order to gain communal acceptance. Until 1970 the Beth Din was comprised of rabbis from both the accommodator and traditionalists camps who often did not see eye to eye. At the same time, there seems to have been agreement when it came to kosher supervision. As we have noted, and as we shall see below, the exception to this rule was the small Adath Yeshurun congregation in Yeoville. By 1970, however, with the growth of the innovators and the concomitant demand for higher and different standards of Kashrut, this

²¹³ L. Segal “Translation of the Rebbe’s “Talk” is Correct,” (letters to the editor), *SAJT*, 23 March 1984

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* emphasis mine.

²¹⁵ “Lubavitch Rumpus: Rabbi and Bnai Brith Now Silent,” *Jewish Herald*, 13 March 1984.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* The fact that it died down, and quite rapidly so, suggests that the Holocaust in and of itself did not play a major role in the attraction of the Orthodox outreach movements.

issue became one of the most divisive, separating the innovators from the establishment and the traditionalists. As we shall see, the Kashrut disputes came as close as anything could to tearing apart the Orthodox community.

Adath had followed its own course since 1953 when it established an independent kosher supervision agency to provide kosher supervised milk and milk products.²¹⁷ This was followed by the establishment of an independent shechita (kosher slaughtering) organization which employed its own shochet (kosher slaughterer) and produced meat at its own abattoir under the Adassia label, and under the auspices of the Beth Din.²¹⁸ In the late 1960s, realising that the burdens of running this organization were draining Adath's resources, Salzer, at Bernhard's urging, approached the Federation of Synagogues with a proposal.²¹⁹ In exchange for Salzer sitting as a rabbinic judge or Dayan on the Beth Din, the Federation would assume financial responsibilities for running Adassia under its ambit.²²⁰ A contract was then signed between the Adath and the Federation stipulating that Adassia meat would continue to be overseen by Salzer and sold at Fehler's butchery, but it would also be granted Beth Din certification.²²¹ In an appendix to the agreement, it was noted that if the relationship broke down, the status quo ante would be restored, and Adassia's abattoir would be handed back to the Adath.²²² Several years later, some of the Beth Din supervised butcheries discovered that members of the Adath and the Kollel avoided buying meat from their establishments, preferring to buy exclusively from Fehler's Adassia meat shop. Disturbed by their findings, the butchers lodged a complaint with the Beth Din. After investigating the matter, two of the rabbinical judges together with the chairman of the Federation of Synagogues approached Salzer and asked him whether he had instructed his followers not to purchase meat that was not also under Adassia's supervision. They enquired

²¹⁷Chandrea Serebro, "80 Years of Yekkes in Joburg," *Jewish Life*, March 2017, <http://www.jewishlife.co.za/new/2017/03/28/80-years-of-yekkes-in-joburg/>. For criticism of these separate institutions see "Voice of Orthodox Jewry," (editorial), *S.A. Jewish Observer*, April 1967, where the writer defends the Federation of Synagogues against Adath, and attacks the latter's "holier than thou" supervised milk. He also questions Adath's need to import its own shochetim.

²¹⁸ See "Tribute to our Rav," *Adath Yeshurun Golden Jubilee*, 1986; see also, "We have never challenged the authority of the Beth Din," 1959.

²¹⁹ See Bernhard, "Original Notes of Hespel for Rabbi Salzer." In retrospect, and after witnessing what he viewed as terrible treatment of the Adath rabbi, Bernhard expressed regret for playing a role in persuading Salzer to join forces with the Beth Din.

²²⁰ Letter from Chief Rabbi BM Casper to Rabbi J. Salzer dated 12 January 1970 (Norman Bernhard Collection). See also Israel Bersohn, "A look at Orthodox Jewry," *Barkai*, 10 August 1973, where the author mentions Salzer's appointment as a Dayan on the Beth Din.

²²¹ This contract is enclosed in the "Application for Ritual Slaughtering from Adath Yeshurun to Dr. Coetzee, Chief Meat Hygiene Officer, Department of Health," dated 13 January 1976, (Norman Bernhard Collection).

²²² See letter from Chief Rabbi BM Casper to Rabbi J. Salzer, which makes explicit reference to this condition.

whether he considered the meat supervised by the Beth Din to be kosher. Salzer replied that owing to his doubts about the Beth Din meat he had ruled it should not be consumed by the observant community.²²³ Shortly after making this statement, the parties realised the relationship between them had irretrievably broken down and Salzer tendered his resignation as rabbinical judge on the Beth Din. This resignation was accepted by the Beth Din and the two organizations parted ways.

Disappointed that the experiment with unifying the Orthodox institutions had apparently unravelled, the Chief Rabbi embarked on a two-pronged battle to hamper Adath's efforts to regain its independent supervision agency. Attempting to ensure that the ordinary synagogue goer would not support Adassia's certification, Casper issued a statement to be read out by all rabbis affiliated with the Federation. It notified the congregants that the Adassia butchery was no longer under Beth Din supervision and warned them that since the meat was overseen by only one individual it could not be relied upon.²²⁴ One of the rabbis to receive this statement was Norman Bernhard, whose synagogue probably had the largest membership of the five-member United Hebrew Congregation. Ostensibly complying with Casper's directive, Bernhard duly read out the official statement, but added his own commentary. Reminding his audience that many kosher supervision agencies operated throughout the world, Bernhard assured them that Salzer was a first class Halachic decisor and his supervision could be eminently relied upon. Inevitably, Bernhard's sermon reached the attention of the Jewish press which disapproved of the perceived disrespect Bernhard had shown his senior colleague.²²⁵ Letter writers also questioned how Adath could possibly run an independent organization.²²⁶ For his part, the Chief Rabbi was in no mood to surrender his honour, and a war of words between Casper and Bernhard ensued. In apparently the last letter on the subject, the New York-born Bernhard, making caustic references to the then bicentenary celebrations of America's independence, warned the London-born Chief Rabbi that that anniversary should serve as a cautionary tale of what could happen when a British leader overplays his hand in attempting to force an American to bend to his will.²²⁷

²²³ See Kurstag, interview. According to the story relayed to Kurstag by his father-in-law, and then Dayan of the Beth Din Rabbi Irma Aloy, Salzer told his interlocutors that if one did not observe the Sabbath one could purchase meat from other butchers. This apparently incensed the chairman of the Federation of Synagogues, Mr. Aaron (Archie) Peck who rhetorically asked Salzer, whether as a Sabbath observing Jew, he too should refrain from buying meat at these butchers. In Salzer, interview, Rabbi Yossi Salzer offered a slightly different version.

²²⁴ See undated (c.1976) letter from Casper to the United Hebrew Congregation, (Norman Bernhard Collection).

²²⁵ "Rabbi Bernhard defies Beth Din," *SAJT*, 27 February 1976.

²²⁶ See "Shechita Move Condemned," (Open Forum), *SAJT*, 9 January 1976.

²²⁷ See letter from Bernhard to Casper, 7 July 1976 (Norman Bernhard Collection).

In the meanwhile, Adath probably took it for granted that the Federation would exercise its power over its synagogues to ostracize Salzer and deter support for Adassia. It is unlikely, however, that they understood the depths of the Chief Rabbi's frustration and his willingness to adopt extraordinary measures to ensure Adassia certification would not be revived. Initially, Adath thought it could deflect the Federation's attack by relying on the escape clause contained in the letter drafted by Casper and addressed to Salzer, ostensibly permitting either party to opt out of the agreement. To its dismay, not only did the Chief Rabbi deny such a clause existed, but he also announced that the current lease of the Adassia abattoir would soon expire and that he would not support Adath's application to operate any other abattoir.²²⁸ Both parties were well aware that under the government's regulations, an abattoir could only operate with the express authorization of the "Head or Leader in the Republic of the religion concerned."²²⁹ The lack of support from Casper would mean that their application would certainly fail. This fact did not dampen the zeal of Salzer's disciples and especially the Kollel members, who, unlike their more restrained German Jewish colleagues, were prepared to retaliate.²³⁰ Newly qualified attorneys and businessmen associated with the Kollel felt they were left with no choice. Sacrificing the unity of the Orthodox community, which anyway appeared irreparable, they petitioned the Minister of Agriculture to recognize the Adath and its followers as a separate religion headed by Salzer.²³¹ The Minister eventually acceded to this request and for the first time the Adath and the Kollel declared themselves, and were recognized, as a separate religion.²³²

Already before this dispute erupted, senior members of the Beth Din expressed dismay with the actions of the Adath and of the Kollel. Writing to *Barkai* in September 1974, Rabbi Jacob Symanowitz, the chief kashrut inspector at the Beth Din, and a graduate of the finest Yeshivas in Eastern Europe, railed against those who promoted an overly stringent form of Torah observance.²³³ He suggested there needed to be one authority and one say on religious matters, especially related to kosher supervision. He opined that those who spread rumours about the Beth Din, and who dissuaded overseas guests from eating its supervised meat, were

²²⁸ See letter from Casper to Chief Meat Hygiene Officer, 10 December 1975; letter from Dennis Isaacs withdrawing Beth Din supervision of Adassia, 12 February 1976 (Norman Bernhard Collection).

²²⁹ Regulation 10(2) of the Standing Regulations under the Animal Slaughter, Meat and Animal Products Hygiene Act, 1967.

²³⁰ See "Shechita Move Condemned," where the letter writer specifically blames Kollel members for the dispute.

²³¹ See "Application for Ritual Slaughtering from Adath Yeshurun to Dr. Coetzee."

²³² This information was relayed to the author in an informal interview with members of the Kollel who were involved from its inception, and for approx. 45 years thereafter.

²³³ Yaacov Symanowitz, "A time to speak," (Hebrew), *Barkai*, September 1974.

ruining the reputations of learned Lithuanian-born shochetim, and were destroying the foundations of Jewish life that had been carefully laid down over the decades.²³⁴

A little more than a year later, in the aftermath of the shechita controversy, Rabbi Moshe Kurstag, who was one of the members of the Kollel in its earliest incarnation, and was closely associated with the Beth Din, penned an article in the same journal venting his frustrations and attacking the separatists.²³⁵ After faintly praising the kiruv [outreach] movement and the “not inconsiderable” inroads it made, Kurstag cautioned his readers not to get too carried away by this phenomenon. In his estimation, Johannesburg was facing a growing assimilation problem and the dropout rate had outweighed any gains the community may have made from those who recently discovered religion.²³⁶ Indeed he may not have considered the latter group to be a gain at all. His disdain for the average returnee is emphasised by his placement of the Hebrew word – Baal Teshuva -- in quotation marks, and expressly questioned whether they deserve this exalted label. Accusing the newly observant of gross ignorance, he stated that the returnees should not only regret having committed sins in their youth, they should also feel remorse for their miniscule Torah knowledge.²³⁷ Alluding to the fact that Kollel members, new to observance, had questioned the Beth Din’s practices and traditions, he expressed the hope that this remorse would lead the returnee to appreciate that the centralized religious establishment has great scholars.²³⁸ Returnees, he opined, had no right to question the Kashrut level that this venerable institution oversaw. Acknowledging that there are various levels for observing kosher laws, Kurstag rejected any insinuation that a more lenient level implied the supervised food was in any respect non-kosher, and warned that this delegitimization of the religious institutions could only serve to undermine observance as a whole. Symanowitz’s and Kurstag’s decision to publish their critiques in Hebrew, in a journal with a severely restricted readership, was presumably a deliberate attempt to limit exposure of their views to a select audience. Their articles nevertheless provide a glimpse into the otherwise repressed tensions between the establishment and the

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ See Moshe Kurstag, “A Red Light in Religious Life,” (Hebrew), *Barkai*, Johannesburg, 1976. Kurstag was then serving as a part time Dayan on the Beth Din (see Chandra Serebro, “The Consummate Teacher,” *Jewish Life*, March 2019 <http://www.jewishlife.co.za/new/2019/03/10/the-consummate-teacher/>).

²³⁶ His contentions are not borne out by the general demographic surveys. As we have noted above, Johannesburg has witnessed large growth in religious observance that has not been offset by the decline in those describing themselves as Orthodox.

²³⁷ This remark appears to contradict Maimonides who cautions us not to remind a Baal Teshuva of his past misdeeds, (*Laws of Repentance* 7:8).

²³⁸ An anonymous long-time member of the Kollel interviewed by the author expressed regret that in his youth he had been impudent to Kurstag, who had previously taught him, when he was basically an ignoramus. These actions caused a long-lasting feud.

Baal Teshuva movements, whom the former regarded as meddling in affairs that were none of their business.

Unlike the Adath and the Kollel, Chabad was never accused of undermining the Beth Din, even if their acceptance of that organization was partial. When Chabad emissaries first arrived in Johannesburg, they were pleased to discover that Salzer and the Adath Yeshurun had set up an independent Kashrut supervision board and were especially grateful for the freely available supervised milk, which was the only milk they would consume.²³⁹ While they did not necessarily trust the Beth Din's shochetim they were also dissatisfied with Adassia's meat supervision. In a subtle move, and one that succeeded in avoiding confrontation, they imported their own shochetim whom they managed to enlist as official Beth Din employees. Knowing exactly which shochet was assigned to which butchery, they ensured they would only eat meat slaughtered by a Chabad shochet. This was an open secret among Chabad but, unlike Adassia, they succeeded in avoiding scrutiny while relying exclusively on their own shochetim and effectively distrusting all others. This privileged position was briefly placed at risk at the end of 1980 when Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz, on a visit Johannesburg to receive the title of Chief Rabbi emeritus, used his address to lash out at Chabad for having its own shechita, and thereby disrespecting the Beth Din. Not only did the speech face vociferous denials from Chabad rabbis who attempted to interrupt it, Rabinowitz was forced to dodge rowdier Chabad youth who attempted to accost him as he attempted to exit the hall. These antics did little to change the community's mind, but thanks to Rabinowitz's successor, Chabad was saved enduring harm. Reacting quickly, Casper told the press he was dismayed by his predecessor's spreading of ill-will among the various "groupings" in the community, and in fact the Chief Rabbi emeritus had been misinformed; there was no separate Chabad authority.²⁴⁰

While this may have quelled discontent towards Chabad, Johannesburg remained riven by the tensions of the mid-seventies which continued into the early 1980s. In 1984, Rabbi Yossi Salzer -- back in Johannesburg following a two year stint in Israel, apprenticing at various rabbinic courts to train himself to succeed his late father, Jacob Salzer, as rabbi of the

²³⁹ See "History of Chabad South Africa," 22 August 2020 (video presentation). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDJ8JjO2eZ0>. As mentioned above, the Beth Din and most traditionalists did not insist on supervised milk, relying on international decisors who permit non supervised milk that is under government control.

²⁴⁰ Marilyn Segal, "We don't want to be left with the stew says Casper," *Zionist Record*, 21 November 1980. The whole incident and its repercussions are contained in this article.

Adath Yeshurun -- suggested a way to resolve the issue.²⁴¹ Faced with the crippling costs of running an independent authority, Salzer, in his capacity as head of the Adassia certification board, presented Kurstag, the then head of the kosher department, with a proposal. The former had noticed that many of Israel's larger cities had a two-tier kosher certification system: basic supervision to accommodate the ordinary consumer, and a Mehadrin [meticulous] supervision for those with stricter requirements. Acknowledging that his community, the Kollel, and Chabad had higher demands than the average Orthodox consumer in Johannesburg, Salzer enquired whether it was feasible for the Johannesburg Beth Din to set up its own Mehadrin supervision. The matter was investigated, and rabbis from the various ultra-Orthodox communities came together to form a Mehadrin commission.²⁴² In mid-1985, Adassia voluntarily disbanded and the Mehadrin department of the Beth Din was officially inaugurated. After functioning smoothly for several years, dissatisfaction with some Chabad shochetim led certain communities to withdraw recognition of the Beth Din meat altogether. At the same time, Rabbi Sternbuch made a short-lived attempt to establish his own Shechitah, which was recognized by the Adath, but not by the Kollel. The situation improved in the mid-1990s when Salzer agreed to be co-opted to the Beth Din's Kashrut department following certain demands that were implemented into the system.²⁴³ This arrangement has remained in place, and almost three decades later, the quarrels between the establishment and the strictly Orthodox communities, at least in matters of Kashrut, have been confined to history.

8. Conclusion

In 1984, South African native Barney Bender, rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation's Yeoville Synagogue, raised a novel idea to unify Jewish Yeoville. Each year, on the eve of the Festival of Shavuot [Pentecost] shuls arrange various forms of Torah study and lectures that would extend throughout the long winter night. This practice was referred to as Tikkun Leil Shavuot. That year at Bender's initiative all congregations agreed to join forces to form one Tikkun Leil for the entire area. Under one roof, and spread out among the communal rooms of the Yeoville synagogue, local and guest rabbis shared ideas and lectures with crowds representing diverse backgrounds and orientations. This ranged from the ultra-Orthodox Kollel and Torah Centre to Chabad and Bnei Akiva. For one night differences were

²⁴¹ See Kurstag, interview and Salzer, interview.

²⁴² Aside from Kollel and Chabad, a number of small congregations and study centres had by then sprung up in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, and some of their rabbis presided on this committee.

²⁴³ See Salzer, interview; Grossnass, interview, and interview with the anonymous member of the Kollel.

set aside, and an estimated crowd of 600 men and women gathered together to celebrate the traditional date of G-d's Revelation on Sinai in a warm spirit of unity and harmony.²⁴⁴ At that time the various Kashrut boards were still at odds with each other; Ohr Somayach had barely begun its efforts, and the current Chief Rabbi was still a high school student in Pretoria. On that night, in the suburb where the traditionalists established their first congregation, where the religious revolution had germinated, and where intensive Torah study was often accompanied by intense argument and discord, a diverse Orthodox audience enjoyed a night rich in Torah knowledge and solidarity. This event was never repeated, and less than two decades later, barely a Jewish soul could be found in Yeoville. Yet that Shavuot, the community reconfirmed for itself that a revival had taken place, and that thanks to their efforts, the religious landscape in Johannesburg had changed. For one night, rabbis and the laity representing the accommodators, the traditionalists, the non-Hassidic innovators, and the Chabad movement received the Torah in a spirit of unity and fellowship.

This chapter has sought to excavate the historic roots of the innovators. Building on the foundational work carried out by the traditionalists, there were primarily two movements responsible for introducing wide scale religious outreach to Johannesburg of the 1970s and 1980s, namely the Kollel Yad Shaul and Chabad-Lubavitch. The Kollel today is no longer considered a premier kiruv organization, but its historic role as a pioneer of this activity deserves recognition and retelling. In contradistinction, for close on half a century Chabad has remained a major force in Orthodox Jewry in South Africa in general and in Johannesburg in particular. While it continues its role in outreach, albeit of a different nature than at its beginnings, Chabad has also become a strong and independent community with its own synagogues and educational institutions that have trained more than two generations of adherents. Its contemporary position is somewhat different from what it was decades ago, and here we have sought to recreate that earlier period. This chapter has also isolated certain points of conflict between the establishment and traditionalists on the one side and between the early innovators on the other, in an effort to trace the latter's impact. It is difficult to imagine Johannesburg's religious revival taking the same shape or at least reaping the same success it currently enjoys without these movements. As we conclude this period, it is important that we reiterate some patterns shared by the movements, while carefully highlighting the differences.

²⁴⁴ See Denise Bender, "Unique Tikkun Leil Shavuot at Yeoville," *Zionist Record*, May, 1984; "Shavuos," *Kollel Newsletter*, (undated).

During their first decade and a half, as noted, both the Kollel and Chabad were led by foreign-born personalities. The latter were not beholden to the conventions of South African Jewry, and regardless of whether this was a conscious or pragmatic choice, it enabled these leaders to spread teachings and ideologies that may have been alien or controversial in the local setting. Both movements placed a heavy emphasis on interacting with the youth and on establishing educational institutions for their children.²⁴⁵ In their respective outreach activities, it appears the primary target was the young single man or woman of marriageable age, whom the movements hoped would build their prospective families on a religious footing. In turn these families would, and indeed did, create a young community of strictly observant members with great potential for natural growth.

To cater for the children of the young outreach activists and of the newly religious couples it was vital that they receive appropriate religious education. Interestingly by the mid-1970s the two main movements, and especially the young returnee families among them, had grown sufficiently apart that it was necessary to create two separate educational facilities to cater for the opposing ideologies that these two movements represented.²⁴⁶ The two different schools which were created in the wake of this split nevertheless shared the distinction of being unaligned with either the Board of Education, or the traditionalist Mizrahi Yeshiva College school network. Unlike the traditionalists, who periodically raised questions about the Beth Din's standards but never separated themselves from that institution, the innovator movements prided themselves on maintaining stricter kosher standards that included supervised milk and having their own shochetim, and in some cases their own butcheries.²⁴⁷

A final feature shared by the two movements was their respective attitudes to Zionism.²⁴⁸ The Kollel and its faculty was very committed to the Land of Israel and often encouraged members to study there and, in certain circumstances, to settle there permanently. This was not based on a Zionist belief but rested primarily on religious values and on the recognition that Israel provided excellent facilities for continued Torah study. Likewise, while professing a love for the Holy Land, and adopting a hard-line stance against any territorial concessions made by Israel, Chabad could not be defined as a Zionist movement. In

²⁴⁵ See sections on “The Innovators and their impact on the university student,” and “The Early Innovators and their impact on education,” respectively.

²⁴⁶ For details, see section on “The Early Innovators and their impact on education.”

²⁴⁷ See section on “The Innovators and the Kashrut Authorities.”

²⁴⁸ For details, see section on “The Revolutionaries’ Encounter with South African Zionism.”

fact, it was even less likely to encourage Aliyah, believing there was a special responsibility to stay in one's current location and to uplift Judaism in the Diaspora. Neither of these innovator movements adopted the Zionist ideology or belief in the intrinsic value of the State of Israel, its army and its institutions; a belief that glued together most other South African Jews, irrespective of their level of observance, and regardless of whether they associated with the accommodators or the traditionalists.²⁴⁹ The Kollel's and Chabad's refusal to adopt Zionist practices such as reciting special prayers for the State of Israel or celebrating Israel's Day of Independence was at first a difficult pill to swallow, and alienated them especially from the traditionalists. With time this attitude gained some respectability, and it partially succeeded in legitimising a religious approach, common to Chabad and the Kollel's successor movements, that no longer viewed Zionism as a spiritual aspiration.

The differences setting apart these movements are important and help explain their vastly different destinies. The Kollel's approach to outreach, as mentioned, was intense and demanding. It proposed adopting a meticulously observant lifestyle that disdained secular ideology, practice and entertainment, and expected followers to embark on an intensive course of Torah study. This may have been appropriate for the uninitiated Jew living in a Johannesburg, whose general society was isolated, and where communication with the wider world was circumscribed. It was less workable from the late 1980s, when South Africa gradually joined the international community, and when improved technology and communications rendered an isolated lifestyle less attractive. The Kollel's inability to adapt to these changes, its rapid turnover in personnel, its infighting, probably linked to its uncompromising attitude, and its limited capacity to cooperate with other establishment and traditionalist institutions impeded its outreach potential. Practically, it could not compete with the trend beginning in the early 1980s of breakaway *shtieblach* [independent small communities] being created by charismatic rabbis in the more popular suburbs of Houghton Estate, Sydenham, Fairmount, and Glenhazel.²⁵⁰ As a Kollel it has continued to support serious minded scholars devoted to fulltime learning, but despite relocating from the rundown suburb of Yeoville to the more attractive Norwood neighbourhood, it has been less successful in retaining its reputation in outreach. The Kollel that pioneered the Monday

²⁴⁹ For the intense Zionist sentiment among South African Jews, see generally Shimoni *Jews and Zionism*.

²⁵⁰ It is difficult to classify the orientation of each *shtiebl*. West Street Synagogue in the heart of Lower Houghton, which appears to have broken away from Oxford Synagogue self-identifies with the Zionist Mizrahi organization. The other *shtieblach* were led respectively by South African-born David Lapin, Israeli rabbi Aaron Pfeuffer who was formerly head of Yeshiva College's post matric Yeshiva Gedolah, and former Kollel Fellow Eliezer Chrysler, and they shared a more ultra-Orthodox orientation, but each with its own character.

evening programme, and that produced a community of returnees in rapid time in the early 1970s, is now a faint memory.²⁵¹ Unlike Chabad, the Kollel brand fails to stir recognition among the average Johannesburg Jew, but the movement it created is reflected in the history of Ohr Somayach and its affiliated network. The latter, in many direct and indirect ways, as we shall see, was the natural successor to the Kollel. The modifications it made enabled it to remain relevant and essentially successful in continuing the outreach the Kollel began. Its primarily South African-born rabbinic leadership, its more accommodating spirit, and its less demanding attitude to observance and to Torah study has enabled it to institutionalize ultra-Orthodoxy. In doing so it has mainstreamed the legacy established by the Adath and the Kollel of a particularistic and non-Zionist religious movement within Johannesburg Jewry.

Precisely owing to Chabad's quite different philosophical approach to outreach, its legacy is very much alive and unchanged. Not only has it retained the strength it accumulated over the one and a half decades surveyed here, but has increased it significantly. The intensity of its outreach in the 1970s and 1980s may not have been replicated over the next decades, but the activity over those years created a powerful base for a self-sustaining community that relies on natural growth. It has reached the point where many of its younger members are second or third generation Lubavitchers. With this communal infrastructure in place, Chabad can afford to grow and expand in quite different directions. Outreach can now follow what the Rebbe had originally prescribed: the introduction of a few core commandments to as many people as possible. These less demanding standards are quite palatable to the uninitiated Jew, wishing to identify with tradition while not ready to adopt the many strictures of a full-fledged Chabad Hassidic lifestyle. Certainly, complete observance is not discouraged but unlike other outreach movements such observance is not the exclusive aim.

Following a worldwide trend, it appears that the number of non-observant Jews who have embraced full observance through Chabad has more recently dipped significantly. This assessment is based on at least three factors. The unaffiliated candidates for outreach in Johannesburg are qualitatively different than they were four and five decades ago. The returnees then, aside from their keen awareness of being Jewish, which was reinforced by government policy, were on a quest for spirituality, not prevalent in today's society. Secondly, outreach movements operating today, as will be discussed later, are far wider reaching than they were in the 70s and 80s and Chabad does not seem to have kept up with

²⁵¹ It should be noted that Rabbi Baruch Rubanowitz, the recent successor to the long-standing Rosh Kollel, Rabbi Boruch Grossnass, appears eager to revitalize some of the outreach impact the Kollel once enjoyed.

this competition. Lastly, and somewhat paradoxically, Chabad over the past few decades have expanded their reach, placing themselves in locations where Jews are far removed from their heritage. During this expansion, it has become increasingly difficult to ensure full observance, and the founding rabbis of these new congregations appear to have opted to water down the message to spread it to a greater audience. The Chabad network of synagogues has grown quite rapidly from where it began in the early 1980s when it comprised two synagogues: the now defunct Yeoville Chassidim shul and the Torah Academy shul. It now has more than a dozen centres spread over the greater Johannesburg area. Additionally, it has become a mainstay of the community, and in many ways makes up a central element of the current Orthodox establishment. Many large and prominent synagogues employ senior and junior rabbis affiliated with Chabad. The South African Rabbinical Association has been chaired by successive Chabad rabbis; they comprise anywhere between 50% to 70% of its members. Funded by the Miracle Drive initiative since 1990, the Chabad House, which has now relocated to Savoy Estate, coordinates many educational programmes including special courses for seniors. In addition, Chabad Johannesburg has established a branch of the international Rohr Jewish Learning Institute, which engages students of all levels in interactive learning programs. And, for the first time since the retirement of Rabbi Aloy, one of the prominent Dayanim on the Beth Din is affiliated with Chabad. Taken together, it has become a major player in Orthodox life, but paradoxically in the process has lost its identity as a non-establishment outreach movement.

CHAPTER SIX: OHR SOMAYACH – TEMPERING A REVOLUTION

1. Introduction

While Yeoville remained the base for the innovators' activities into the 1980s, the suburb itself was on the decline and Jewish residents were beginning to migrate from it. Torah Academy's location in Orchards induced a fair number of Lubavitchers to relocate to that area. Other suburbs were also turning more religious owing to the influence of some small independent shuls with a more ultra-Orthodox *Weltanschauung*. Apparently, most attending these congregations, whether in Yeoville or farther north, were fully observant with the majority comprising Baaley Teshuva. Proactive outreach, that had been so dynamic a decade and a half before, and which had produced unprecedented levels of observance and study, seemed now to be on the retreat. Those who had been pioneers in kiruv, especially from the Kollel, had now either left the country or had changed career paths. This left an apparent void in dedicated and enthusiastic personalities able to connect with the younger generation and to introduce them to an observant lifestyle.

Former Kollel fellow Jeremy Abramov who had witnessed and was part of the changes of the 1970s believed the situation should be rectified. Having been kept abreast of developments in the Jewish community and taught South Africans at his home base at Ohr Somayach Jerusalem, he realized that at least some of the latter were keen to give back to their community. Ohr Somayach already had branches outside of Israel. Now he set about planning a branch for Johannesburg.¹ Sensing that the Kollel and Chabad model of importing foreigners would not appeal to the 1980s generation, he recruited personable and popular former students who had been schooled in mainstream South African Jewish institutions. Carefully placing the latter as youth directors at well attended Orthodox synagogues, he hoped they would appeal to the synagogue-going youth, who in turn would embrace a more religious lifestyle.

He did not have to wait long to discover whether his gamble would pay off. Thanks to the concerted and enthusiastic efforts of two of the youth leaders he had dispatched, Larry Shain and Shmuel Moffson, Ohr Somayach South Africa was established in Glenhazel and rapidly gained a large following. Though Ohr Somayach differed very little in philosophical outlook from the Kollel, Shain's and Moffson's relaxed attitude, informal dress code, and

¹ The trend of establishing satellite branches began in 1977 when Ohr Somayach International established its first branch in Yonkers, New York which relocated two years later to Monsey, where it is currently located (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ohr_Somayach,_Monsey, accessed on 12 December 2021).

ability to relate to local Jews enabled Ohr Somayach to overcome the Kollel's drawbacks. The fact that it ran trips to Israel and worked closely with many establishment organizations immunized it from criticism of its attitude to Zionism which in essence was no different from that of the Kollel. Nonetheless it was saved it from the scrutiny that was focused on the other two innovator movements. Suddenly, and not altogether explicable, Ohr Somayach became the proverbially "cool place" for many young adults seeking greater engagement with Orthodoxy. This popularity was driven by Moffson, who was particularly effective with university students, and Akiva Tatz. Tatz, who was introduced to observance by the Kollel and studied at Ohr Somayach Jerusalem, drew hundreds of listeners to his popular weekly lectures.

This enthusiasm was maintained into the mid-1990s at which point Ohr Somayach opened new branches outside Glenhazel. Even more importantly, in the later 1990s and onwards, Ohr Somayach and its offshoots established new congregations tailored for the next generation. In turn and over time, these new communities, under the charismatic leadership of dedicated rabbis (including the future Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein) gained their own character and broke away from their parent organization. Unfazed, Ohr Somayach and its affiliates reinvented its outreach division with new thinking, new marketing techniques, and certain concessions to the new generation. These would probably have been unimaginable at Ohr Somayach's founding, but a calculated decision seems to have been made allowing compromise for the sake of sustained growth.

In many ways Ohr Somayach was an heir to the Kollel's success. Symbolic of this inheritance, as we shall see, was the smooth takeover and expansion by this institution of the ultra-Orthodox Shaarey Torah school network. That said, it would probably be incorrect to view the Ohr Somayach communities, and its membership, as a natural outcome of the Kollel vision. Each period has its challenges, and it appears that for various reasons those who became observant in the 1970s and 1980s were seeking something different and more intense than that of later generations.² From a historic perspective, comparisons have to take into

² The differences in intensity can be attributed to local and international factors. During the 1970s and 1980s Apartheid was being viciously applied and as mentioned, those who did not wish to be involved in the struggle were seeking alternatives that would immunize themselves from the harsh realities. The more they indulged themselves in spiritual pursuits the more successful their escape from reality would prove to be. Those who came later and who matured in calmer times were less in need for an alternative lifestyle and this were more cautious in embracing a completely different spiritual lifestyle. However, there were also international trends that divided these periods, see for example. Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 223-224), who notes: "In tune with the radical times those who returned to Judaism in the 1970s and early '80s generally did so with ferocious single-mindedness. They tended to go all the way very

account these generational factors. Indeed, there appears to be substantial differences between those drawn to strict observance through the Kollel products, and those coming through the Ohr Somayach system. Superficially, the dress code and lifestyle of today's Baal Teshuva appears more relaxed than that which prevailed in Yeoville and Observatory. In fact many former inhabitants of these suburbs chose to immigrate to likeminded communities in Israel and the United Kingdom, rather than move elsewhere within Johannesburg.³ There also now appears to be a much freer flow between the various communities.⁴ Credit for this phenomenon may partially be given to the significant intensification of religious observance and study in the mainstream communities that has allowed for more common ground.⁵ Still, at least one founder of the Kollel has expressed disappointment with the fact that, for the most part, the strictly Orthodox laity appears far more open and relaxed than similar communities in Israel and the anglosphere.⁶ It appears that many newer Baalei Teshuva shy away from separatism.⁷ Ohr Somayach's founders seem to have intuited this reluctance to embrace a single-minded approach that typified the Kollel fellows.⁸ Perhaps they imagined that eventually their recruits would adopt a stricter lifestyle, and quite possibly some have. Though Johannesburg now has an established ultra-Orthodox population, it reflects a dynamic distinct from that of similar communities elsewhere.

2. *Ohr Somayach: the Early Years*

In 1972, a group of four prominent American rabbis based in Israel identified the growing phenomenon of secular American Jews who were visiting the Jewish State with the desire to discover more about their religious heritage. Hoping to cater to this population, they established a Yeshiva in Jerusalem specifically tailored for Baalei Teshuva. Ranging from

quickly.” In contradistinction today's Baal Teshuva, the world over, especially those who became observant through the popular Aish Hatorah organization, may call themselves Haredi and dress the part but many lead a very modern and fairly materialistic lifestyle. See for example: rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein, “Rethinking Contemporary Modern Orthodoxy” (audio presentation), Yeshiva University, New York, 9 January, 2011, <https://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecture.cfm/755064/rabbi-mosheh-lichtenstein/rethinking-contemporary-modern-orthodoxy/> accessed on 12 December 2021,.

³ Indeed, pockets of Johannesburg Jewry may be found in London, Manchester, Telz-Stone, and Har Nof, to name a few.

⁴ See Tatz, interview, where Tatz made anecdotal reference to his nephews, who feel equally comfortable attending Bnei Akiva, as they do Ohr Somayach communities. But see also Salzer, interview, where the current rabbi of Adath Yeshurun bemoans the fact that the various congregations have not set up “parameters,” which would make it more difficult to wander between communities.

⁵ This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

⁶ See Ziskind, interview. These sentiments were also expressed in private conversations with other former members of the Kollel.

⁷ See Tatz, interview with author, where Tatz insinuated that the undemanding mentality of the average South African Jew, while promoting unity and acceptance, has come at the cost of religious and scholastic excellence.

⁸ Larry Shain, interview conducted by author, (Bet Shemesh, Israel, February, 2017). Shain felt the Kollel faculty were too intense for the average South African.

their early to late thirties, all four had been trained in reputable, non-Hassidic Ultra-Orthodox yeshivas in the United States and Israel, with some hailing from rabbinic dynasties. They recognized the instruction level they would provide would have to be lower than that provided to those born religious. At the same time, they believed the returnees should receive a solid Torah education with a heavy emphasis on Talmud study.⁹ Their ultimate aim was to prepare the students so they could enter the premier ultra-Orthodox Yeshivas. Originally they called their institution Shema Yisrael [Hear O Israel], but later changed its name to Ohr Somayach [lit.: The Joyous Light], after receiving criticism for appropriating a sacred phrase.¹⁰ Though not the only or even first institution of its kind, its reputation for providing the uninitiated with a thorough immersion in the Talmud spread far and wide.¹¹

Students in Johannesburg who encountered the Kollel at its Monday night shiurim or on campus and who wished to study further were often advised by Rabbi Shakovitzky to go to Israel and study at Ohr Somayach.¹² Upon taking leave of the Kollel community in 1977, Shakovitzky announced that he would be assuming an educational role at Ohr Somayach.¹³ That same year, Ohr Somayach decided to set up its first branch outside of Jerusalem in Yonkers, New York.¹⁴ The success of this venture encouraged Ohr Somayach to develop an international section which would establish branches across the world. In 1980, notwithstanding the establishment's wariness of the innovator movements, the South African Zionist Federation, looking for new avenues to inspire love of Israel invited Ohr Somayach representatives to present its Jerusalem Echoes seminar to King David high school students.¹⁵

⁹ Nota Schiller, "Teaching The Men: Studying Gemora-The Means and the Ends of the Teshuva Process," *Jewish Observer*, June, 1980:13.

¹⁰ See https://ohr.edu/ohr_somayach/did_you_know_that/713 accessed on 12 December 2021. See also Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism – Transformation and Renewal*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 295. The original name *Shema Yisrael* [Hear O Israel] are words taken from a Biblical passage (Deuteronomy 6:4) that have been part of the daily liturgy for thousands of years. They express absolute faith in G-d and have long been associated with acts of martyrdom, etc. The name Ohr Somayach [Joyous Light], is taken from the title of a fairly well know commentary on Maimonides, written by Rabbi Simcha Meir of Dvinsk, whose commentary was favoured by the founders of the institution. Since Dvinsk died childless, the founders thought it would honour his memory if students of the yeshiva became Dvinsk's adopted disciples (see Shlomo Simon, "History of Ohr Somayach & The Kiruv Movement," (video presentation), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpm4clEyyZI>, accessed on 12 December 2021) . It was probably also chosen to broadcast a message of joy in religious life.

¹¹ See Yechezkel Sever, "News: Harav Mendel Weinbach Zt" l", *Deiah Vedibbur*, 13 December, 2012, <http://chareidi.org/archives5773/mikeitz/arweibachmkz73.htm>, accessed on 12 December 2021.

¹² See Hassan, interview. In fact, many of the South Africans who would later establish a local branch of Ohr Somayach only heard about the institution because of their direct or indirect connection with the Kollel (see Tatz, interview; see also Shain, interview). By 1987, it was reported that 500 South African had studied at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, (see "Dynamic new leaders head new venture", *Herald Times*, 27 March 1987).

¹³ See "Rosh Ha-Kollel on Aliyah," *Zionist Record*, 3 October 1977.

¹⁴ See note 1 above.

¹⁵ See https://ohr.edu/ohr_somayach/worldwide_branches/south_africa/1051, accessed on 12 December 2021.

A year later, in 1981, Rabbi Chaim Budlender, the Durban-born former Kollel fellow who was then head of the intermediate program at Ohr Somayach, was invited by SAUJS to lead a group of young adult professionals at a weekend seminar.¹⁶ The fact that it attracted over 100 attendants, who grappled with the issue of “Discovering Judaism,” could only have pleased the main branch in Jerusalem.¹⁷ It probably also motivated the latter to expedite its plans to establish an independent branch in Johannesburg.

Before establishing a branch in any country, Ohr Somayach International sent a *shaliach* to introduce that country to its various programs and to recruit students for the Ohr Somayach Yeshiva in Jerusalem. To that end, in the early 1980s, the organization despatched Florida-native Rabbi Avraham Union as their *shaliach*.¹⁸ After spending a short time in Johannesburg, he left to Cape Town where he was appointed rabbi of the Constantia Hebrew Congregation. At this point, Ohr Somayach approached South African-born Jeremy Abramov, one of its prominent teachers, to devise a plan to establish a permanent branch in Johannesburg. Abramov had left South Africa for Israel in the mid-1960s where he attended prominent secondary and tertiary level Yeshivas before returning to South Africa for a few years in the mid-1970s. It was then that he served as youth director at the Oxford Synagogue while studying part time at the Kollel.

Coming back to South Africa in 1984, he noticed the Kollel had ceased to attract crowds and that other smaller kiruv communities were similarly cultivating their own congregations. He realised there was a potential to reignite the wave of revival that had been witnessed in the 1970s, especially among the youth. To achieve this aim, he recruited five South African-born students who had been studying and were living in Israel; most had attended Ohr Somayach. He secured them part-time employment as youth directors across Johannesburg’s congregations. For their part, these synagogues were grateful to be hiring directors of such a high calibre, and so both parties benefitted from the relationship. This arrangement allowed these young men to use their mornings to study at the Kollel, leaving their afternoons to concentrate on educational work at their respective communities. Abramov and his recruits also opened an Ohr Somayach office at the premises of the Pedagogic Centre in Johannesburg.¹⁹ It was there that they ran their various educational

¹⁶ “100 students at seminar,” *Zionist Record*, 7 August 1981.

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ “Dynamic new leaders head new venture.”

¹⁹ See Reporter, “A New Magazine”, *SAJT*, 25 April, 1986. For more information of this Pedagogic Centre, see previous chapter.

activities and established their presence as a key actor among the innovator movements. This choice of venue is intriguing, especially since it was closely associated with Chief Rabbi Casper. As shall be noted below, from its beginnings Ohr Somayach enjoyed a warm relationship with the then Chief Rabbi, as well as with his successors. Unlike the other innovator movements, it succeeded in sustaining this relationship.

After living in Johannesburg with his family for eleven months, a satisfied Abramov decided to return to Israel. He had been busy after setting up many educational ventures including shiurim for businessmen that also served as fundraisers for Ohr Somayach's activities.²⁰ He handed the reins to his two most outstanding protégés, Rabbis Shmuel (Stanley) Moffson and Larry Shain, who were then working at Sydenham and Cyrildene synagogues, respectively. Moffson, who came from a Sabbath-observant home, matriculated from King David Victory Park where he served as a prefect. After completing school, he went to Israel where he studied at various Yeshivas and was ordained as a rabbi. Though never a student at Ohr Somayach Jerusalem, he would often visit that institution during the holidays and established a warm association with the senior staff. Upon his return to South Africa, he established himself as a very popular youth director.²¹ He was careful to nurture the relationships he had established which gained him a reputation as warm and sincere. His co-leader, Larry Shain, was raised in a non-observant home. After matriculating, he spent a year in the United States and then moved to Israel where he enrolled at Ohr Somayach and continued to study for a number of years before becoming a rabbi.²² Originally interested in pursuing a career involving kiruv and education, he became adept at managing the nascent movement and it was he who assumed the organization's financial responsibilities. From 1985 to 1986, while still employed at their various communities, these two rabbis were active in arranging lecture series, bringing out international guests who drew crowds of over 500 attendants, arranging study tours to Israel, and publishing a popular magazine.²³ Gradually, Ohr Somayach was establishing itself as an important player on the Orthodox scene.

²⁰ See Abramov, interview. The businessman's shiur was initiated by the Kollel as mentioned in the previous chapter, and like in that case the businessman's association with this budding independent group presumably gave them a sense that they were responsible for building something new and exciting.

²¹ See "New Director," *SAJT* 9 August 1985. See also Rabbi Shmuel Moffson, interview by author, May 2017, Johannesburg.

²² See Shain, interview.

²³ For its lecture series see "Education Launch," *SAJT*, 14 June, 1985; "Ohr Somayach Educational Activities," *Jewish Herald*, 16 July, 1985; For overseas guest speakers, see for example, "Ohr Somayach's Rabbi Dr. Gottlieb Mesmerizes," *SAJT* 6 June, 1986. Since Gottlieb was a permanent member of staff at Ohr Somayach Jerusalem, he came to Johannesburg as part of his teaching duties and only received travel and accommodation expenses (see Shain, interview); For Israel tours, see "Chief Rabbi meets Ohr Somayach tour members," *SAJT*, 6 December,

3. *Ohr Somayach Johannesburg*

With Ohr Somayach increasing its activities, Shain decided in 1986 that the time had come to establish an independent community. Deciding not to renew their contracts with their synagogues, Shain and Moffson planned to secure a building and establish a separate synagogue by the beginning of 1987. Daunted by this next step, Shain contacted Abramov in Israel, asking him to send another emissary to assist in running the South African branch. Abramov replied that he had arranged for Rabbi Boruch Rapoport to join Shain at the helm. Rapoport came to South Africa from Liverpool, where he had served as head of the local Kollel and had recently been appointed a rabbinic judge on the Johannesburg Beth Din.²⁴ By the time Rapoport joined Ohr Somayach, Shain no longer felt a need for extra personnel.²⁵ Rapoport, on the other hand, came to realise that his Beth Din duties did not afford him the time to run a new organization, and he decided to leave this position.²⁶ In the meantime, Shain had cultivated a relationship with the proprietors of Twin Pharmaceuticals, Abe and Solly Krok. The Krok twins were well known for their philanthropy and for contributing to causes that were outside the establishment, including Chabad and the Kollel.²⁷ They also encouraged fellow businessmen and entrepreneurs to contribute locally to the community through their Millionex venture. Participants bought lottery tickets, half of which went to the ticket holders, and the remaining amounts to charities.²⁸ It appears they did not set strict conditions for their contributions, and their beneficiaries were saved the need to comply with the requirements set by mainstream charity funds. In April 1987, with their assistance, a property was acquired in Glenhazel to serve as the learning centre for the new community.²⁹

The centre's location made Ohr Somayach even more popular, and quite soon the home's features were too small to accommodate the crowds streaming in to hear the local and international speakers.³⁰ While the erection of a marquee in the centre's garden brought

1985. The *Shoresh* [Roots] tours took King David and government school graduates on a five-week tour that combined Yeshiva learning with touring. It received the warm support of Casper, who assisted in connecting Ohr Somayach personnel with the government schools. For Ohr Somayach's publication see: "Ohr Somayach's New Publication," *Zionist Record*, 27 March 1986; "A New Magazine."

²⁴ See <http://www.uos.co.za/bethdin/dayanim.asp>, accessed on 12 December 2021.

²⁵ See Shain, interview.

²⁶ Chandra Serebro, "An Englishman in Sunny South Africa," *Jewish Life*, January 2019.

²⁷ For Kollel, see previous chapter concerning the Torah Foundation.

²⁸ "At 90, the journey's just beginning for Solly", *SAJR*, 13 June 2019, <https://www.sajr.co.za/at-90-the-journey-s-just-beginning-for-solly/>. See also Masinter, interview.

²⁹ "Movements: Ohr Somayach," *Jewish Tradition*, Pesach 5758 [April 1998].

³⁰ For a list of local and international speakers who came to Ohr Somayach during its opening year, see: "New York Rabbi to Speak at Gala Evening," *Herald Times* 3 July 1987; "Exciting Jewish Programme," *North Eastern Tribune*, 4 August 1987; "Student Expo '87 Next Week," *Herald Times*, 7 August 1987; "Student Expo

temporary relief, Shain realized an extension to the home would have to be built. By the end of 1987, at the advice of Solly Krok, Shain approached steel magnate Paul Nathan, who agreed to sponsor the building of a new hall. The motive for giving this sizable donation is unclear, especially as it appears Nathan had no connection with Orthodox Judaism and was not known for contributing to its causes. It is possible he did so as a sign of his friendship with Krok. In any event, during the building process, Nathan died unexpectedly, leaving a shortfall in the funds required for completing construction. This difference was then supplemented by fellow steel magnate, and well-known community leader and philanthropist, Mendel Kaplan. The latter insisted his donation not be publicised, and that the future hall be named after Paul and Brenda Nathan exclusively.³¹ Kaplan did, however, condition some of his donations on Ohr Somayach reciting the Prayer for the State of Israel which was uncommon for ultra-Orthodox communities. They apparently agreed to this stipulation and by early 1988 the new study hall was completed and immediately used for daily prayers and shiurim, as well as for weekly lectures.³²

Equipped with all these facilities, the centre now became an attractive place not only for the youth drawn to Moffson and Shain, but also for many local observant residents. The young rabbis, still in their twenties, wished to concentrate their efforts on kiruv exclusively and felt unqualified to serve as community rabbis for the seasoned congregants who joined the synagogue. To fill this void, they once again contacted Abramov, who this time dispatched Rabbi Yechezkel Auerbach, a veteran teacher at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem. In February 1988, Auerbach arrived in Johannesburg where he has continued to serve as the community rabbi. Ohr Somayach had now entered a new phase in its rapid growth serving as both a kiruv movement as well as a separate ultra-Orthodox community. Given their friendly relationship with the Chief Rabbinate, they immediately became a constituent member of the successor organization to the Federation of Synagogues, the Union of Orthodox Synagogues (UOS). This was unlike the Adatah and the Kolliel.

In 1989, Rabbi Dr. Akiva (Kevin) Tatz, who had qualified as a doctor at Wits medical school then studied for many years at the Ohr Somayach Yeshiva in Jerusalem, returned to Johannesburg to take over the medical practice of his recently deceased father. Since the Kolliel had introduced him to Torah observance, he decided to make his home in the suburb

³¹ ‘87 Well Attended,’ *Herald Times*, 28 August, 1987; ‘Over 500 Hear Rabbi,’ *North Eastern Tribune*, 8 September 1987.

³² See Mr. Allan Zulberg, interview by author, September, 2019, Johannesburg

³² See Shain, interview. According to Shain, the practice of reciting this prayer was eventually stopped.

of Yeoville where that institution was located.³³ Owing to his association with the Ohr Somayach rabbis in Johannesburg, who knew him from Israel, he was invited to lecture at the centre in Glenhazel.³⁴ Aware that Tatz had not only acquired training in traditional Talmudic sources but thanks to his association with Rabbi Moshe Shapiro of Jerusalem was also *au fait* with Kabbalistic works, they sensed his teachings might attract some interest.³⁵ After drawing a few dozen listeners in the first weeks, the shiur rapidly gained popularity. On a typical Monday night, an audience of between 250 to 300 youngsters would pack Ohr Somayach's halls to listen to Tatz's expositions on mysticism. The esoteric nature of the shiur, unique in Johannesburg, made it as popular, if not more so, than the shiurim taught in the 1970s by Rabbi Hassan of the Kollel. Interestingly, the latter happened also to be Tatz's teacher some time before he became a Baal Teshuva. Here apparently the pupil outperformed his mentor. Tatz's shiur was so appealing that young men would take their dates to these lectures despite only being able to mingle after listening to Tatz for an hour.³⁶

By no means did all who attended the Tatz shiur adopt an Orthodox lifestyle; however, the shiurim served as a means to attract its listeners to other activities and to other faculty members at the organization. To ensure that the audience did not limit their contact to once a week, Moffson attended the shiur and took careful note of new faces. He would then approach each one, and after taking their details he would follow up with them in the course of the week. Owing to his approachable manner, Moffson often succeeded in building a relationship with those he would contact. These relationships gained him standing among Jewish students who reciprocated by inviting him to campus and eventually appointing him SAUJS's official rabbi in 1990.³⁷ In this capacity he arranged shiurim and attended annual national seminars where students from around the country approached him for "informal

³³ See Salzer, interview and Ziskind, interview, where they remark that before he embraced an observant lifestyle, Tatz was fairly challenging.

³⁴ This was not the first time Tatz had given lectures to an Ohr Somayach crowd, having occasionally served as guest lecturer when visiting Johannesburg, (see "Student Expo '87 Next Week"), but it was the first time he did so on a regular basis.

³⁵ For background information on Tatz's teacher, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro, and as an example of the esteem with which he was held by the ultra-Orthodox community, see an obituary by one of the official organs of ultra-Orthodox, *Hamodia*, "Hagaon Harav Moshe Shapira, Zt"l, of Yerushalayim", <https://hamodia.com/2017/01/07/harav-moshe-shapira-ztl-of-yerushalayim/>.

³⁶ See Tatz, interview and Moffson, interview. It is difficult to explain the unparalleled popularity of Tatz's lectures. In Tatz, interview the lecturer was reluctant to explain his ability to attract such large crowds, proposing merely that the time was ripe to share his teacher's teachings with a larger crowd. For a less complimentary explanation of Tatz's popularity see Braude "From the Brotherhood of Man to the World to Come", 259-289

³⁷ "A Sukkah for the Jewish Students at Wits," *Herald Times*, 26 October 1990: 6.

chats, or deep penetrating questions.”³⁸ Like Hassan, Moffson’s campus position proved a very effective recruitment tool so that many who eventually joined the Ohr Somayach community did so as a result of this contact.

4. Years of Expansion

As the nineties approached. Ohr Somayach sought to expand its network and build satellite communities elsewhere in the city. In 1991, answering a call by a small group of interested families living in Sandton, a property was acquired, and Ohr Somayach Gallo Manor was born.³⁹ After having their Saturday services run by visiting rabbis, this new branch welcomed their permanent spiritual leader a year later with the arrival of Rabbi Zev Kreinis. Originally from California, and an alumnus of Ohr Somayach Jerusalem, Kreinis had established himself as a community rabbi and educator in various centres across the globe. He gradually grew the community to 130 families where its numbers remain steady until today. Closer to Glenhazel, another branch opened in the Johannesburg suburb of Savoy. Unlike Sandton, the initiative partially came from Ohr Somayach itself. In 1993, Tatz gave notice he would be leaving South Africa as he wished to return to Israel. This left Ohr Somayach without its star speaker, and in need of recruiting a popular replacement. At that time Johannesburg’s Waverley synagogue was led by Lewis Furman, a young South African rabbi whose sermons and shiurim drew very large crowds. After seven years with his congregation, Furman, along with his followers drawn from the younger and more observant members, became increasingly disenchanted with the synagogue’s committee and sought independence from it. To that end, some of the wealthier members collected funds among themselves and purchased a property that would serve the dual purpose of an independent congregation and as a home for their rabbi. Breaking away from a large synagogue and maintaining Furman in the financial position to which he had become accustomed was, however, not an easy task. Moreover, the instigators for independence were faced with the problem that they were not affiliated to any organization which would make it difficult to recruit new members.

Hearing of this development, Larry Shain approached Furman together with the future founders of the independent congregation, and proposed that they collaborate. For the mutual benefit of both Ohr Somayach Johannesburg and Furman’s followers, they agreed that the

³⁸ “SAUJS Seminar Stokkiesdraai Holiday Resort, 28th June – 5th July 1995,” (Brochure) (SAJBD Archives). In the brochure Moffson is affectionately given the title “SAUJS Rosh Yeshiva.”

³⁹ See <https://www.ohrsandton.com/about>, accessed on 12 December 2021.

new congregation would be named Ohr Somayach Savoy. Furthermore, despite Furman not having been educated at Ohr Somayach institutions -- he was a graduate of Yeshiva College, had been associated with Bnei Akiva and the Yeshiva Gedolah -- he was placed on Ohr Somayach's payroll in consideration for replacing Tatz as the main Monday night speaker. In return, Ohr Somayach undertook to contribute to the running costs of the synagogue to Furman's monthly salary. Consequently, at the beginning of 1994 Furman along with his followers moved to the new venue in the nearby suburb of Savoy. Furman concurrently assumed Tatz's role as Ohr Somayach's main drawcard. Though this was not the first time a small synagogue was built around the personality of the rabbi, it was apparently the first time a rabbi left the congregation that launched his career, taking core members with him. Observers of this move, unfamiliar with its details, would have believed the responsibility for the split lay with Ohr Somayach. Though it does not appear to have aroused public debate, it seemed at that time that Ohr Somayach was competing with the mainstream big synagogues, and in this case hiring away their spiritual leader.

A year later, in 1994, Rabbi Ezriel Tauber, one of the founders of Ohr Somayach Monsey, who had visited Johannesburg on a number of lecture tours, convinced Milton Weinberg, a property developer and one of Ohr Somayach Savoy's primary benefactors, to approach Shain and Moffson with the idea of establishing an Ohr Somayach Advanced Kollel on the premises. After Weinberg proposed he would take care of the bulk of the funding, the latter agreed, and in 1995, young men from overseas, together with locals who had learned in Yeshivas abroad, were recruited to found the new Kollel's first contingent.⁴⁰

The excitement Furman's shiur had previously generated wore off within a few years, and Ohr Somayach was in danger of losing touch with the student generation. Its main congregation continued to grow as its members established families, but this came at the cost of alienating unmarried students and young professionals who began to feel out of place in the older community. Noticing this trend, and noting the drop in outreach, Allan Zulberg, the educational entrepreneur who had served as Ohr Somayach's original honorary financial director in its early years, decided to take action. After consulting with Moffson, he acquired a new property in Glenhazel, which came to be known as the Sunny Road shul. While it was intended to be run as an independent congregation aimed specifically at attracting the youth, Ohr Somayach agreed to provide one of its staff to serve as its spiritual leader. Gavriel

⁴⁰ Milton Weinberg, interview by author, September 2019, Johannesburg.

Klatzko, a member of the new Kollel, initially filled this role, but he died soon after.⁴¹ After failing for a number of years to locate a permanent successor, Ohr Somayach turned once again to Waverley Synagogue, this time recruiting its junior rabbi, Warren Goldstein, who had built himself a reputation as a popular speaker and an erudite Torah scholar. (A few years later Warren Goldstein was chosen to succeed Cyril Harris as Chief Rabbi of South Africa.⁴²) Prior to Goldstein's accession, Sunny Road shul was able to attract a considerable following. Quite rapidly, families replaced young students as the core members of the new shul which meant its original mission to serve as an outreach centre was undermined. To remedy this situation, an additional small shul was built on the premises which was led by Rabbi Moffson and was targeted specifically at young unmarried students with the aim of providing outreach. This marked the beginning of what was later to be called OhrSom Student, which eventually became an independent organization with its own campus, and whose development and activities are discussed below.

At the beginning of 2000, Rabbi Chagi Rubin, the longstanding principal of Shaarey Torah Primary School, approached Shain in the latter's capacity as Ohr Somayach's financial director. He noted that for the last few years he and his committee had been running the Yeoville-based Shaarey Torah independently but could no longer afford the overheads for this ultra-Orthodox school. Furthermore, since many Jews were leaving Yeoville, its location was becoming less attractive to the pupils and their parents. Rubin himself was planning to return to his native United States, and he offered Shain the keys to the school, with the suggestion that Ohr Somayach take over the enterprise.⁴³ Upon hearing of this conversation, Rabbi Mendel Lipskar, who more than two decades earlier was one of the rabbis who presided over Menorah Oxford's split into the Lubavitch Foundation's Torah Academy and the Kollel-affiliated Shaarey Torah contacted Shain with an offer of his own. Seeing this as an opportunity to rectify what he regarded as a historical mistake and to unify the ultra-Orthodox communities, Lipskar proposed that the Torah Academy would open a non-

⁴¹ See Larry Shain, "Rabbi Gavriel Eliyahu Klatzko zt"l" (undated) <https://ohr.edu/special/misc/klatzko.htm>, accessed on 12 December 2021.

⁴² Goldstein has still maintained some links with Ohr Somayach, where he delivers a shiur on the Talmud every morning after early morning prayers named in his honour. See "Chief Rabbi's Minyan" at <http://www.ohr.co.za/davening.html>, accessed on 12 December 2021.

⁴³ See Shain, interview.

Hassidic branch on its premises and run the Chabad and so-called *Litvish* [Jewish Lithuanian] streams under one roof.⁴⁴

Shain appreciated the fact that someone was willing to shoulder the burden of running a school. It certainly made financial sense to use the educational resources of a functioning school where secular studies could be taught to both streams jointly. On the other hand, based on his experience with Chabad, Shain was concerned it would not take long for the Litvish stream to become fully integrated into the school. Uncertain what to do, he shared his dilemma with his mentor in Israel, Rabb Mendel Weinbach, one of the founding Yeshiva heads of Ohr Somayach. The latter pondered for a few days before reconfirming Shain's doubts, and recommending that despite the financial burden, Ohr Somayach Johannesburg should find a way to take over the school. Shain took his advice, raised the funds to build Shaarey Torah on Ohr Somayach property, and installed their Gallo Manor rabbi, Zev Kreinis, as principal. With the demise of Toras Emes boys' high school, in around 2010, and the amalgamation of the formerly independent Beis Yaakov girls' high school into the Shaarey Torah network, Ohr Somayach effectively become the main provider of ultra-Orthodox education. Other non-establishment schools, such as the Yeshiva Gedolah's Hirsh Lyons, and Maharsha, discussed in the next chapter, are also active in Johannesburg but it is the Shaarey Torah network which attracts a much larger student body.⁴⁵

5. *OhrSom Student*

Later that decade Moffson and Shain realised that to remain relevant in the outreach business, a new institution, appealing to young students had to be created. Local South African spiritual leaders were enlisted, and in 2010, the original small minyan run by Moffson as an adjunct to the Sunny Road shul was officially retitled OhrSom Student. A few years later it relocated to a new building in close proximity to Ohr Somayach's premises. Soon after, other branches were established in Cape Town and in Melbourne, Australia. Its current spiritual leaders are Rabbis Menachem Sosnovick, Jarred Bloch and Gavriel Abramson, all of whom were raised in Johannesburg, studied in Jerusalem, and previously ran various Ohr Somayach programs. Geared both to senior high school pupils and to university students, thanks partially to the efforts of Chief Rabbi Goldstein, its staff teaches

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* This conversation was also confirmed in Lipskar, interview. Lipskar explained that he was very supportive of Shain and Moffson's outreach program, and thought the extra burden of running a school would prove too difficult.

⁴⁵ For information on these schools, see <https://hirschlyons.org.za/schools/>; <https://www.maharsha.co.za/background>; <http://www.shaarei-torah.org/>, all accessed on 9 December, 2021.

Jewish identity at King David High School to separate groups of boys and girls from grades 11 and 12. Graduates of this program, upon entering university, are invited to OhrSom's campus which caters mainly for 18-24-year olds. These students are offered a variety of tours ranging from short summer trips to Israel, Spain, and New York, to a gap year, where, in addition to studying at Ohr Somayach institutions in Israel, students are given a tour of India and Europe.⁴⁶ The shorter trips are heavily subsidized and introduce participants to short stints at a boys' yeshiva and a girls' seminary. It is there that they receive a taste of Talmudic learning. The tours are well advertised and the promotional media, in a somewhat groundbreaking move for an Ohr Somayach offshoot, does not shy away from featuring attractive, and to the Orthodox eye, immodestly dressed youth. Indeed the average viewer would be hard-pressed to identify it as religious.⁴⁷ To ensure that these short trips translate into longer term commitments, students are informed at the outset that the considerable subsidies are to be repaid in the form of attending approximately 50 weekly learning sessions at OhrSom's campus. As part of the learning program, participants are also exposed to informal meetings with successful and influential personalities who adopted a religious lifestyle through exposure to Ohr Somayach. The aim of these meetings is to show the compatibility of a Torah lifestyle with a modern lifestyle and career, broadcasting the idea that observance does not entail sacrifice.

Superficially at least, OhrSom's message appears to be different from that of the early innovators who were attracted to separation from the normal materialistic world and to devotion to a more spiritual life. This is not to say pursuing spirituality and religiosity is not valued at OhrSom, but the demands are much lower. In addition to attending sessions, students need only commit to full observance of two Shabbats. Though failure to uphold one's commitments may result in students forfeiting the subsidies they received, this forfeiture is only occasionally enforced, and generally students who have difficulties in keeping their commitments are assisted and encouraged to reach their targets. This innovative approach to outreach has seen around a ten percent success rate when measured in terms of those who go from no observance to full observance. OhrSom's leadership however are at pains to point out that this is not the only measure and that the sessions plant a seed for further growth which may germinate years later. Anecdotally, they claim the effect of these sessions can sometimes be seen years later when students are older and re-establish contact

⁴⁶ See <https://www.facebook.com/ohrsomstudent/>, accessed on 9 December 2021.

⁴⁷ See for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQIPGrqWrsQ>, accessed on 12 December 2021

with the rabbis. Though less successful than Ohr Somayach of the late 1980s and 1990s, OhrSom, run independently from Ohr Somayach, has developed a sustainable model. Thanks to their innovative and methodical approach, they receive generous funding from the American-based Olami organization enabling them to maintain a spacious three storey building and to run expensive and subsidized tours.⁴⁸ In the process this has made outreach less burdensome on the local community, and has allowed this new, low pressure kiruv, to continue.

6. *Ohr Somayach's Raison d'être*

How do we account for Ohr Somayach's success? In the early 1980s, a young and recently ordained Larry Shain sought the opportunity to spread his knowledge and promote outreach.⁴⁹ After being approached by Abramov to join him in South Africa, Shain decided to confer with Rabbi Mendel Weinbach. The latter encouraged him to accept the offer, and provided several reasons for doing so. In retrospect this advice goes some way to explaining Ohr Somayach's subsequent success. A prime reason for promoting outreach in South Africa, Weinbach told Shain, was the fact that the country then was undergoing political upheaval.⁵⁰ Unlike their counterparts elsewhere in the anglosphere, the Jewish youth could ill afford the luxury of patiently mapping out their future. This compelled them to think seriously and made them open to alternate thoughts and philosophies, especially religious ideology with its well-defined goals. This does not mean, as critics have argued, that religion serves as a crutch during a time of political and social uncertainty. Indeed, many in outreach strongly disagree with this diagnosis. Yet it cannot be denied that Ohr Somayach benefited from the political situation.⁵¹ Its first home was built in the shadow of the 1985 State of Emergency at a time when violent resistance to the Apartheid regime was met with brutal police suppression. The ensuing situation resulted in physical insecurity, international isolation, and economic instability, causing many Jews to emigrate.⁵² Ohr Somayach's rapid success so soon after

⁴⁸ <https://olami.org/organizations/>, accessed on 9 December 2021.

⁴⁹ See Shain, interview. This entire paragraph is based on that interview.

⁵⁰ This is not the place to discuss the culpability of the Orthodox leadership vis-à-vis the political situation. For a discussion on the role played by the rabbinate see Shimoni, *Conscience and Community*, 140-149.

⁵¹ See Rabbi Yossi Goldman, interview by Gideon Shimoni, where Goldman denied the return to religion has anything to do with a "panacea for the insecurity." Independent scholar Claudia Braude suggests Tatz's shiurim provided a distraction from political events, (see Braude "From the Brotherhood of Man to the World to Come"); See also Roberta G. Sands and Dorit Roer-Strier, "Ba'alot Teshuvah" Daughters and Their Mothers: A View from South Africa," *Contemporary Jewry*, 21: 1 (January 2000): 55-77, where the authors state: "Political instability in South Africa provides a...context for the emergence of Teshuva," (at 72).

⁵² The results of the turbulent 1980s on Jewish emigration from South Africa has been documented by many writers and commentators on South African Jewry, see for example: Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 124-125, 151; Mendel Kaplan, "Envoy" in Kaplan and Robertson, *Founders and Followers*, 253; Shimoni, "South

its establishment is therefore reasonably attributable, in part at least, to the turbulent political climate and its effect on the Jewish community. Indeed, the fact that this organization provided a troubled student body with the benefits of an intense community spirit, mental support, and philosophical clarity, cannot be overlooked.

According to Weinbach, another reason that augured well for the success of outreach efforts in South Africa was the country's "separate development" policy which encouraged the Jewish community to remain a strong and independent sector within the white population.⁵³ Unlike the accommodators' approach, and more in line with that of the traditionalists, Ohr Somayach teaches Jewish specialness and particularity while undermining universalism. This approach features prominently in mystical works, and was likely emphasised by Tatz, an alumnus of both Kollel and Ohr Somayach Jerusalem.⁵⁴ Unlike those in more liberally oriented and ethnically integrated countries, many Jews who grew up in Apartheid South Africa would have had few problems with such particularism and parochialism. A third reason Weinbach gave Shain for going to South Africa was because the latter was born and bred there. Weinbach felt this was an appealing feature that would endear Shain to others and would establish a rapport between him and those he taught. As noted, Ohr Somayach, in contradistinction to the Kollel and Chabad, was from its very beginning staffed by South Africans who had mostly come from irreligious homes and had themselves returned to religion. Their ability to relate to their fellow South Africans and to empathise with their spiritual journey was obviously a boon to the movement.

Fourthly, it was Weinbach's understanding that the South African community was a very homogenous *Litvish* community. Despite not being religiously observant, they respected learning and were drawn to it. Indeed, Ohr Somayach Johannesburg in its early years imported the speakers from overseas using the resources of its international branch. Later it was able to select the most qualified local speakers. This apparently high level of

African Jews and the Apartheid Crisis," *American Jewish Yearbook*, 88, 1988, 47; Sergio Della Pergola, "South African Jewry- A Sociodemographic Survey," *American Jewish Yearbook*, 88,(1988), 68, 75. The effects of emigration on the community were and have been manifold. It has left the community with fewer financial supporters, many of whom have left the country. On the other hand, many indigent Jews who cannot afford relocation have been left with fewer sources of charitable support. This has led in some cases to a siege mentality, and has perhaps affected those who seek a spiritual refuge. In any event this aspect deserves an independent study, beyond the scope offered here.

⁵³ This view is not a justification of this policy and the disclaimer above, in note 52, applies here with equal force.

⁵⁴ See Shaul Magid, "It's the Spirituality Stupid," *Times of Israel* 1 July, 2012 (<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/its-the-spirituality-stupid/>, accessed on 12 December 2021), where he suggests a mystical education gives rise to "parochialism."

scholarship, packaged in a savvy and accessible manner, was a distinguishing mark of this movement. More than any other institution, Ohr Somayach has succeeded in placing itself in the appealing middle ground between the less demanding Chabad movement and the Kollel's strictures and intensive learning. This balancing act, and ability to evolve with the times, probably accounted for it being an appealing option for those who sought a serious intellectual challenge while retaining a modern lifestyle, and remaining firmly within a religious comfort zone.

Over and above the local conditions explaining the fairly rapid growth of Ohr Somayach in South Africa, the growth of the movement also occurred in a broader context.⁵⁵ As was noted earlier, the modern Baal Teshuva movement dates back to the middle of the 20th century. Hassidic movements such as Chabad, which started systematic outreach activities in the 1950s, appealed mainly to those attracted to its countercultural message. The same was true of non-Hassidic movements in the United States and in Israel. Those who purportedly eschewed materialism and had attached themselves to the hippie movement were most receptive to the teachings of the various emissaries and Yeshivas that were geared towards outreach.⁵⁶ This phenomenon appears to have changed over the decades so that by the early 1980s the movement's adherents came from successful and upwardly mobile populations. The latter were drawn to religion through synagogue rabbis who themselves had often experienced a "return" through the original outreach Yeshivas and were using their training to attract new followers.

The strength of the movement was observed in surveys taken in 1982 that indicated that as much as a quarter of Orthodox Jews residing in the New York metropolitan area had not been raised observant.⁵⁷ Interestingly, by the mid-1980s the upsurge in, and attraction to, Orthodox observance by many successful New Yorkers caught the attention of the secular press.⁵⁸ By that decade the typical Baal Teshuva candidate in the United States, and to some

⁵⁵ See generally, M. Herbert Danzger, "The "Return" to Traditional Judaism at the End of the Twentieth Century: Cross-Cultural Comparisons" in Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 495 – 511. For a broader discussion of the impact of outreach in the United States, within the context of American Jewry in general, see Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History, Second Edition*, New Haven: Yale University, 2019, 326-329, 356-390; Jeffrey Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009, 312-323.

⁵⁶ For an excellent essay on the attraction to Judaism by a spiritual seeker see Ellen Willis, "Next Year in Jerusalem," *Rolling Stone*, April 21, 1977, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/next-year-in-jerusalem-51482/>.

⁵⁷ Danzger, "The "Return" to Traditional Judaism", 496.

⁵⁸ See Natalie Gittelson, "American Jews Rediscover Orthodoxy," *New York Times Magazine*, September 30, 1984, <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/09/30/magazine/american-jews-rediscover-orthodoxy.html>; Cathryn Jakobson, "The New Orthodox," *New York Magazine*, 17 November 1986: 52-60.

extent in Israel, was no longer the typical spiritual seeker of the late 1960s. This same pattern was mimicked in South Africa where by the late 1980s yuppies had replaced hippies as the primary participants in the turn to Orthodoxy. The Kollel and Chabad, which were once powerful magnets for those drawn to their non-materialistic message in the 1970s and early 1980s lost momentum by the middle to late 1980s. Instead, the centre of the Baal Teshuva movement was in the wealthier parts of the city and drew upon those who were well integrated into the secular community. These newcomers to Orthodoxy were initiated into Orthodoxy by rabbis who, a decade earlier, had undergone a similar religious transformation. These outreach rabbis shared with the returnees a South African attitude and mentality. Moreover, whereas the first generation Kollel fellow, and to a lesser extent, the Chabad emissaries, had practiced kiruv as untrained novices, those leading Ohr Somayach were entering a field that had become considerably professionalized. This in turn made the latter more adept at attracting new recruits. It is this broader context which may also go some way in explaining Ohr Somayach's achievements during the period from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. As we have noted, by the end of the 1990s, the organization had to reinvent itself, and to an extent has been successful in finding local solutions that continue to the present day.

7. Conclusion

Ever since Ohr Somayach arrived on the scene some 35 years ago it has had a considerable impact on Jewish life in Johannesburg. It has been innovative in the field of outreach; it has inherited and now operates the largest network of ultra-Orthodox schools, it has spurred the creation of a number of affiliated congregations; and it has created a new archetype of the Orthodox Jew: a professional who leads a relatively modern lifestyle and devotes time to Torah study. It has done all this while managing to steer clear of significant controversies. This adroitness and success, moreover, has allowed it to be viewed as a mainstream Orthodox organization, albeit slightly to the right of other congregations. Yet unlike the establishment, Ohr Somayach maintains a non-Zionist outlook and does not celebrate Zionist holidays. Its strong affiliation with Israeli institutions, and its promotion of tours and ties to Israel, has probably blurred this distinction. For the most part, it does not

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5821fcda579fb3ff43e5876c/t/58af2147be659461bb75c47a/1487872335219/Ramin-NewOrthodox-NewYorkMagazine+%281%29.pdf>

routinely recite the Prayer for the State of Israel, but unlike the Kollel and Chabad, it appears to have been spared a public scolding for its stance.⁵⁹

The original Ohr Somayach congregation, now well established, has become inward looking and appears to have abandoned kiruv. The organizations it has inspired and produced, on the other hand, have succeeded in continuing the outreach mission. Due to their dedicated, innovative, and mostly South African-born staff --some of whom were specifically trained in outreach practices -- they have continued to make inroads, even when faced with a less agreeable environment.⁶⁰ Ohr Somayach's successes notwithstanding, it has also suffered some recent setbacks including the departure of its two founding members, Moffson and Shain, who led it loyally for close to three decades.⁶¹ Moreover, mirroring a problem experienced in the United Kingdom, and most probably the rest of the outreach world, it has struggled to make inroads with the 25-40-year old population cohort.⁶² For this reason, Moffson has set up his own organization, specifically targeting young professionals of this age group.⁶³ On top of this, Ohr Somayach must contend with a politically and economically volatile climate, where emigration is significant and the general Jewish community is in a gradual state of numerical decline. Only time will tell whether it will succeed in maintaining the success and momentum that has characterised the movement thus far.

⁵⁹ See Shain, interview. As mentioned above, Ohr Somayach at first complied with a condition by Mr. Mendel Kaplan to recite this Prayer, but this practice was discontinued after a short period.

⁶⁰ For examples of outreach training, see profile on Gavriel Abramson, who completed a course with the Israel-based Ner LeElef, directed by the original founder of Ohr Somayach, Johannesburg, Jeremy Abramov. This course is specifically designed to train outreach rabbis for Diaspora communities, <https://nerleelef.com/alumni/abramson-gavriel/>, accessed on 12 December 2021.

⁶¹ Larry Shain has relocated to Israel, whereas Shmuel Moffson operates his own independent organization in Johannesburg. See Shain, interview and Moffson, interview. Since it was Moffson who was active in outreach, his absence has been especially felt in this regard, see Kurstag, interview.

⁶² See Rabbi Daniel Rowe, interview by author, London, February 2017.

⁶³ See <https://www.facebook.com/thearchsa>, accessed on 12 December 2021.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE ESTABLISHMENT'S RESPONSE: COOPERATION, PROTEST AND COUNTERREVOLUTION

1. Introduction

The changes wrought by the Kollel and Chabad left their mark on the mainstream Orthodox establishment. As we have seen, the accommodators and traditionalists did not remain unaffected by the evolving religious landscape. In this chapter we will survey the various responses and strategies adopted by the establishment in response to the innovators and assess the extent to which these responses reshaped the community.

In earlier chapters, we noted that Johannesburg's pre-revolution Orthodox community was not homogeneous or united. Almost from the beginning it was characterized by intensifying battles between accommodators and traditionalists. The arrival of the innovators, and their challenge to established norms, went some way to uniting these previously divided camps. Nevertheless, distinctions between the accommodators and traditionalists still remained, and the tactics used in response to the new reality was somewhat different. Moreover, the accommodators, who once enjoyed a virtual hegemony over the community, witnessed a gradual decline in their influence, a process that had already begun before the innovators arrived.

By the end of the 1980s, very few of those active in the South African rabbinate could be classified as accommodators. Many of the staunchest advocates of accommodation had either retired or were on the cusp of retirement. They were not replaced by those who shared their philosophy. Those who were ordained at the Ministers' Training College occupied very few pulpits, with some taking educational positions and others ministering overseas. On the other hand, moderate rabbis from abroad, who were trained at Jews' College and likeminded institutions, apparently no longer considered Johannesburg an attractive option. Even the legacy of accommodation that had been nurtured in the past appeared to be unravelling. The Chief Rabbi emeritus, Louis Rabinowitz, despite visiting South Africa frequently and publishing critical observations, had little influence on local trends from his home base in Jerusalem. Rabbi Dr. Isaac Goss, Professor Solomon Rappaport, Rabbi Dr. Alter Hilewitz, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Newman and Chief Rabbi Casper, all of whom had played prominent roles in religious leadership and Jewish education at all levels, had either died or were living in retirement in Israel. The Ministers' Training College, whose lecturers included many of the aforementioned personalities, and which had enjoyed modest success in graduating rabbis,

was now virtually defunct.¹ The diminishing presence of accommodators was exacerbated by South Africa's political environment, and specifically by the increasing global criticism of the Republic's racial policies since the 1960s. As historian Dana Kaplan noted, this deterred many potential overseas English-speaking rabbis from pursuing a communal position in Johannesburg.²

On the other hand, the traditionalists, who had already seen their number and influence expand by the mid-1960s, continued to enjoy steady growth. Not as active in outreach as the innovators, they nonetheless served to counterbalance the trends introduced by the newcomers. Indeed, as we shall see, it was primarily the traditionalist position, fortified with a pro-establishment flavour inherited from the accommodators, and augmented by aspects of the innovators' religious zeal, that ultimately defined Johannesburg Orthodoxy at the turn of the twenty first century.

This chapter is divided into three sections, the first of which is devoted to the accommodators' reactions to the innovators. This is followed by an analysis of the patient strategy employed by the traditionalists, and their successful attempt to capture the reins of Johannesburg Orthodoxy. The third section observes the results of this traditionalist counterrevolution; we will survey the reactions -- positive and negative -- from the general Jewish community to the energetic programs and religious *Weltanschauung* of a new generation of traditionalists.

2. *The Accommodators' Response: Cooperation, Protest and Defiance.*

2.1 *Cooperation*

While focusing on the innovators, the previous two chapters noted the establishment's reactions to these newcomers and to the innovations they introduced. We noted areas of dissension over issues such as Jewish education, independent Shechita boards, Zionism, and Holocaust memorialization. We also highlighted the results of the productive cooperation between the establishment and the more extreme Orthodox elements. Chief Rabbi Casper was

¹ See Barry Sidelsky, *The Adventures and Experiences of a Once Upon a Time South African Rabbi*, (Jerusalem: Mazo Publishers, 2018), 5. Sidelsky graduated in 1973 from the Ministers' Training College, along with several other candidates. Otherwise there are not many documented cases of graduates attending this College.

² See Dana Evan Kaplan, "South African Orthodoxy Today: Tradition and Change in a Post-Apartheid Multi-Racial Society," *Tradition*, Fall 1998 33(1): 81-82. Kaplan suggests the political climate prevented American and British rabbis from coming to South Africa, so that the latter had to look to Israel to fill the void. Indeed, the typically modern English minister and American pulpit rabbi who matched the definition of an accommodator would probably have avoided South Africa. However, as we have shown, all the rabbis who comprised the first contingent of the Kollel faculty originated from England, whereas Chabad's first arrivals all hailed from North America. Very few rabbis came from Israel.

one of the first to endorse the idea of a Kollel and presided over it as its president. Chabad's first emissary, Mendel Lipskar, offered his services to the general community, and often shared platforms with establishments speakers and rabbis.³ Such cooperation occasionally bore fruit, as may be seen in Chief Rabbi Casper's appointment of Kollel stalwart Rabbi Chaim Shein as director of the Pedagogic Centre. The latter used his position to issue booklets to thousands of Jewish pupils attending government schools at primary and secondary level. In the mid-1980s, a negotiated settlement to the multiplicity of kashrut supervision agencies was amicably reached, and subsequent hiccups notwithstanding, this resulted in overwhelmingly broad recognition of the Beth Din's authority. From its inception, Ohr Somayach's founders carefully cultivated a relationship with the incumbents of the Office of Chief Rabbi, enjoying warm relations with both Bernard Casper and his successor Cyril Harris. The latter worked in tandem with the Chabad-dominated Rabbinical Association, where he was active in advocating for higher salaries for Orthodox community rabbis of all stripes. In turn he received the rabbis' support and cooperation in promoting religious campaigns such as Taste of Shabbat.⁴ In mid-2004, on the occasion of the appointment of Harris's successor, Warren Goldstein, Harris praised the new candidate as a representative of "a younger generation ... at the vanguard of the accelerating Ba'al Teshuva movement."⁵ It appears, that the accommodators not only collaborated with those to their right, but were also cognizant of the changes in the religious atmosphere, and to a certain extent, expressed appreciation of this development.

2.2 *Protest*

Yet many within the accommodationist camp were alarmed by the effects the religious revival had produced. Beginning in the mid-1970s, and throughout Chief Rabbi Casper's tenure, several local rabbis, as well as rabbinic visitors, raised their concerns in the Jewish press. In June 1978, after lauding the "missionary activity of the Lubavitch movement and the Kollel," Louis Rabinowitz bemoaned the fact these movements dared to challenge the heretofore "unquestioned authority" of the Federation of Synagogues and Chief Rabbinate. He warned that the divisiveness in Kashrut and shechita would lead to a gradual breakdown

³ See for example, "Federation of Synagogues of South Africa Lecture Series: Some Aspects of Judaism," *Federation Chronicle*, April, 1977.

⁴ See Yossy Goldman, "A Rabbi's Rabbi", *Jewish Tradition*, Rosh Hashanah, 2005; "An integrating force," *Jewish Tradition*, Chanukah, 2004.

⁵ Cyril K. Harris, "An optimistic indicator of the continuation of South African Jewry", *Jewish Tradition*, Shavuot 5764 (June 2004).

of “religious cohesiveness.”⁶ Less than two years later, Rabinowitz again expressed his dissatisfaction with the innovators, and with their tendency to introduce what he regarded as unnecessary, and even harmful, stringencies. Not only did he believe this trend cause the “fragmentation of a united community” and the “denigration of the standards adopted by the community,” but in his opinion these actions contradicted Jewish law. Quoting Rabbi Shabtai Cohen, a respected 16th century Jewish legal authority, he declared that “just as it is forbidden to permit that which is forbidden, so it is forbidden to prohibit that which is permitted.”⁷

As we have noted in a previous chapter, Rabinowitz gained public admiration during his tenure for his willingness to issue lenient rulings, especially when it came to playing sports on the Sabbath.⁸ It is perhaps unsurprising then that he would fight for this legacy of leniency which he believed to be under threat. In 1981, the then head of Jews’ College, Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch, who had visited South Africa twenty years earlier in 1961 as Rabinowitz’s guest, jotted down his impressions of his return visit to the Republic.⁹ Unlike Rabinowitz, he found the community enjoyed greater harmony than they had enjoyed two decades earlier. Externally, the community was more confident in exhibiting the outer trappings of observance and “kippot on campus were a common sight.” He was also impressed with the high level of Kashrut observance, and the immense improvements in Jewish education, where youth were trained in the “serious study of the Talmud.” Yet not everything pleased him. Although emigration from the country was on the rise, very few had chosen Israel as their destination and so, it seemed to him, Zionism was on the decline. Moreover, he “confessed to a nagging feeling” that the religious developments had come at the cost of an “intellectual decline.” Recalling his first visit where he had met “Lithuanian Jews reared in scholarship and learning,” including “some fine *Talmiday Chachamim* [Torah scholars],” he conceded it would be unfair to imagine the present generation capable of replicating that success. He felt, however, that present trends of observance were crippling the intellectual attainments:

Of course it is too much to expect any society to create in one generation the personalities which were reared in Lithuania, in a milieu which evolved over several centuries. Yet the loss is real and perhaps the recognition of it may

⁶ Louis Rabinowitz, “A Gast auf a veil,” *Federation Chronicle*, June 1978.

⁷ Louis Rabinowitz, “Leniency and stringency in deciding Halacha,” *Federation Chronicle*, April 1980.

⁸ See above, Chapter 3.

⁹ Rabinovitch’s previous visit is briefly discussed in chapters 3 and 4 above.

help to restrain some of the excesses of the public relations approach to Judaism which one frequently encounters.¹⁰

Though the culprit for the “public relations approach” goes unnamed, we can assume Rabinovitch was referring to the Lubavitch Foundation’s ubiquitously advertised mitzvah campaigns and educational programs. He probably felt it was producing a qualitatively inferior Judaism despite ostensibly increasing the level of observance.

In 1986, South African-born Eric Kaye, who had lived and ministered in Johannesburg, but was then occupying the pulpit of the “mother congregation” in the Gardens in Cape Town, was invited to deliver the keynote address to the Federation of Synagogue’s annual conference.¹¹ In his speech, Kaye condemned the “fundamentalist and isolationist attitudes” of some of the “religious authorities” who effectively discouraged interest in Judaism among the uninitiated, unobservant sectors. “Right wing elements” he noted “tend to exclude arbitrarily from religious legitimacy their fellow Orthodox Jews who do not subscribe to the same fundamentalist stringencies,” and thereby cast “unjustified aspersions on the centrist Orthodox community.” Reminiscent of Rabinowitz’s admonitions, Kaye recommended that any rabbinic colleague faced with a valid choice “between a lenient and stringent view” should always adopt the former.¹²

In 1988, shortly after retiring as Chief Rabbi, Kaye’s likeminded colleague Bernard Casper, struck a slightly more positive note when he spoke of the “two themes” that had “dominated his Weltanschauung.” As someone who considered “Orthodox Judaism [an] all-encompassing religious concept,” his primary theme was “preserving the unity of the community and its centrist position in Jewish religious life.” This unity, he implied, was being threatened by “splinter groupings of religious Jews.” Notwithstanding the “good influence” the latter may have brought to “their followers,” the stringencies they introduced were undermining the Chief Rabbi’s position as well as the “Anglo-Litvak tradition and quality...as the centrist bulwark of the entire edifice of South African Jewry.”¹³ Indeed, for Casper and for his fellow accommodators, preserving the community’s religious status quo was vital. While there was a grudging acknowledgement of the innovators’ achievements, it seemed to be coupled with fears of disunity.

¹⁰ Nachum Rabinovitch, “Many Signs of Change,” *Federation Chronicle*, October 1981: 7.

¹¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gardens_Shul, accessed on 14 December 2021.

¹² Eric Kaye, “The Role of the Rabbi in Practice,” *Jewish Tradition*, May 1986.

¹³ Casper, *Broadcasts and Papers*, 12.

2.3 *Defiance*

If some establishment rabbis felt right-wing innovations were foreign and divisive to the Johannesburg community, this was even truer when it came to the lay leadership. The growth of the smaller congregations or *shtieblach*, and the innovators' increasing impact appeared to erode the influence of the once powerful laity. Nevertheless, on the eve of Chief Rabbi Casper's retirement, the laity still retained the power to select his replacement and, indirectly determine the course of mainstream Orthodoxy. Prominent Jewish leader and philanthropist Mendel Kaplan warned that any errors in selecting the future Chief Rabbi would "threaten the unity that once prevailed" in the community. Noting the alien "levels of observance" introduced by the "Hassidic and Baal Teshuva movements," Kaplan, betraying a fear that Casper's successor would be a Lubavitcher, characterized the choice as a battle "between control of the community by Hassidic Rebbes versus control by committed lay leaders."¹⁴ Ultimately, Cyril K. Harris, self-described as "utterly traditional and at the same time thoroughly modern," and one, who "loathed fundamentalism and preferred moderation," was nominated for the position.¹⁵ His appointment was met with much acclaim, if not relief, on the part of the lay leaders. A triumphant Kaplan described it as "an overwhelming victory for the determination of the majority of Johannesburg Jewry to maintain the traditional observance from its earliest days."¹⁶

The passive tone of this statement notwithstanding, one suspects that Kaplan played an active role in securing Harris's appointment. The search process was kept under wraps, and only once the executive body had made its decision were various entities including the leadership of the constituent members of the UOS and of the South African Rabbinical Association, invited to interview the candidate. In the case of the rabbinical association, they were told that while they may raise concerns, they had no veto power to block the appointment.¹⁷ This condition reduced rabbinical input, and was perhaps a deliberate attempt to thwart a challenge by then chairman Rabbi Norman Bernhard who eventually put forth his own candidacy.¹⁸ The only rabbis apparently consulted were the United Kingdom's then Chief Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits and Casper himself. Reportedly, it was Jakobovits who promoted Harris's candidacy while Casper endorsed it. It is therefore unclear whom

¹⁴ Kaplan and Robertson, *Founders and Followers*, 252.

¹⁵ Cyril Harris, *For Heaven's Sake*, (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2000), 52.

¹⁶ Kaplan and Robertson *Founders and Followers*, 252.

¹⁷ Ivan Sackheim, "These are the facts," *Jewish Tradition*, October 1987: 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

among the lay leadership supported Harris's appointment. At least one person suspected that Kaplan was the main mover.¹⁹

The friendship between Kaplan and Lord Jakobovits dated back to at least 1985 when Kaplan and his wife Jill named the Centre of Medical Ethics at Ben Gurion University, Beersheba, in honour of the British Chief Rabbi.²⁰ Consequently one may speculate that Kaplan was at least informed of Jakobovits's preferences. Even if one discounts any relationship, the views held by Kaplan, one of the foremost Jewish lay leaders in South Africa, certainly influenced the matter.²¹ As it turned out, the new Chief Rabbi's activities in the religious and political spheres placed him squarely in the accommodators' camp.²² His tenure succeeded in staving off challenges by the innovators and traditionalists. It also afforded the latter more time to launch a counteroffensive against the innovators. It is to the traditionalists, and their response, to which we now turn.

3. *Traditionalist Response: Synthesis and Counterrevolution*

3.1 *Yeshiva College and the Yeshiva Gedolah*

In 1968, the Federation of Synagogues' Ministers' Training College, active for less than ten years, found itself with no students. This prompted Chief Rabbi Casper to request that Yeshiva College encourage graduates wishing to enter the rabbinate to attend the Training College, rather than study at a Yeshiva abroad. In line with the thinking of founding Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Michel Kossowsky, who opposed the idea of anything other than a traditional Yeshiva, the school council turned down the request. At the same time, they felt that establishing a traditional Yeshiva in the Republic would be too costly, and in the long run, it would be cheaper to send graduates overseas.²³ A few years later, in 1972, owing to the continued dearth of home-grown rabbis, the Board of Deputies and the Office of the Chief Rabbi proposed that Yeshiva College amalgamate with the Training College. Once again the school council rejected the proposal. This time, however, it was because they felt ready to

¹⁹ See transcript of telephone conversation between Rabbi N.M Bernhard and Rabbi B.M. Casper (undated) (Norman Bernhard collection).

²⁰ See The Lord Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits Center for Jewish Medical Ethics Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Beersheba, Israel, Report 5774, 2013-2014, 4, [https://in.bgu.ac.il/fohs/DocLib/Pages/depts/JewishEthics/Report%20Jakobovits%20Center-2013-14%20\(1\).pdf](https://in.bgu.ac.il/fohs/DocLib/Pages/depts/JewishEthics/Report%20Jakobovits%20Center-2013-14%20(1).pdf), accessed on 14 December 2021. During Harris's ministry, Harris drew close to Kaplan and considered him an influencer (*For Heaven's Sake*, 18).

²¹ For an indication of Kaplan's personal observance, see for example, Mendel Kaplan, *In Search of a Minyan* Cape Town: M. Kaplan., 1996.

²² For details of his tenure see Geoff Sifrin (editor), *Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris: How Humanity, Morality and Humour Helped Lead a Community*, (Johannesburg: Chief Rabbi Harris Memorial Foundation, 2015).

²³ Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 67. For Michel Kossowsky's principled opposition to the Training College, see chapter 3.

establish their own fulltime Torah institution, or what is known in the Jewish world as a Yeshiva Gedolah [a Senior Yeshiva]. The new Yeshiva open its doors the next year.

Hoping to enlist the services of a renowned Torah scholar, an invitation was extended to Rabbi Azriel Goldfein who had studied together with Rabbi Tanzer at Telshe Yeshiva from the mid-1950s through the early 1960s. At the time the approach was made, Goldfein was serving as Rosh Yeshiva of the rabbinical College of St. Louis, Missouri, and was slowly building a reputation as “one of America’s foremost young Talmiday Chachamim.”²⁴ Goldfein accepted the offer, and together with his young family arrived in South Africa in November 1972, eager to begin his new job. Aside from providing a Jewish education at a post high school level for students who would no longer need to travel to Israel to receive a higher education, it also provided a facility for training rabbis. To this end, the Solomon Bronner Rabbinical Academy was opened in November 1973.²⁵ Unlike the Training College, this Academy offered a curriculum closely resembling that of a yeshiva, omitting any subjects related to practical rabbinics. Instead it was devoted exclusively to Torah at “the highest possible level.”²⁶ Concomitantly, it shared the Training College’s ideal of producing South African-born rabbis able to relate to the South African community. With the arrival of a traditionally trained scholar devoted to providing a local high-level Yeshiva, a “solution” of sorts was reached. On the one hand, traditionalists could be trained at an authentic Yeshiva. On the other hand, its location rendered it capable of producing local rabbis loyally serving the community in which they were born and bred and whose customs they respected.²⁷

In theory, the idea of establishing a rabbinical academy under Yeshiva College’s auspices made sense, yet for various apparently non-ideological reasons it did not pan out. At the end of 1977, Goldfein announced he would not be extending his five-year contract with Yeshiva College and resigned from his position as associate Rosh Yeshiva.²⁸ The next year, he established an independent Yeshiva Gedolah. The reasons for leaving the Bnei Akiva-based institution, and failing to renew his contract, are unclear. It has been claimed by the

²⁴ *Ibid.* Saks does not attribute the quote, but refers to a local press announcement in St. Louis. Soon after Goldfein’s arrival, his scholarship was recognized by all factions of Johannesburg’s Orthodox community. Some of the Kollel Fellows even suggested he was imported to compete with the Kollel. (See Hassan, interview).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁶ Azriel Goldfein, *The Yeshivite*, 1973, cited in Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 73.

²⁷ Compare Hayman, “The Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Sectors”, 114, who provides a binary analysis of the situation, viewing the “pro-establishment” Yeshiva Gedolah as the “antithesis” to the ultra-Orthodox movements (which we have referred to as the innovators).

²⁸ See Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 73-75, 84.

Goldfein family that the United Communal Fund, which was then supporting Yeshiva College, was no longer willing to finance a tertiary educational institution.²⁹ On the other hand, it appears that Rabbi Tanzer, who had expended considerable resources on importing Goldfein to the country, was taken by surprise by his colleague's departure and was hurt by his move.³⁰ Tanzer temporarily filled the void with Rabbi Eliezer Chrysler, one of the Kollel's founding fellows, and in the interim he searched for a permanent replacement.

In August 1979, Tanzer recruited Israeli native, Rabbi Ahron Pfeuffer, then based at London's Etz Chaim Yeshiva, whom he described as a "thirty-year-old genius by anyone's standards."³¹ Pfeuffer served as head of the Yeshiva Gedolah for two years between 1980 and 1981 and proved very popular with his students.³² In 1982, he decided, like his predecessor, to leave the school and found his own institution, which would eventually morph into an independent strictly Orthodox congregation where high level Torah was taught to educated lay persons.³³ In March that year, together with the internationally renowned Jerusalem based Harry Fischel Centre, Pfeuffer ordained five rabbis, including Isadore Rubenstein who would go on to serve as chief army chaplain for Jewish soldiers in the SADF and head of the South African Board of Jewish Education.³⁴ This, however, was to be the only ordination he would oversee, as he reached the conclusion that South African society was not sufficiently observant to produce Torah scholars. As Pfeuffer himself put it in an interview: "In Johannesburg, the atmosphere conducive to the development of G-d fearing human beings is absent. ... having full-time students would result in synthetic talmidday chachamim deficient in a level of fear of Heaven which can be attained elsewhere."³⁵ Over the years his congregation would establish its own school network, from nursery to high school, under the name Yeshiva Maharsha. Unlike Goldfein's Yeshiva, its philosophy was closely linked to the innovator movements. In the meantime, as far as Yeshiva College was concerned, with the departures of Goldfein and Pfeuffer it was decided to discontinue the Yeshiva Gedolah on the

²⁹ See *Bridging Worlds: The Life and Teachings of Rav Azriel Chaim Goldfein*, documentary, directed by David Sassoon, (2014, South Africa). DVD.

³⁰ See Tanzer, interview.

³¹ Saks, *Yeshiva College*, 84.

³² *Ibid.* 85.

³³ *Ibid.* 86. See also Hayman, "Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Sectors" 1988, 116. Unlike Goldfein's departure at the end of 1977, Pfeuffer left Yeshiva College with the blessing and encouragement of its Rosh Yeshiva, Tanzer, who probably realized Pfeuffer's ultra-Orthodox outlook did not suit the school's ethos (see Tanzer, interview).

³⁴ See "5 to be ordained as rabbis next week," *Jewish Herald*, 16 March, 1982.

³⁵ Hayman, "Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Sectors", 115.

Yeshiva College campus. Nine years of continuous operation of this higher institution was thereby terminated.³⁶

3.2 *The independent Yeshiva Gedolah of Johannesburg*

Since leaving Yeshiva College in January 1978, Rabbi Goldfein -- without any official institution backing him, and after having only succeeded in recruiting two fulltime students -- decided to establish an independent Yeshiva which he called the Yeshiva Gedolah of Johannesburg. Originally located at the Valley Observatory Synagogue complex, not far from the Kollel Yad Shaul, it was unlike Grossnass's Ohr Yisroel Yeshiva, founded a year earlier, which had catered specifically for Baaley Teshuva with limited background in the Talmud.³⁷ Goldfein intended to implement the program he had originally devised for Yeshiva College. He aimed to impart Torah and ethics at the highest possible level to any interested person, irrespective of the profession they would later choose. Additionally, he envisaged training rabbis and religious functionaries who would later serve the South African Jewish community.³⁸ Ordaining local born rabbis in South Africa, he felt, would rectify the situation in which overseas rabbinic personnel were imported into South Africa while talented South African students were sent off to Israel.³⁹

Leaving aside the fact that importing foreign born rabbis on short term contracts was imposing a "crushing financial burden" and was leading to a rapid turnover of rabbis, Goldfein expressed doubts as to whether the current overseas personnel were even suited for the culture and youth of South Africa.⁴⁰ It is uncertain which foreign personnel Goldfein was referring to, but it is not far-fetched to suggest it was a subtle allusion to the Kollel and Chabad rabbis who, to his mind, had failed to adapt themselves to Johannesburg's spiritual environment. In any event, even if prospective foreigners were eminently qualified, the difficult political and economic climate in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising would have deterred them from setting foot in the Republic. To Goldfein, the need to establish the Yeshiva Gedolah and graduate as many rabbis as possible had become a matter of urgency,

³⁶ Saks, *Yeshiva College* p. 86.

³⁷ See Hayman, "Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Sectors," 114.

³⁸ "Yeshivah (*sic*) Gedolah of Johannesburg. Memorandum." Date of publication unknown, cited in Hayman, "Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Sectors", 122.

³⁹ Azriel Goldfein, "Can South African Jewry Face the Challenges?" *Federation Chronicle*, August 1979. See also D Ben Zvi, "Disintegration or Re- "Jew"venation?," (guest editorial), *Federation Chronicle*, August 1979.

⁴⁰ "Yeshivah Gedolah of Johannesburg: Commitment to South Africa Jewry," *SAJT*, editorial supplement, 8 November, 1985. As we shall note later, Goldfein does not seem to have given much credence to western culture as a value, and therefore the reference to culture probably denotes lifestyle.

so much so that failing to fill the void would lead to “the crumbling of institutions that took decades to build.”⁴¹

In a lead article in the *Federation Chronicle* published in August 1979, Goldfein enumerated his aims to mixed reviews. Some in the community predicted the venture would fail, and the average South African student would not be drawn to fulltime Torah study.⁴² On the other hand, the Federation of Synagogues and the Johannesburg Beth Din were encouraged by Goldfein’s moves and saw potential in it. In November 1979, the *Federation Chronicle* enthusiastically reported on the expansion of the staff and hostel facilities at that institution and the fact that the “talents” of the prospective rabbis and shochetim would be “utilized for the South African Jewish community.”⁴³ Calling the Yeshiva Gedolah “the lifeblood of the South African Jewish community” at a Conference held a few months later, the Federation pledged R100 a month while urging constituent synagogues to donate generously to “one of the most deserving causes.”⁴⁴ These calls appear to have been well received and a few years later it was widely acknowledged that the “functions” of the Ministers’ Training College had been “virtually taken over by Rabbi Goldfein’s Yeshiva Gedolah.”⁴⁵

From its inception, the Yeshiva Gedolah of Johannesburg enjoyed considerable, albeit incremental, success. After its first decade of operations, the institution became South Africa’s leading source of supply of rabbis and educational personnel. By that time, it had produced young rabbis occupying pulpits in Edenvale, Orange Grove, Randburg, and Waverley, as well as other parts of the Republic. By 1988 ten former students had served in the South African Defence Force Jewish Chaplaincy, while other students had assisted congregations in local and outlying areas.⁴⁶

The institution also engaged in sharing resources with the broader community. This included Yeshiva Gedolah students spending three days at King David Linksfield in 1981 where they taught intensive Torah classes to 1,200 pupils during the periods reserved for Jewish studies.⁴⁷ In other acts of public engagement, the Rosh Yeshiva would present a

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See Hayman, “Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Sectors”, 114., and see also, *Bridging Worlds*, where former students speak of the difficulty of making youth forgo their Sunday leisure for fulltime study on that day.

⁴³ “Training Rabbis,” (editorial), *Federation Chronicle*, November, 1979.

⁴⁴ “Shul leaders pledge support for Yeshiva Gedolah”, *Federation Chronicle*, April 1980. The present value of R 100 is approx. R 2,750.

⁴⁵ “Religious Personnel” (editorial), *Jewish Tradition*, January 1987.

⁴⁶ Hayman, “Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Sectors,” 113.

⁴⁷ “1200-Pupil Torah Study”, *Federation Chronicle*, October 1981.

weekly general shiur to men and women at the Yeshiva's premises, where he would discuss the portion of the week or an upcoming festival. These shiurim were recorded and, once a month, 500 audio cassettes would be posted across South Africa, as well as to former South Africans living in Israel, Australia, England, U.S.A. and Canada.⁴⁸

In its second decade, even as the student body expanded less time was dedicated to community outreach. The graduating class of 1996 included two students, both hailing from Pretoria, who would play pivotal roles in the community. One was Craig Kacev, who served as a congregational rabbi for many years and later headed the South African Board of Jewish Education, where he remained at the helm for a decade and a half, before immigrating to Israel in 2021. The other more famous graduate was Warren Goldstein, who after ordination stayed on at the Yeshiva as one of its instructors while concurrently occupying important pulpits in Johannesburg. As we shall discuss later in greater detail, Goldstein was appointed the Chief Rabbi elect in 2003. A year later, Goldstein was officially inaugurated by his mentor Azriel Goldfein in the presence of President Thabo Mbeki as the new Chief Rabbi of South Africa.

Three years later, the 72-year-old founder of the Yeshiva Gedolah of Johannesburg died soon after handing the reins to two of his sons. Over the next decade, the Yeshiva continued to function and to ordain new rabbis. Recently, it relocated to the suburb of Glenhazel, where the majority of the Orthodox community resides. Alongside running a yeshiva, the Goldfein family set up an independent school network providing formal education for various age groups. Initially catering to the young alumni who were searching for a Jewish school to suit the needs of their children, these educational institutions began with the Hirsch Lyons nursery school which was founded in 1985 on the grounds of the Orange Grove Ninth Street Synagogue.⁴⁹ Three years later, a Grade 1 class was inaugurated, and each successive year a grade was added until it eventually developed into a co-educational primary school and separate boys' and girls' high schools.⁵⁰ This school network added to the tapestry of Jewish day schools in Johannesburg while providing an ethos based on the thinking of Rabbi Azriel Goldfein.

⁴⁸ "Torah taught in tapes", *Federation Chronicle*, November 1984. All these audio cassettes have been digitized and are located at <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=cloud.shiur.ygj&hl=en>, accessed on 19 December 2021.

⁴⁹ See Clarice Goldfein, interview by author, (Johannesburg, May 2017); Hayman, "Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Sectors", 98.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 106. Hayman's thesis predates the full establishment of the school, but mention is made there of the first grade 1 class.

3.3 *The Goldfein Doctrine*

It is difficult to place Rabbi Azriel Goldfein in any single camp within the Johannesburg Orthodox community.⁵¹ This is made harder by the fact that Goldfein declared himself, out of principle, to be unaffiliated to any organization. Citing his mentor and senior study partner, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, the Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe, Goldfein claimed he was strictly adhering to the former's directive that "Torah must supersede all political interests ... Torah must be affiliated with only Torah itself."⁵² His stated aim was therefore to be nominally apolitical and non-sectarian.

Certainly, his approach and attitude differed from that of the innovator movements, especially in their earlier phase. Like the accommodators mentioned here, Goldfein was firmly opposed to adding stringencies to Jewish Law. In some cases, he insinuated that not only were certain practices unnecessary, but that they were also contrary to the letter of the law. Examples of this category was the lighting of the giant Chanukah Menorah at Johannesburg's shopping malls organized by the Lubavitch Foundation. In his view this violated the laws of Chanukah candle lighting which required that the candles be lit at home or at the synagogue and not in a public square and that the Menorah itself be limited to a certain height, which was far exceeded by the giant Menorah.⁵³

On other occasions, Goldfein averred that stringencies were unnecessary and counterproductive, and that the financial and other intangible costs they sometimes caused were unjustified. In a statement that may be interpreted as an attack against Chabad and the Kollel for insisting on supervised milk and mistrusting some of the ritual slaughterers, he berated those who divided the community based on "tiny *chumras* [stringencies] on kosher milk, and shechita."⁵⁴ Unlike the innovator movements, which to a greater or lesser extent focus on mysticism and otherworldly subjects, he instructed his disciples to conduct

⁵¹ Rabbi Goldfein's philosophy, his lifework, and acts of kindness, are recorded in the hagiographic *Bridging Worlds* documentary. Other articles have discussed various aspects of his personality, but none has provided a detached academic examination, which still awaits publication. In the paragraphs below, a modest attempt is made to highlight those aspects of his philosophy that bear upon his Orthodox *Weltanschauung*.

⁵² See Hayman, "Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Sectors," 114; 'Yeshivah Gedolah of Johannesburg,' (Supplement), *SAJT*, 8 November 1985. Claims of being apolitical and unaffiliated should be considered aspirational, but not be taken at face value.

⁵³ Azriel Goldfein, "Chanukah - Hiddur Mitzvah - the challenges and pitfalls," 2004 (audio), <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B9OxqzObWrYWbjZhQzZwLWdJQIE?resourcekey=0-CzA9YBeNYZRZ6Nr6lb-gog>, accessed on 14 December 2021. For a discussion on the Jewish Law aspects related to a Giant menorah see Yair Hoffman "Public Lubavitch Menorah Displays and Halacha," 2015, <https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/headlines-breaking-stories/368933/public-lubavitch-menorah-displays-and-halacha.htm>, accessed on 14 December 2021.

⁵⁴ Azriel Goldfein, "Vayishlach - Frumkeit or Erlichkeit; Frumkeit or Torah" 1994, (audio), <https://torahdownloads.com/shiur-1029866.html>, accessed on 14 December 2021.

themselves as ordinary human beings and to appreciate the value of nutrition and of exercise.⁵⁵ He was also a strong proponent of following local custom in public, regardless of family traditions.⁵⁶ These pronouncements probably earned him accolades from the established community. It would, however, be unwise to perceive Goldfein's concessions as a sign he was fully consonant with the accommodationist camp.

Many of Goldfein's statements, and much of his conduct, place him firmly within the traditionalist school, and, in specific arenas, even further to its right. Unlike the Ministers' Training College which required three to four years of study of various aspects of Jewish thought, including Talmud study, Bible, and oratory, his Yeshiva was very traditionally oriented. He would only ordain students after they had undergone an intensive seven year course of Torah and Talmud study which laid an emphasis on the Litvish approach to scholarship and ethical integrity.⁵⁷ Indeed, it appears Goldfein did not see much value to secular culture, and any references to secularism in his shiurim appear to be negative and synonymous with permissiveness and sexual immorality.⁵⁸ For Goldfein Torah was the supreme value and imparted supreme wisdom.⁵⁹ While he allowed students to study for a primarily vocational UNISA degree during their spare time, he was generally not in favour of the liberal arts, and viewed university Jewish Studies curricula akin to heresy.⁶⁰ This was in stark contrast to the former South African Chief Rabbis who studied at universities in Europe and Britain. In fact two of their number, Judah Landau and Louis Rabinowitz, chaired the Hebrew Department at Wits University.⁶¹ As for Cyril Harris, he advocated for Jewish

⁵⁵ Azriel Goldfein, "Torah insights into physical health and nutrition" (audio), 1988 available at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0ByFFs3GqTdwaT04wRHJOLWtiQ2c?resourcekey=0-Jl221YmzCQmOChsMjPxU3g> ; Goldfein, "Torah guidelines for physical health and fitness" 1996 (audio) <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0ByFFs3GqTdwaT04wRHJOLWtiQ2c?resourcekey=0-Jl221YmzCQmOChsMjPxU3g>, both accessed on 14 December 2021.

⁵⁶ Robert Sussman, "Reflections on the Fourth Yahrzeit of Rabbi Azriel C. Goldfein, z"l, Parshas Vayishlach - 14 Kislev 5772 / 10 December 2011," https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Aw75eCJCf9KadY8aOypUrO3-2h5sfisHGC-xOb_SeSRafW93sQwa4r8ujS/view, accessed on 14 December 2021.

⁵⁷ Hayman, "Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Sectors," 113.

⁵⁸ Azriel Goldfein, "Ki Sisa - Sanctity and the secularization of the world," 2004 (audio) available at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0ByFFs3GqTdwaXNoWGNjLUtvUE0?resourcekey=0-rmqCD2rN4uogxjmc_zAng; *Idem.* "A decade ends - a new one dawns" (1989) (audio), available at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0ByFFs3GqTdwaT04wRHJOLWtiQ2c?resourcekey=0-Jl221YmzCQmOChsMjPxU3g>, both accessed on 14 December 2021. .

⁵⁹ Azriel Goldfein, "Chanukah - The struggle between the wisdom of the Greek Empire and the wisdom of Toras Yisrael" (1983), (audio), available at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B9OxqzObWrYWbjZhQzZwLWdJOIE?resourcekey=0-CzA9YBeNYZRZ6Nr6lb-gog>, accessed on 14 December 2021. .

⁶⁰ See Clarice Goldfein, interview; WhatsApp conversation between the author and Rabbi Matthew Liebenberg, a close disciple of Rabbi Goldfein, November 2021.

⁶¹ Katz, "History of Jewish Education in South Africa," 254; Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon*, 3.

students to study Judaism at university, bemoaning the fact that South African students were unfamiliar with academic Jewish studies, even if they attended yeshiva.⁶²

As a proponent of following the traditions of Jewish Lithuania, Goldfein preferred, but did not insist, that his disciples read Hebrew according to the Ashkenazi pronunciation and not the Israeli pronunciation that Rabinowitz had mandated by a nationwide directive in 1948.⁶³ Rabinowitz did this in order to familiarize the community with the pronunciation of modern spoken Hebrew. However, unlike the former Chief Rabbi, Goldfein was not enamoured with the modern State of Israel. There was little Zionism in Goldfein's teachings and in his yeshiva. Former disciples have confirmed that like Chabad and the Kollel, the Prayer for the State of Israel was not recited at the yeshiva on the Sabbath.⁶⁴ Yet, unlike the Kollel and Chabad, Goldfein succeeded in avoiding public scrutiny of his non-Zionist practices. This notwithstanding the fact that far from promoting immigration to Israel, Goldfein rallied against "indiscriminate Aliya" and encouraged many to stay the course in South Africa.⁶⁵

Goldfein's philosophical position, and that of his institution, was mixed but leaned in favour of the traditionalist school. After leading his independent Yeshiva for almost three decades, Goldfein produced a crop of rabbis serving all parts of South Africa and holding key positions in Johannesburg. They were neither part of the innovator movements, nor heirs to the accommodators, but succeeded in further diluting the strength of the accommodationist camp. In effect, with the marginalization of the accommodators, the rabbinic leadership of Orthodoxy in Johannesburg was now divided between traditionalists and innovators.

4. The Demise of the Accommodators

Effectively by the beginning of the twenty first century, the accommodators had become irrelevant. It is unlikely this was due solely to external competition. The influence that the innovators and the traditionalists, including Goldfein's graduates, exerted on their respective congregations and on the community as a whole certainly played a role in the marginalization of this position. Already by the 1980s, however, very few rabbis with accommodationist views occupied any position of significance in the Orthodox community owing primarily to death, emigration, and retirement, With the notable exception of Chief

⁶² Harris, *For Heaven's Sake*, 119-120.

⁶³ See chapter 3.

⁶⁴ WhatsApp conversation with Liebenberg. It should be noted that unlike the innovators, the Yeshiva Gedolah did recite a weekly prayer for the Israel Defence Forces.

⁶⁵ Goldfein, "Can South African Jewry Face the Challenges?"

Rabbi Cyril Harris, it does not appear anyone with an inclusive outlook was brought in from abroad to occupy a key pulpit. The question remains why this was so: why within the space of a few decades did the accommodationist view, so predominant leading up to the 1960s, lose its currency? Undoubtedly the Johannesburg community was becoming less receptive to the accommodationist message. This may have reflected changes within the broader political climate. As confrontational opposition to apartheid grew at home and abroad, as white South Africa was increasingly ostracised, and as the government promoted a laager mentality, a more inward-looking orientation may have gained additional traction. Similarly, the ethos of separate development and ethnic particularism that was intrinsic to apartheid may have also favoured a turn to particularism. Equally important was a growing sense of insecurity and siege. In such a climate, those who promised an inward looking approach and intense religious experience may have been at an advantage. Of course, developments in Jewish Johannesburg also reflected broader processes in the Jewish world in these same decades. Elsewhere, revivalist and fervent religious movements gained ground in this same period.

For those in Johannesburg feeling under siege, the traditionalist zeal within the Mizrachi party and its Bnei Akiva affiliate, which gathered steam from the mid-1960s would probably have been much more attractive. Perhaps the successes of Kollel and Chabad in the early 1970s were signs that many in the community preferred to relate to their Judaism in a parochial fashion. After all, the political and social climate in Johannesburg was geared towards a segregationist impulse which may have become amplified over the decades. While the innovators emphasised differences within humanity and were unashamedly proud of their spiritual superiority vis-a-vis the gentiles, the accommodators would have been repelled by such notions, so that not only would they have not agreed to immigrate to South Africa, some of those already in South Africa would have been prompted to leave.

Fashions changed too. Over time, more sought an intimate religious experience. For that reason, the Bnei Akiva model of a small community-run synagogue that had been unique to the fifties and sixties was becoming more popular and ubiquitous in the seventies and eighties.⁶⁶ Typically, these smaller establishments were led by rabbis more interested in teaching the minutiae of Jewish law than wide-ranging ethical principles, and more focused on their small congregation than on the broader community. This trend, and the declining popularity of the big synagogue, obviated the need to seek a rabbi with an inclusive mind-set,

⁶⁶ The phenomenon of the *Shtiebl* has been briefly discussed in chapter 5.

who in turn saw it his duty to take care of all segments: the observant as well as the non-observant. As synagogues became smaller and more like-minded, it became less necessary for congregational rabbis to tailor their teaching and rulings to suit a broader and more diverse constituency. Instead, traditionalist rabbis, well versed in Jewish law, became the favoured option in many *shtieblach*. In the South African context this trend of favouring small sized congregations where the preacher is immersed in religious teachings to the exclusion of broader society has its parallel, as mentioned above, in the “house church” movement, and its “politically neutral gospel”.⁶⁷

The move away from accommodation towards parochialism during the last decades of the twentieth century was not unique to Johannesburg. It had precedent in the Jewish world, especially in English-speaking countries. Historians and sociologists have noted a rightward shift among the modern Orthodox in the United States, with one labelling this trend the “Haredization” of American Orthodoxy.⁶⁸ Indeed, by the end of the twentieth century various factors contributed to this shift. This included the failure of moderates at Yeshiva University in New York to encourage candidate rabbis to embrace modern scholarship and the subsequent retreat from serious intellectualism.⁶⁹ This came to the fore in the increased hiring of personable but unscholarly Chabad rabbis for mainstream synagogues, and the decreasing publication of Orthodox academic journals.⁷⁰ Concurrently, many graduates of Modern Orthodox institutions uncritically accepted the authority and rulings of Haredi decisors. This has resulted in the adoption of purportedly unnecessary stringencies.⁷¹ In a seminal lecture, the noted sociologist Samuel Heilman attributed the right-wing shift to the failure of Modern Orthodox parents to encourage their children to enter the teaching profession. This resulted in a dearth of modern teachers qualified in Jewish studies and a concomitant increased reliance on Haredi educators at Modern Orthodox day schools. This reliance has produced a generation of students heavily impacted by a Haredi approach to

⁶⁷ See Domeris, "Revivalist Movements in South African Churches," 19; Goodhew, "Growth and Decline in South Africa's Churches, 1960-91," 361

⁶⁸ Chaim I. Waxman, "The Haredization of American Orthodox Jewry," *Jerusalem Letter / Viewpoints*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 15 February 1998, <https://jcpa.org/article/the-haredization-of-american-orthodox-jewry/>, accessed on 14 December 2021. Interestingly, the trend in the United States towards Haredization may have been arrested at the beginning of the 21st century, with the popularity of the Open Orthodox Yeshivat Chovevey Torah. Writing in 2011, Waxman reversed course suggesting there may have been a leftward shift, (see Yehuda Turetsky and Chaim I. Waxman, "Sliding to the Left? Contemporary American Modern Orthodoxy," *Modern Judaism*, 31(2), May 2011: 119-141, <https://academic.oup.com/mj/article-abstract/31/2/119/1202838> .

⁶⁹ Zev Eleff, "From Teacher to Scholar to Pastor: The Evolving Postwar Modern Orthodox Rabbinate," *American Jewish History*, 98(4), October 2014: 307.

⁷⁰ Zev Eleff, "The Orthodox Rabbinate and its Chabad Revolution" *Looking Forward*, 2014: 42, https://www.academia.edu/12270128/The_Orthodox_Rabbinate_and_its_Chabad_Revolution.

⁷¹ Waxman, "The Haredization of American Orthodox Jewry", 1.

Judaism.⁷² On a congregational level, the commonplace practice until the 1950s for non-observant synagogue-goers to affiliate themselves to Orthodox congregations has gradually declined. Certainly, the availability of Conservative synagogues has caused some non-observant members to switch denominations. Yet an increasing “rigidity” on the part of congregational rabbis, and their tendency to “patrol the borders of Orthodoxy” has also accounted for the exclusion of the non-observant Orthodox from the broad tent of Orthodoxy.⁷³

In her article on the transformation of Orthodoxy in Britain, Miri Freud-Kendal notes that up until 1967 the mainstream United Synagogue practiced Minhag Anglia (literally: English custom), a modus vivendi that allowed congregants, most of whom were lax in their religious observance, to affiliate with Orthodoxy while maintaining their dual Jewish and British identities.⁷⁴ This changed upon the accession of Immanuel Jakobovits to the Chief Rabbinate; he sought to undermine this philosophy, improve religiosity, and “push Anglo-Jewry to the right of the religious scale of values.”⁷⁵ He did this fully cognizant of the fact that he risked alienating those to the left of him, and yet he decided the inevitable fallout was worth the gains of a more religiously committed Anglo Jewry. This narrow approach, which resulted in a declining membership of the United Synagogue, was a matter of concern to the lay leadership. As with South Africa’s choice of Cyril Harris, the British laity appointed Jonathan Sacks to succeed Jakobovits in 1992 in an attempt to stem the tide of religious extremism and in the hope that he would succeed in fostering inclusivism.⁷⁶ Though Sacks’ leadership witnessed a renewal of Jewish identity, it is a matter of debate whether British Jewry became more inclusive as a result; the preponderance of the evidence suggests inclusivism did not take hold.⁷⁷ It appears that the experience in the United States

⁷² See Samuel C. Heilman, “How Did Fundamentalism Manage to Infiltrate Contemporary Orthodoxy? The Marshall Sklare Lecture,” *Contemporary Jewry* 25, 2005:258-272; Heilman, *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2006.

⁷³ Zev Eleff, “The Vanishing Non-Observant Orthodox Jew,” *Lehrhaus*, 8 June 2017, <https://thelehrhaus.com/commentary/the-vanishing-non-observant-orthodox-jew>, accessed on 14 December 2021. Eleff also cites Jeffrey Gurock, “The winnowing of American Orthodoxy,” in Marc Lee Raphael (editor) *Approaches to Modern Judaism*. Vol. II. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984, 41-53.

⁷⁴ Miri Freud-Kendal, “*Minhag Anglia*: The Transition of Orthodox Judaism in Britain,” *Pardes*, 2012: 39.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* at 44.

⁷⁶ For all Jonathan Sacks’ success as a Jewish public intellectual, his efforts to introduce an inclusive agenda was hampered by his surrender to the right wing Beth Din, and his deference to that body, which saw him refuse to attend Limmud’s conferences (see Gary Rosenblatt, “Why the Chief Rabbi isn’t at Limmud UK,” *New York Jewish Week*, 29 December 2010. <https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/why-the-chief-rabbi-isnt-at-limmuduk>).

⁷⁷ See “Freud-Kandel on Persoff, ‘Another Way, Another Time: Religious Inclusivism and the Sacks Chief Rabbinate,” (book review) H-Judaic, May 2011 <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28655/reviews/30791/freud-kandel-persoff-another-way-another-time-religious-inclusivism-and>, accessed on 14 December 2021, where

and United Kingdom confirms that the pattern seen in Johannesburg was part of a global rightward trend.

While Johannesburg was directly impacted by innovators educated in the United Kingdom and the United States, there are important differences between these two countries and South Africa. In the western world, broader society, especially the urban sector with which Jewish communities primarily mingle, tend to be liberal minded. Moreover, from at least the post Second World War period, Jews in those countries have enjoyed a relatively comfortable lifestyle. Though the Jewish community in South Africa has for the most part not been discriminated against, and in the contemporary period has not suffered from overt antisemitism, it has undergone crises that have impacted its religious revival. Its experience with violence, economic uncertainty and mass emigration has made it defensive, which may have diminished the universalistic impulses seen in its peer communities. In such a situation, retreating to small sheltered religious congregations is particularly attractive. Moreover, the general population in South Africa tends to be far more religious than in the urban centres in the United States and the United Kingdom where most Jews live, thus the choice of many Jews to seek religious intensification is in line with trends in the general populace.

5. *The Ascension of Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein and the traditionalist takeover of the Chief Rabbinate*

5.1 *Appointment of Warren Goldstein as Chief Rabbi*

In 2003, Chief Rabbi Cyril K. Harris, who had endeared himself to the Jewish community as well as to the broader public, and enjoyed a close relationship with Nelson Mandela, announced he would retire at the end of the following year.⁷⁸ In December 2003, the Union of Orthodox Synagogues (UOS) appointed Warren Goldstein as Harris's successor.⁷⁹ At age 32, Goldstein was the youngest person to be selected as Chief Rabbi and the first to be born in South Africa. He apprenticed under Harris in 2004 while bearing the title of Chief Rabbi elect, and was installed as Chief Rabbi in early 2005. He had co-authored a book with Nelson Mandela's grandson and recently completed his doctoral

Freud Kendal declares: "The extent to which Sacks can take credit for revitalization is questionable, and Orthodox inclusivism has not been a prominent feature in many of the types of renewal that have occurred."

⁷⁸ Harris, *For Heaven's Sake*, 206-215.

⁷⁹ See Milton Shain, "South Africa," *American Jewish Yearbook*, 104 (2004), 486.

dissertation at the Wits Law School which dealt with the contemporary relevance of Jewish law.⁸⁰ This was later published into a book by the strictly orthodox Feldheim publishers.⁸¹

Goldstein's nomination was acclaimed by his predecessor as a "bold and inspired move," and he received endorsements from Rabbi Boruch Grossnass, head of the Kollel Yad Saul, and by the Ohr Somayach faculty.⁸² Beyond the Jewish community, he was praised by newspapers across the national political spectrum.⁸³ In an interview with *Haaretz*, Goldstein described himself as "defying labels," a public stance in line with that of his mentor, Rabbi Azriel Goldfein.⁸⁴ As evidence of this, he pointed to having served as a rabbi at a Bnei Akiva shul, at an establishment synagogue, and more recently at the "Haredi" Ohr Somayach affiliate. Proud of this non-sectarian approach, he claimed this was "a tradition" in South Africa that he hoped "to continue and to nurture."⁸⁵ Goldstein has since changed the Chief Rabbinate and moved it rightward. The first Chief Rabbi to have been trained at a traditional Yeshiva, his tenure, if not reminiscent of the innovator movements, has been strongly traditionalist in orientation and sympathy.

During his years as Chief Rabbi, Goldstein has been active on many fronts, ranging from the religious to the political and social.⁸⁶ In this section we outline his religious projects while devoting space to some of the controversies that have plagued his term of office.

5.2 *Goldstein's Initiatives*

In 2005, immediately following his inauguration, Goldstein launched a series of seminars on ethics for Jewish health care professionals, lawyers, and businessmen.⁸⁷ Around 2007, in a move that foretold a ministry heavily invested in mass communications, Goldstein launched his "Chief Rabbi on Air" half hour weekly SABC radio program, reportedly

⁸⁰ See Warren Goldstein and Dumani Mandela, *African Soul Talk: When Politics Is Not Enough*, (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2005); Milton Shain "South Africa," *American Jewish Yearbook*, 105 (2005), 536.

⁸¹; Warren Goldstein, *Defending the Human Spirit: Jewish Law's Vision for a Moral Society*, (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2005).

⁸² Cyril Harris, "An Optimistic Indicator of the Continuation of South African Jewry," *Jewish Tradition*, Shavuot 5764, [June], 2004; Grossnass, interview.

⁸³ "Rabbi Warren Goldstein: A New Generation Jewish Leader," (feature article), *Jewish Tradition*, Shavuot, 5764, [June], 2004.

⁸⁴ Charlotte Halle, "Native Son Is South Africa's New Chief Rabbi," *Haaretz*, 17 December 2004, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4839703/>

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ See details of the neighbourhood security service developed by the Office of the Chief Rabbi, the Community Active Protection – CAP, mentioned in Chief Rabbi's Report: UOS Conference 2007 <http://ww1.chief Rabbi.co.za/2007/08/uos-conference-august-2007-chief-rabbis-report>, accessed on 14 December 2021.

⁸⁷ Milton Shain, "South Africa," *American Jewish Yearbook*, 106 (2006), 553.

attracting a listenership of between 14,000 and 17,000 across the country.⁸⁸ In 2009, in a joint venture with the Board of Jewish Education and head of OhrSom, Rabbi Ryan Goldstein, the Chief Rabbi instituted a Bet Midrash [study hall] program at King David Linksfield. For the first time students were exposed to an option of in-depth Talmud or in-depth Chumash [Pentateuch] study. In line with the classical Yeshiva method, students studied in pairs, before being taught by the teacher.⁸⁹ This program reflected Goldstein’s belief that, irrespective of their level of observance, all students had the right to experience intensive Torah study.⁹⁰ In January 2010 this program was expanded to include Cape Town’s Herzlia High School, and a few months later King David Victory Park in Johannesburg was added.⁹¹ In 2011, two new projects were inaugurated, namely Sinai Indaba and Generation Sinai. The first was led by the Office of the Chief Rabbi, in partnership with other rabbis, shuls, and outreach organizations. Held over two days at upmarket convention centres in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban -- with Johannesburg’s attendance numbering in the thousands -- it brought together international speakers from around the Jewish world to discuss current Jewish issues. Designed to provide a “Torah perspective,” the speakers were strictly Orthodox and selected by the Chief Rabbi with input from Chabad, Mizrachi, and Ohr Somayach, all of which participated in funding the event.⁹² The organizers were careful to include a fair number of women in the main line-up following a growing worldwide trend even among the strictest Orthodox organizations.⁹³ In its inaugural year the venture was enthusiastically received by the Jewish press, with the *Jewish Report* calling it “a breath of fresh air which will be long remembered.”⁹⁴

That same year the Chief Rabbi also introduced Generation Sinai, a coordinated mass parent and child learning session on the Friday preceding the Festival of Shavuot. At almost every Jewish day school across the nation parents came to learn a “pre-arranged piece of Torah” with their children, who had previously revised it at school. Calling it “probably the

⁸⁸ “Chief Rabbi’s Report: UOS Conference 2007”, <http://ww1.chiefrabbi.co.za/2007/08/uos-conference-august-2007-chief-rabbis-report>, accessed on 14 December 2021.

⁸⁹ “Chief Rabbi’s Report: UOS Conference 2009,” <http://ww1.chiefrabbi.co.za/2009/08/uos-conference-august-2009-chief-rabbis-report>, accessed on 14 December 2021.

⁹⁰ See Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein, interview by author, (Johannesburg, May 2017).

⁹¹ “Chief Rabbi’s Report: UOS Conference 2011,” <http://ww1.chiefrabbi.co.za/2011/08/uos-conference-august-2011-chief-rabbis-report>, accessed on 14 December 2021.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Ferziger, *Beyond Sectarianism*, 195-210. See also discussion in chapter 1.

⁹⁴ “A gathering good for the soul” (editorial), *SAJR*, 24 June 2011, <https://4crdug1m1izqix01u1hvesh1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/24-june-2011.pdf>. The same edition devoted four pages (2-4,6) to reports on the content of the sessions. The event was, in the main, sponsored anonymously. As we shall indicate below, the initiative was almost certainly in response to the Limmud conference, to which UOS rabbis had been banned from attending by the Chief Rabbi and the Beth Din.

single largest Torah learning event that a community has ever experienced,” Goldstein reported that between 8,000 and 9,000 students and between 3,000 and 4,000 parents participated at the inaugural event. Johannesburg’s Jewish community radio station, Chai FM, provided live coverage.⁹⁵ These initiatives were accompanied by high levels of media publicity, heretofore uncommon for the Office of Chief Rabbi.⁹⁶ As we shall discuss below, Goldstein consciously chose to market his activities, claiming it would add prestige to his agenda of spreading what he regarded as Torah values. He was unabashed in his aims of drawing international acclaim for South African Jewry in general, and his projects in particular.

Two projects in 2013 catapulted South Africa’s Chief Rabbi into the international arena. The first was the publication of a book titled *Legacy: Teachings for Life from the Great Lithuanian Rabbis* which Goldstein had jointly authored with the popular Orthodox historian Rabbi Berel Wein.⁹⁷ One function of this book, as Goldstein admitted, was to set out his “moral and strategic vision” for the “Jewish community’s internal challenges.”⁹⁸ Another function, equally important, was to pay tribute to the authors’ mentors, who in Goldstein’s case was Rabbi Azriel Goldfein, whose teachings and anecdotes are frequently cited in the footnotes. Visual expression of this intention may be seen in the book’s inside cover. It displays a photograph taken in the 1950s of a young Goldfein in conversation with his colleague Avraham Tanzer as they walk alongside America’s greatest Torah sages, all of whom studied and lectured at Lithuanian Yeshivas. By using this photograph, the co-authors attempt to broadcast the message that South Africa’s Chief Rabbi was a true heir to the Lithuanian legacy.⁹⁹ Wein’s reputation as conservatively Orthodox with no formal ties,

⁹⁵ “Chief Rabbi’s Report: UOS Conference 2011”; Alison Goldberg “History made with Generation Sinai,” *SAJR*, 10 June 2011, <https://4crdug1mlizqix01ulhvsh1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/10-june-2011.pdf>

⁹⁶ As noted, Bernard Casper initiated annual radio broadcasts (see Casper, *Broadcasts and Papers*), and Harris occasionally appeared in the media, but their projects had little advertising or publicity.

⁹⁷ Berel Wein and Warren Goldstein, *Legacy: Teachings for Life from the Great Lithuanian Rabbis*, Jerusalem: Maggid, 2012.

⁹⁸ Bayla Sheva Brenner, “Conversing with Chief Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein”, *Jewish Action*, Winter 2013, <https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/people/conversing-chief-rabbi-dr-warren-goldstein>.

⁹⁹ For reviews, see Wallace Greene “The Legacy: Teachings for Life from the Great Lithuanian Rabbis” (Book Review), *Jewish Book Council*, December, 2013 <https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/book/the-legacy-teachings-for-life-from-the-great-lithuanian-rabbis>; Kimberly Hay, “On Torah Values and the Courage to Rebuild: A Review of The Legacy,” *Kol Hamevaser*, 6:6 April 28, 2013: 21-22, <https://repository.yu.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.12202/4891/Kol%20Hamevaser%206.6-holocaust-catastrophe%20April%202013.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; Allan Jay Gerber, “The Kosher Bookworm: The legacy of the great Lithuanian Rabbis: another Berel Wein classic,” *The Jewish Star*, December 27, 2012 <https://www.thejewishstar.com/stories/The-Kosher-Bookworm-The-legacy-of-the-great-Lithuanian-Rabbis-another-Berel-Wein-classic.3766>.

either to modern Orthodox or to Haredim, but embraced by moderate elements of both, might very well have appealed to Goldstein's self-portrayal as non-sectarian.¹⁰⁰ Over the course of the year the book enjoyed some measure of success and was launched in Israel, England and the United States.¹⁰¹ These events brought the Chief Rabbi into contact with major Jewish figures in the global Orthodox community.¹⁰²

5.3 *The Shabbos Project*

Notwithstanding the international recognition the abovementioned book brought Goldstein, it would pale in comparison with that year's other new initiative: the Shabbos [or Shabbat] Project.¹⁰³ On the last day of the Sinai Indaba in 2013, it was announced that from Friday 11 October at sundown until stars out Saturday on the 12th the South African Jewish community would endeavour to observe the Sabbath "in its entirety, in all of its detail and splendour as set out in *The Code of Jewish Laws*." Over the next three months, "written video and audio material providing the philosophy and ideas of Shabbos", as well as the "practical guidelines of how to keep it," were disseminated to the community.¹⁰⁴ Even if not every one of the latter observed the Sabbath on the appointed date, the first Shabbos project proved successful beyond the expectations of its prime initiator, and immediately plans were afoot to replicate its success around the world.

Partnering with various organizations and working primarily with volunteers, the first international Shabbos Project was launched in 2014, reaching 465 cities in over 60 countries.¹⁰⁵ Every succeeding year these numbers grew and by 2018 Jewish communities in 1,511 cities spread across 101 countries, speaking ten different languages, with a total

¹⁰⁰ See Alan Rosenbaum, "The unique life story of Rabbi Berel Wein, a scholar of the past," *Jerusalem Post*, 20 December, 2019, where Wein attributes his programs' success to the fact that they "speak to the entire Jewish people, and ... are not agenda-driven."

¹⁰¹ "Chief Rabbi's Report: UOS Conference 2013," <http://ww1.chiefrabbi.co.za/2013/08/chief-rabbis-report-uos-conference-august-2013>, accessed on 14 December 2021. For an audio presentation of the book launch at Yeshiva University, New York see Rabbi Warren Goldstein, "A Moral and Strategic Vision for the Jewish People Today," yutorah.org, 7 April 2013. <https://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecture.cfm/792232/rabbi-warren-goldstein/a-moral-and-strategic-vision-for-the-jewish-people-today>, accessed on 14 December 2021.

¹⁰² See "Chief Rabbi's Report: UOS Conference 2013."

¹⁰³ C.B. Lieber, "Claim to Fame: Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein," *Mishpacha*, 2 November, 2016; <https://www.theshabbosproject.org/en/home>. See also Goldstein, interview where he explains that the project was interchangeably called the Shabbos Project and the Shabbat Project, signifying that irrespective of how one pronounced the Sabbath: Shabbos among ultraorthodox, and Shabbat among modern orthodox, the Project belonged to everyone.

¹⁰⁴ "Chief Rabbi's Report: UOS Conference 2013. (13. The Shabbos Project)." The project received enthusiastic support and coverage by the Jewish press leading up to, and following, the main event (see for example Shira Druion, "Shabbos Project' gets thumbs-up all round," *SAJR*, 13 September 2013; Ant Katz, "Chief Rabbi's Shabbos Project put a spring in community's step," *SAJR*, 25 October 2013.)

¹⁰⁵ Lieber, "Claim to Fame."

estimate of one million individuals were keeping Shabbat together.¹⁰⁶ Mass events were organized before and after the nominated Sabbath: baking of the ritual Sabbath bread or Challah, and a concert by popular Orthodox musicians performing at Havdalah. In 2018, there were record attendances at events before, during and after Shabbat. Challah-baking in Buenos Aires attracted 8,000 women. In a Los Angeles neighbourhood, 3,000 Jews participated at a Shabbat dinner while seated at 300 tables spread over five city blocks; and on Saturday night, a record breaking 10,000 Jews enjoyed a Havdalah concert in Melbourne.¹⁰⁷ Key to the project's success, according to Goldstein, was the fact that it mandated complete observance so that the many who kept it for the first time did so through total "immersion" in the Sabbath experience.¹⁰⁸ Beyond the anecdotes of those who kept the Sabbath for the first time, Goldstein and his international partners are hoping for increased Sabbath observance in both quality and quantity; and for a newfound global Jewish unity centred around common adherence to this fundamental mitzvah [commandment].¹⁰⁹

At this stage is difficult to gauge the project's impact: will it generate lasting change in Johannesburg and beyond? In the meantime, the Project has garnered overwhelmingly positive coverage from the Jewish local and international press. Unsurprisingly, some non-Orthodox movements were disturbed by the Project's implicit claim that Orthodox observance was the exclusive way in which the Sabbath ought to be celebrated.¹¹⁰ Yet, there were also criticisms emerging from the Orthodox camp, with some concerned that with the passing of the years, fatigue has set in and the Project was no longer having the effect it once had.¹¹¹ Others have wondered whether the Project has really improved Sabbath observance. Was it an example of what Nachum Rabinovitch, in a different context, disparagingly

¹⁰⁶ Yonason Rosenblum, "Power Broker at the Pulpit," *Mishpacha*, August 28, 2019; JTA "Shabbat Project reaches more than 1 million people in 97 countries," *Times of Israel*, 30 October, 2017. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/shabbat-project-reaches-more-than-1-million-people-in-97-countries>.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ See "Conversation - Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein" (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bha6nErPBIY>, accessed on 14 December 2021. In this interview between Goldstein and Efreim Goldberg, the latter asks the Chief Rabbi, several times, if Shabbat could be observed partially, but Goldstein politely and firmly rejects anything other than total observance. See also Rosenblum "Power Broker at the Pulpit."

¹⁰⁹ Rosenblum, "Power Broker at the Pulpit;" See also resources at the official website, www.theshabbosproject.org/en/home.

¹¹⁰ Zoe Jick, "The Shabbos Project: Global Jewish Outreach Gone Wrong," *Haaretz* 24 October, 2014 <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/premium-where-the-shabbos-project-falls-short-1.5319080>; Dan Goldberg "Progressive Aussie Jews Fear Global 'Shabbat Project' Misses the Point," *Haaretz*, 21 October 2014. <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/premium-not-all-aussie-jews-joining-the-shabbat-project-1.5318157>

¹¹¹ See Aubrey Lampert, "Shabbos Project Overdone," *SAJR*, 2 November, 2018 <https://4crdug1mlizqix01u1hvesh1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2018-11-02.pdf>; Michele Engelberg, "Shabbos Project still an inspiration today," *SAJR*, 29 November, 2018, <https://4crdug1mlizqix01u1hvesh1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019-11-29.pdf>

referred to as “public relations” Judaism? And had it merely promoted the Goldstein brand?¹¹²

5.4 *Spiritual Entrepreneurship*

Underlying these various projects is a philosophy that the Chief Rabbi, revealing his business minded approach, has labelled spiritual entrepreneurship.¹¹³ This rests on what he describes as three principles: (1) all Jews must be treated as equals. One cannot talk down to any Jew, for we are all brothers and sisters. Irrespective of one’s level of observance the materials produced must appeal to everyone; (2) The Torah should be pure and authentic and as close to what is Hashem’s original Torah. The more diluted it is the less effective one will be; and (3) The Torah has to be in a *kli mefoar* (a beautiful vessel). This relates to aesthetic presentation and to relevance.¹¹⁴

In line with these principle, in projects such as Sinai Indaba and the Shabbos Project the marketing materials must be written in a way that appeals to Jews of all (Orthodox) shades and may not be condescending in any way. It means secondly, that the content, in the case of the Indaba, or the Laws of Shabbat in the case of the Shabbos project, are reflective of what he regards as pure uncompromised Halacha. Like his mentor, Goldstein does not seek stringency, but any teachings contradicting traditional Torah and Halacha must be excluded. It means thirdly that the presentations are not of mere theoretical or intellectual value but must have relevance. When it comes to the Indaba, relevance means the speakers should adhere to Rabbi Mordechai Pinchas Teitz’s motto which Goldstein has incorporated into his talks and podcasts, *viz*: “The Torah speaks in the language of tomorrow.”¹¹⁵ In the case of the Shabbos Project, relevance means that observing Shabbat is presented as a force that unifies Jewish communities, that fends off problems such as assimilation or drift, and that offers a haven from the demands of daily life.¹¹⁶

The concept of a “beautiful” vessel requires that the packaging must be sophisticated, and in turn, command respect. For that reason, the Indaba is hosted in the most upmarket

¹¹² Conversations between the author and anonymous prominent members of the community.

¹¹³ Warren Goldstein, interview. See also video presentation on “Spiritual Entrepreneurship: Leadership Principles for Rebuilding Jerusalem and Redeeming the World,” available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prupfVZ2CFc> , accessed on 14 December 2021.

¹¹⁴ The idea of a beautiful vessel originates with Rabbi Mottel Katz, first Rosh yeshiva of Telshe Cleveland, (see Goldstein interview; Rosenblum, “Power Broker at the Pulpit”).

¹¹⁵ See https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/the-language-of-tomorrow-chief-rabbi-warren-LF1sm_CYqR3/, accessed on 14 December 2021.

¹¹⁶ See Goldstein, interview. The relevance of Shabbat as articulated by Goldstein contrasts sharply with that of Louis Rabinowitz, who as we noted in chapter 3, describes it as an ethically mandated rest day.

convention centres, and the Shabbos Project is marketed so as to impress the casual uninitiated onlooker, and in turn, so Goldstein hopes, cause G-d's name to be sanctified. The Chief Rabbi believes that the key to succeeding in these projects is to ensure each element mentioned above is at its optimal level.

Beyond the “spiritual entrepreneurship” entailed in these projects, Goldstein has acknowledged the importance of another dimension to both the Sinai Indaba and to the Shabbos Project: international publicity.¹¹⁷ According to the Chief Rabbi, the initiatives have had the “great benefit of promoting the image and standing of South African Jewry around the world, which has multiple benefits for our community [and] gives South African Jewry its rightful place of pride within Klal Yisrael [The People of Israel].”¹¹⁸

Clearly much planning and thought has gone into Goldstein's philosophy, and it reflects his ambition to spread Orthodoxy far and wide, irrespective of the levels of observance or religious background of his intended audience. Understandably, since it is an initiative of the Office of the Chief Rabbi, the syllabus presented at Generation Sinai is devised by Goldstein and reflects his views. Yet, when it comes to an event such as the Sinai Indaba, which purports to provide a range of ideas and opinions, even a cursory glance at the list of speakers reveals a hesitancy to host anyone who would challenge the *Weltanschauung* of the traditionalists and innovators.¹¹⁹ There are no speakers from heterodox movements, but nor are there those that represent more liberal or unconventional outlooks on Judaism.¹²⁰ The format of the convention, where speakers address mass audiences for 45 minutes, does not appear to lend itself to in-depth grappling with source materials. Judging by the titles of the speeches, the content leans more to the inspirational than the intellectual.

5.5 *Controversies*

Right at the beginning of his tenure, Goldstein became embroiled in controversy when he declined an invitation to attend the tenth memorial service for Israel's assassinated prime minister Yitzhak Rabin after discovering a Progressive rabbi would be in attendance. Goldstein's refusal was based on a Concordat signed in 1965 between Chief Rabbi Bernard

¹¹⁷ “Chief Rabbi's Report: UOS Conference 2013.”

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ It appears that most of the speakers are affiliated with Chabad, Aish Hatorah, Ohr Somayach, Mizrahi, and a variety of outreach movements, and these include rabbis and other entertainers who present their stories. There are also political commentators, who discuss Israel and the Jewish world, but they are not there to provide a religious perspective. Occasionally Chief Rabbis from other countries have also taken part. With the notable exception of Rabbi Dr. Sam Lebens and perhaps several others, most guests tend to present a conservative view.

¹²⁰ See, for example, Avraham Weiss, “Open Orthodoxy, A Modern Orthodox Rabbi's Creed,” *Judaism*, Fall, 1997, 46, 4:409-421, available at <https://library.yctora.org/files/2016/07/aw-open-orthodoxy.pdf>.

Casper and Rabbi Arthur Super, spiritual head of the United Progressive Jewish Congregation of Johannesburg, which barred an Orthodox rabbi from sharing the platform with a reform rabbi at religious events. Yet the said Concordat explicitly excluded “social, welfare and other non-religious matters,” including the “annual memorial meeting for victims of the Holocaust” where cooperation for the general communal interest was encouraged.¹²¹ Objectors to Goldstein’s actions wondered why the Chief Rabbi did not view the Rabin memorial as a “non-religious matter” in the same vein as a memorial to Holocaust victims. Writing in the Jewish press, Mendel Kaplan, complained that the community was being “pushed by a small minority to be intolerant of the broad house of Judaism.”¹²² Answering his critics, the new Chief Rabbi distinguished between his indiscriminate embrace of every Jew, and his more qualified acceptance of what constitutes Judaism. “As Chief Rabbi of every single Jew in this country,” he explained “I preach Torah Judaism in its authentic form. I can't with a clear conscience call something Judaism if it is not.”¹²³ Over time this incident was forgotten, but only because it was superseded by other events that created tension between the Chief Rabbi and the broader community.

Given Goldstein’s long and still ongoing tenure, it was unavoidable that some opposition to his policies would be voiced. Space does not allow recapping all the occasions when objections were raised. At least two incidents do, however, merit discussion as they appear to have had a lifespan longer than desired by the protagonists. To a certain extent, they are also emblematic of Goldstein’s leadership. In early 2005, the Chief Rabbi attended a Yom HaShoa [Holocaust Day] memorial service. For the first time, instead of an all-male choir, the program included a solo piece by a teenage female singer. Publicly disapproving this change, and out of a stated concern that the young woman’s singing voice violated the Halacha of *Kol Isha* [literally: the voice of a woman], which proscribes males from listening to a female singing, Goldstein walked out.¹²⁴ In response, one outraged critic wondered how an adolescent singing at a sombre memorial event could be considered “sexually arousing” and consequently prohibited under the Kol Isha law. Even if it was the case, she questioned whether it was so severe as to justify embarrassing the singer, and in the process violating the

¹²¹ Milton Shain, “South Africa,” *American Jewish Yearbook*, 106, (2006), 555. Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 233.

¹²² Shain, “South Africa,” 106, 555.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ See *SAJR*, 3 June 2005.

grave prohibitions against shaming a fellow human being.¹²⁵ Others, calling this action “the institutionalization of ultra-Orthodox customs” warned that Goldstein would be held responsible for “broadening the gap between secular and religious Jews in South Africa.”¹²⁶ For his part, the Chief Rabbi remained unrepentant, and in a retrospective interview he insisted that the “key to communal leadership” was “adhering to core principles... comprised of Torah values... If your leadership is going to be based on what is most pleasing to people, you have no compass.”¹²⁷ Goldstein’s elevation of a blanket prohibition on Kol Isha to a “core principle” does not appear universally accepted, even in Orthodox circles. Among the more liberal wing of Modern Orthodoxy in Israel, the approach to Kol Isha is more nuanced. Indeed in 2011, several rabbis were willing to grant Halachic permission to male soldiers to attend military ceremonies containing female singing, after the Israel Defence Force had denied them a religious exemption.¹²⁸ Some rabbis have even allowed women generally to sing at official functions. Admittedly, the more conservative wing of Orthodoxy, along with the Haredi world, completely forbids it under any circumstances.¹²⁹ By holding the last mentioned position, Goldstein, it appears, planted himself firmly within the conservative camp of Orthodoxy.

In the wake of this affair, the Office of the Chief Rabbi declared that no official ceremony, including subsequent Holocaust memorials, would permit female singing.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Nadya Wynchank, “Beware a flawed compass in the kol isha brouhaha,” (letters to the editor), *SAJR*, 24 June 2016, <https://www.sajr.co.za/beware-a-flawed-compass-in-the-kol-isha-brouhaha>.

¹²⁶ Chaya Herman, “The Jewish community in the post-apartheid era: same narrative, different meaning,” *Transformation Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 63(1): 34 [https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/5090/Herman_Jewish\(2007\).pdf?sequence=1](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/5090/Herman_Jewish(2007).pdf?sequence=1), accessed on 14 December 2021.

¹²⁷ Brenner “Conversing with Chief Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein.”

¹²⁸ See discussion of the sources in Laurie Novick, Ezra Bick, Ilana Elzufon, and Shayna Goldberg, (editors) “Kol Isha II: Mutual Responsibility,” <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/halakha/studies-halakha/women-and-mitzvot/kol-isha-ii-mutual-responsibility>, accessed on 14 December 2021.

¹²⁹ See the stringent views cited in Moshe Lichtenstein, “Kol Isha: A Women’s Voice,” *Tradition*, Spring, 2013. 46(1): 17-18.

¹³⁰ More than a decade later, in 2016, the Cape Board of Deputies barred a woman from signing at Cape Town’s Yom HaShoa event, which they had organized. In response, the affected individuals, self-described as Modern Orthodox, together with interested parties from the Reform movement, filed a constitutional claim for unfair discrimination against women at the Western Cape Equality Court. This was eventually settled out of court, after it was agreed to lift the ban on Kol Isha, and to make certain arrangements for those wishing to avoid listening to female voices, to attend the ceremony later. Apparently the Board of Deputies realized they could not defend the case in court, and that compromise was the better option. (See Sally Frankental, “South Africa,” *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, June 2021 <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/south-africa>; JTA, “Ban dropped on women singing at South Africa Holocaust memorial,” *Times of Israel*, 28 July 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ban-dropped-on-women-singing-at-south-africa-holocaust-memorial/>; Ant Katz, “Kol Isha dispute settled out of court,” *SAJR*, 29 July 2016; <http://www.beitemanuel.co.za/2016/07/28/a-deal-is-reached-on-kol-isha-and-ban-on-singing-women-to-end/>; For an overview of the various opinions on Kol Isha see <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/halakha/studies-halakha/women-and-mitzvot/kol-isha-ii-mutual-responsibility>). The

5.6 *The Limmud Episode*

In August 2007, inspired by their attendance at the nondenominational Limmud UK conference the year before, a small group of South Africans launched Limmud South Africa. They envisaged it as a “smorgasbord of Jewish learning and culture, a place where all voices could be heard and [a] space for multiple opinions, dialogue and engagement.”¹³¹ Ostensibly concerned that some of the intellectual dishes served at this conference would not be strictly kosher, and that heterodox views would be given a platform, the Johannesburg Beth Din banned all Orthodox rabbis under its aegis from participating.¹³² The fact that the organizers were not entirely Orthodox, and that the UOS would have no veto power over the speakers’ roster and the content of the presentations may have also accounted for this move. Nevertheless, in line with the composition of South African Jewry, the majority of Limmud participants and presenters came from an Orthodox background, and the conference complied with all Orthodox requirements, including Beth Din supervised food and Orthodox prayer services. On the other hand, it was probably the only place where “Chabadniks” mixed freely with Jewish LGBT activists, as well as with others expressing unorthodox views.¹³³ Many, including Limmud SA’s founders, suspect that the impetus for establishing the Sinai Indaba project was to offer a strictly Orthodox alternative to Limmud.¹³⁴

In 2019 the South African Rabbinical Association, Beth Din, and Chief Rabbi met with Limmud SA representatives to re-examine their decision. Realising the gulf between the parties remained unbridgeable, the Beth Din reinstated its prohibition against UOS-affiliated rabbis attending Limmud.¹³⁵ Following criticism from the Jewish press, and from left

entire incident shows the extent to which the Chief Rabbi was willing to go to ensure his interpretation of Halacha be observed, irrespective of the unwelcome publicity it may attract.

¹³¹ Adina Roth, “Limmud South Africa: Aye-Sayer to Jewish Diversity and Possibility,” *eJewishPhilanthropy* 2 July, 2015 <https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/limmud-south-africa-aye-sayer-to-jewish-diversity-and-possibility>, accessed on 14 December 2021. For the history of the international Limmud organization see their website at <https://limmud.org>.

¹³² The primary reason for the ban was Limmud’s commitment to pluralism, and its refusal to bar any views.

¹³³ *Ibid.* Though Lubavitchers have attended and presented, Lipskar told the author he supports the Beth Din’s ban (See Mendel Lipskar, interview). Other Chabad affiliated rabbis have anonymously commented they would advise congregants to attend, if they so wished. Indeed, Rabbi Simon Jacobson, a prominent Lubavitch speaker from the United States, who has been a guest in South Africa, attended a Limmud UK event and came away very impressed (see <https://www.meaningfullife.com/vayechi-2500-seekers>, accessed on 14 December 2021).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ “Beth Din reinforces prohibition on rabbis attending Limmud,” *SAJR*, 21 June, 2019, <https://4crdug1mlizqix01ulhvesh1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019-06-21.pdf>. For comparative purposes it is noteworthy that several years after Johannesburg issued its ban, Britain’s Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks was replaced by South African-born Ephraim Mirvis, who reversed his predecessor’s policy of discouraging attendance at Limmud UK. In 2013, Mirvis became the first sitting UK Chief Rabbi to personally present at that conference. (JTA, “Mirvis first UK Chief Rabbi to attend Limmud,” *Times of Israel*, 17 September 2013, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/mervis-first-uk-chief-rabbi-to-attend-limmud>).

leaning Orthodox rabbis who had previously attended Limmud SA, the Chief Rabbi penned a lengthy response.¹³⁶ In his view, Limmud was based on Jewish religious pluralism, “a philosophy that says that Judaism as a religion is whatever you wish it to be, and that any approach to the beliefs and practices of Judaism is equally valid...even atheism or a denial of the divine origin of the Torah.” Consequently, rabbis and rebbetzins [rabbis’ wives] who represented “Torah Judaism” could not “in good conscience ...speak under the banner and on the platform of Limmud.” After expressing reservations at having to reach this divisive decision, he declared he was left with no other option: “Torah Judaism is the only formula for a vibrant future for the South African Jewish community [for] Jewish history has shown that pluralism ultimately weakens Jewish identity, practice, and continuity.”¹³⁷ In an attempt to disabuse the mainstream Orthodox reader of the notion that the UOS ban was oppressive, Goldstein ended his missive by alleging his innovative and traditionalist brand of Orthodoxy was in essence welcoming open, and democratic as was evident in the friendly shuls affiliated to the UOS:

Every Jew in our community is welcome, no matter who they are, where they come from, whether they keep Shabbos or they don’t, whether they are married in the faith or not, whether they can read Hebrew or not, whether they practice mitzvot (commandments) or not, no matter who they are, no matter what race, sexual orientation, gender, or age. There is a warm and welcoming place in our shuls for every Jew. As a community, we pride ourselves on the fact that we have been part of making our shuls such warm, welcoming, and inclusive places, and I cannot stress enough the importance of this going forward.¹³⁸

Notwithstanding the language of tolerance and inclusiveness used in the above cited paragraph, it bears emphasizing that the “every Jew” to which Goldstein refers is exclusively one considered Halachically Jewish by Orthodox standards.

¹³⁶ Warren Goldstein, “Chief Rabbi addresses the Limmud issues”, *SAJR*, 5 July 2019 <https://4crdug1mlizqix01ulhvesh1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019-07-05.pdf>. For criticisms of this response, see “We should pull together, not apart,”(editorial), *SAJR*, 21 June 2019, <https://4crdug1mlizqix01ulhvesh1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019-06-21.pdf>; Samuel Lebens, “Don’t fear Limmud for providing neutral space,” *SAJR*, 21 June, 2019; Nathan Lopez Corodza, “Rabbis are obliged to teach there,”, *SAJR*; “The Halachic reasons for attending Limmud” all at <https://4crdug1mlizqix01ulhvesh1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019-06-28.pdf>.

¹³⁷ Goldstein, “Chief Rabbi addresses the Limmud issues.”

¹³⁸ *Ibid*

5.7 *The Goldstein Doctrine*

It appears that with Warren Goldstein's elevation to the Office of Chief Rabbi, his philosophy and notion of leadership has been markedly different from all the others preceding him. These differences go beyond the natural changes in temperament ordinarily accompanying a succession. Stylistically and substantively, the current Chief Rabbi has forged a different path. Above we detailed the grand programs he initiated, and which, with few exceptions, have been universally welcomed. The substance of his philosophy has been more divisive. Goldstein's diagnosis of a community afflicted by "widespread ignorance" which could only be cured through "spreading the light of Torah learning as far and wide as possible" would not have been a foreign prescription for any of his predecessors.¹³⁹ The accommodator philosophy, which was espoused by virtually all previous holders of this Office, also put much stock into Jewish education. This goes back to Landau, who pressed for a South African Board of Jewish Education; through to Rabinowitz, who was most proud of the King David day school; to Casper, who introduced Jewish Religious instruction into the government schools; and finally to Harris, who had partial success with the initial inclusion of Jewish studies as a matric subject. What sets Goldstein apart is the belief that Jewish education is confined primarily to teaching Torah and ethics based on his understanding of the Lithuanian tradition.¹⁴⁰ None of the previous Chief Rabbis, so it seems, were overly concerned with spreading an exclusively eastern European heritage. Judah Landau and Louis Rabinowitz appeared more interested in introducing a Zionist ethos, whereas Bernard Casper spoke of the much broader Anglo-Litvak tradition, and Cyril Harris of the importance of integrating Jewish studies with secular culture. Moreover, they saw their position as far broader than dispelling ignorance. For them it involved recognizing the needs, customs, and limitations of their flock, while gradually introducing them to a richer and broader Jewish experience.

Goldstein, however, appears to view himself less a spiritual guide to the community and more a role model of what he considers the ideal rabbi. This rabbinic model appears to be based on the teachings of his mentor and Rosh Yeshiva Azriel Goldfein who expected his ordained students to be Talmudic scholars or Talmiday Chachamim. It is therefore much

¹³⁹ "Chief Rabbi's Report: UOS Conference 2011."

¹⁴⁰ As we have noted above, common to all of Goldstein's initiatives and writings, (with the possible exception of the Shabbos Project), is spreading Torah on strictly Orthodox lines. The Chief Rabbi has been an active initiator in many spheres, including national politics, Israel advocacy, and crime fighting, but this analysis covers only the religious aspect.

more important for Goldstein to lead his colleagues and his flock by personal example, by publishing Torah materials, by delivering a daily morning Talmud shiur, and by studying Torah at his alma mater, the Yeshiva Gedolah, every afternoon. More than half a century earlier in the late 1950s, when introducing the idea of a Ministers' Training College, Rabinowitz and his colleague Jacob Newman went to lengths to stress the importance of practical rabbinics. They considered it inappropriate to ordain as rabbis, those unequipped to understand South African Jewish culture. Goldstein, on the other hand, despite being thoroughly immersed in South African culture, and possessing natural oratory skills, regards the Chief Rabbi's ceremonial and clerical duties, traditionally important to Anglo Jewry, as of secondary importance.¹⁴¹ In fact, he has stated that the more ceremonial the position becomes, the less "authentic" it is. He sees his prime mission as "bringing His People closer to His Torah and His Torah closer to His People. Everything else is commentary."¹⁴² This view is consonant with the traditionalist perspective and is an updated incarnation of the views of the Lithuanian-trained rabbis Isaac and Michel Kossowsky who never reconciled themselves to local conventions.

Many of Goldstein's initiatives, as we have indicated, have been carried out in partnership with traditionalist and innovator organizations. Like these organizations, he too has recognized the need for raising funds to further his agenda. Indeed, as a fundraiser he has carefully and successfully nurtured his contacts with the business world to launch very costly projects such as Sinai Indaba and the Shabbos Project. Even in his day-to-day activities, Goldstein has continued his association with Ohr Somayach, delivering daily and weekly shiurim at its main campus, as well as at Sunny Road shul. His emphasis on following the Lithuanian traditions of ethics and Torah learning may lend the impression he shares much of his philosophy with the innovators. As with the early innovators, he too has been accused of introducing ultra-Orthodox customs that divide the community. Goldstein, like his mentor, prefers to view himself, as mentioned above, as "defying labels." While he may have incorporated some of the innovators' zeal, he cannot be said to be representative of that camp.¹⁴³

The current Chief Rabbi's tenure is better understood as the natural outgrowth of a traditionalist counterrevolution. In an interview with the Orthodox Union in the United

¹⁴¹ Halle, "Native Son Is South Africa's New Chief Rabbi."

¹⁴² Goldstein, interview.

¹⁴³ Halle, "Native Son Is South Africa's New Chief Rabbi."

States, Goldstein made it explicit that the “key to kiruv is learning Torah...That’s one of my key philosophies. It’s not about getting people to do anything initially; it’s about teaching Torah in its purest form.”¹⁴⁴ Clearly learning Torah is not the primary message or focus of one of the main innovator organizations, Chabad. Their various mitzvah campaigns, their calls to do acts of kindness, and to read Psalms appear to take priority over education courses they offer through the Rohr Centre. Even if education did take priority, it would unlikely be the rigorous Torah learning envisaged by Goldstein. Other kiruv movements such as Ohr Somayach and the Kollel do indeed lay great emphasis on Torah learning, but their mission in the past, and even in the present, has also been focused on stringent practical behaviours and on improving religious observance. Moreover, there seems to be an implied condition that the purpose of studying Torah at these outreach institutions is to reach a certain level of observance.

Goldstein offers a different paradigm. Whether it is the Shabbos Project, the Bet Midrash Program, or Generation Sinai, he is concerned to broadcast the message that the Torah and Shabbat is a gift every Jew deserves to experience; it is not reserved for the fully observant. A King David student who lives in an unobservant home has, in Goldstein’s view, the same right to experience the beauty and sophistication of deep Torah learning as does a child from an observant background.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, he believes, perhaps paradoxically, that because Shabbat belongs to all Jews, none of the concessions usually recommended by the outreach movements, which allow for partial observance, apply. Everyone, even the least observant, deserves full and complete immersion into the Shabbos experience. His view on the centrality of exposure to the Torah, rather than to the efforts of an outreach adviser or teacher, seems to distinguish the Chief Rabbi from the innovative approach. Thus, Goldstein writes:

As a person learns Torah he gradually absorbs more and more of Hashem’s thinking about the world, and becomes motivated and uplifted through understanding. The Torah emphasizes learning over coercion; persuasion over pressure. Torah learning changes a person’s perspective on life, uplifts him through closeness to Hashem, and from that flows character development.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Brenner, “Conversing with Chief Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein”,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; Goldstein, interview.

¹⁴⁶ Wein and Goldstein, *The Legacy*, 91-92.

6. Conclusion and a Tentative Look to the Future

In the wake of the religious transformation which accelerated in the 1970s, Johannesburg's Orthodox Jewish establishment responded in several ways. Many welcomed the changes it brought about and tried, with some success and willingness, to cooperate with the new movements. Some changes, however, were difficult for the establishment to swallow, prompting the various movements to attack each other in the press. These conflicts did not diminish the popularity of the innovator movements, nor, it seems, did they affect the traditionalist elements who were on the ascendancy by the late 1960s.

On the other hand, the accommodators, whose numbers began to recede earlier, appear to have almost completely lost their influence by the end of the century. As enumerated above, there are a variety of reasons for the retreat of the type of Orthodoxy they stood for. The result was that in Johannesburg the two great forces in Orthodox life were now a grouping of innovators -- comprising different organizations often at odds with one another -- and a more united traditionalist movement.

Unlike the community as a whole, the Chief Rabbinate remained, until 2005, in the tenacious hands of the accommodators. Bernard Casper and Cyril Harris, with their different styles, sought to govern from the centre. Though cognizant of the need for a better educated and more observant community, they laid more emphasis on the pastoral and ceremonial aspects of their position. They also appear to have tolerated the practices of the largely non-observant Orthodox, and to have retained the status quo. With the appointment of Warren Goldstein as Harris's successor this all changed quite abruptly. As Goldstein's true disciple, he laid out his goal of placing Torah learning, with all its sophistication, at centre stage. While improving Jewish knowledge has always been one of the Chief Rabbinate's tasks, it normally entails oversight by the office, but not direct involvement. In Goldstein's case, the Office of Chief Rabbi was intimately in charge of educating the wider public, whether by means of broadcasts and podcasts, school programs, shiurim, publishing books and pamphlets or whether by means of running large scale annual programs. This appears to have come at the cost of pastoral visits and other ceremonial roles that were traditionally the province of the Chief Rabbi.

Programs not exclusively Orthodox, especially those associated with Jewish culture, appear to have either been abandoned, or banned outright, as in the case of Limmud. Prohibiting women from singing at public events at the risk of a reprimand by the Constitutional Court and avoiding platform sharing with Reform has also become part of

Goldstein's legacy, earning him the perhaps unfair label of being an ultra-Orthodox zealot. Seen more subtly, we discover a Chief Rabbi not nearly as flexible as the accommodators, but nor as dogmatic as some in the innovator movements. His oratory, and the content of his lectures and broadcasts, reveal a certain tolerance for diverse levels of observance. His prescription for what he sees as the ills of ignorance, assimilation and drift lies not in introducing new observances and stringencies, but in exposing the community to a sophisticated and deep appreciation of Torah learning. This, he adduces, in turn inspires more knowledge, and the adoption of more observances. His faith in the power of traditional learning to induce the community to become religiously elevated places him squarely in the traditionalists' camp. To some extent, he has completed the counterrevolution that was initiated by his mentor, Rabbi Azriel Chaim Goldfein.

It is foolhardy to speculate on the future of Orthodoxy in Johannesburg. National surveys of South African Jewry indicate that while Johannesburg has modestly grown in Orthodox practices, Cape Town-- home to the second largest Jewish population in the Republic -- has moved in the opposite direction, with Progressive Judaism gaining traction.¹⁴⁷ Johannesburg could feasibly become more Orthodox, or possibly suffer pushback from the general community. We may, however, ask what will become of the mainly dormant accommodator philosophy. Very few congregations are led by rabbis preaching this approach, and on the surface a resurgence of this worldview appears unlikely. Nevertheless, there are pockets of the Jewish population that have sought a space for broader interpretations and observances of Orthodoxy. On a practical level, there have been organized Megillah [Scroll of Esther] readings by women and for women, as well as female dancing with Torah scrolls on the festival of Simchat Torah.¹⁴⁸ These practices, hardly radical in overseas Orthodox communities, are not necessarily endorsed by the local religious establishment. Indeed, the fact that the shul hosting the women's Torah scroll dance is left unnamed in press reports indicates a lack of confidence, and a fear of institutional repercussions.¹⁴⁹ Culturally, aside from exposure to the annual Limmud conference, there is the option of attending lectures at the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning, affiliated to the London School of Jewish Studies. The Academy offers adult courses on topics ranging from the Bible to Ethics

¹⁴⁷ David Graham, *The Jews of South Africa*, 6-7, 9-39.

¹⁴⁸ "Entrenching a new tradition," *SAJR*, 19 March 2020 <https://www.sajr.co.za/entrenching-a-new-tradition/>; Adina Roth "Simchat Torah: Memories and meaning", *SAJR*, 19 October 2020 <https://www.sajr.co.za/simchat-torah-memories-and-meaning> .

¹⁴⁹ "See Roth "Simchat Torah: Memories and meaning", where unusually for a report of a shul event, the venue is not provided.

and to Zionism, which are taught in a critical environment.¹⁵⁰ It appears to enjoy moderate success but only time will tell how sustainable it is.

In a democratic South Africa, and in an age when the internet provides easy access to information, it is difficult to control the content to which the community is exposed. It is likely these influences will have some effect. On the other hand, the pull of traditionalism, and the air of authority possessed by the Beth Din and Chief Rabbi also have a strong hold on the community. Patience and humility require us to wait some time before knowing in what directions the community moves.

¹⁵⁰ For more information, see their website at <https://www.theacademy.org.za/>.

CONCLUSION

This study marks the first time a sweeping history of Johannesburg's Orthodox Jewish community, from the second decade of the twentieth century until the end of the second decade of the twenty first, has been presented. Much has been written on Johannesburg Jewry in general, and on the Orthodox aspects of this community in particular, but few have sought to account for the changes that have taken place over the last century. Here by observing the community over a sustained period, and by recording the different and successive styles of religious leadership and their underlying philosophies, we are better equipped to detect patterns and explain the intriguing transformations that have taken place within Johannesburg's Orthodox population.

As we noted in the introduction, already by the 1910s the Jewish community was taking shape, and had established various social, national, and religious organizations alongside the new synagogues being built to serve the various areas in which Jews resided. It took a few more decades for the independent synagogues to loosely unify themselves under one Federation of Synagogues, but throughout this period, public observance of religious ritual was a regular feature of Jewish life, especially when it came to commemorating lifecycle events and festivals. In the private sphere, few families observed a strictly religious lifestyle, and study of the Talmud was limited. At the same time, the religious leadership, though not strong in number, boasted at least two influential figures, one of whom, Joseph Herman Hertz, was to make his mark in the English-speaking world as the long-standing Chief Rabbi of the British Empire. Judah Leo Landau, leader of the congregation that was locked in bitter rivalry with that of Hertz's, unified the two largest establishment congregations, and for three decades thereafter unofficially assumed the title of Chief Rabbi of the Union of South Africa.¹ Yet his position was fraught with difficulty as there was a vast gulf between rabbis and their congregants. A concerted effort was made by the rabbis to slowly introduce levels of religiosity to the mostly non-observant community. Thanks to Landau's efforts, a broad-based Jewish Board of Education was established, and solutions were sought, if not always found, to bring back the lost youth to the culture and religion of their parents. In these early decades, few would have believed that by the turn of the next century Johannesburg's religious landscape would have changed as radically as it did. The flourishing religious Jewish educational systems, replete with schools, Yeshivas, Kollels, and

¹ Mazabow, *To Reach for the Moon*, 3.

strictly kosher shops and restaurants, as well as ritual baths, would have been unimaginable at that time. Of course, these transformations did not come all at once; they were the products of various and competing religious factions and their respective leaders, and the ability of the latter to impact the community at large. In this concluding chapter we shall briefly revisit the earlier chapters, draw out their salient features, and attempt to show how our conclusions mesh with the latest surveys of the Johannesburg Jewish population.

In the early 1930s, in answer to an invitation by Johannesburg's officially named Orthodox Hebrew Congregation, Rabbi Isaac Kossowsky, who had served prominent communities in Poland and Lithuania, arrived in Johannesburg. In addition to being rabbi of his congregation, Kossowsky was appointed head of the Johannesburg Beth Din, and the official rabbi of the Federation of Synagogues. From these lofty positions he established a foothold among the more observant factions of the community and his presence and efforts also strengthened the traditionalist Mizrachi movement and their associated rabbis. In turn, the religious Zionist movement enjoyed moderate and incremental success with children and young adults. Coming mainly from the poorer working classes, and not particularly observant or religiously knowledgeable, these Mizrachi youths were drawn to Kossowsky's personality and his strict adherence to tradition. Emboldened by his young followers, and together with pockets of Mizrachi-associated rabbis, Kossowsky disseminated his philosophy to the broader public. Eventually, he became head of a camp that sought to reintroduce *Litvish* [Lithuanian] Talmudic scholarship, rituals and observance, and that challenged the established organs of Orthodoxy. For this rigid attachment to tradition, to the exclusion of other Jewish values we have referred to his camp as traditionalist, which judging from the narrative appears to be appropriate, whether it refers to Kossowsky or whether it refers to later generations who see Torah as the exclusive guide. This camp was originally the smaller of two main camps that formed within the Orthodox community. The larger one, nominally headed by Landau, sought to maintain religious practices, while reconciling itself to the broader Jewish community's spiritual levels. Based on Jeffrey Gurock's categorisation we have referred to this camp as the accommodators for their willingness to accommodate all members of the community under their wings. Unlike the traditionalists, this camp was unafraid of modernity, prioritized the teaching of Hebrew culture and language, and at the same time maintained public supervision and observance of kashrut and the Sabbath. It sought to produce a South African community that was moderately observant and strongly

Zionist. During Landau's tenure most of the spiritual leadership of the Orthodox community in Johannesburg were firmly within the accommodators' camp.

Differing in style from his predecessor, and a protégé of Joseph Hertz, Louis Rabinowitz was likewise rooted in a modern conception of Orthodoxy, promoting a "wholesome" Judaism that combined Jewish observance with scholarship and culture. Rabinowitz's ministry was marked by disagreements with the traditionalists led by Kossowsky and his son Michel over the place and role of Hebrew in Jewish education, over stringencies (and particularly playing sports on the Sabbath), how to engage with the broader Jewish public, and how to educate rabbis for South Africa's Orthodox synagogues.

Owing to the Yeshiva College's establishment at the beginning of the 1950s, to Mizrachi and Bnei Akiva's growing popularity, and to the incremental growth of Talmudic study circles at various synagogues, the traditionalist camp was increasingly confident and assertive. Notwithstanding the accommodators forming the majority among the Orthodox spiritual leadership and laity in Johannesburg, the traditionalists, together with the sectarians, were beginning to contest this hegemony.

The traditionalist school continued to flourish during the tenure of Bernard Moses Casper as Chief Rabbi. Yet by the end of the 1960s the accommodators were faced with an entirely new challenge, the advent of the innovators. The partnership between Bernhard and Salzer, which began with the establishment of strictly Orthodox primary- and boys' high schools, developed in new directions. The Kollel opened its doors in September 1970 with its principal and four Fellows, all hailing from England, and all of whom observed a strict form of Orthodox observance.

Barely two years after the Kollel arrived in Johannesburg, another innovative movement was introduced in early 1972. The youthful and energetic Rabbi Mendel Lipskar arrived in Johannesburg from the United States with the intention of serving as spiritual leader of the Hassidic congregation and as the personal emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Together with a handful of native observant Lubavitchers, Lipskar initiated a number of public outreach activities. By adopting a different style to the Kollel fellows, exerting less pressure on his audience to become observant, and imparting Hassidic mysticism that was lighter than the Talmud taught at the Kollel, Lipskar managed to draw non-observant newcomers to religion. Lipskar was joined by Yossy Goldman in 1976; the latter was tasked with establishing a Chabad House to act as a centre for all the movement's activities. Having

a knack for marketing, Goldman embarked on various campaigns that enhanced Chabad's reputation, including adult education, establishing the Gan Yisrael day camp, lighting a giant Menorah at a popular shopping mall, and arranging the first Lag B'Omer parade. Though popular with many, the Lubavitch movement was not without its critics, many of whom felt uncomfortable with its non-Zionist stance, its different Kashrut standards and its loyalty to the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Though these two organizations often ran counter to one another, they were the first Orthodox movements that placed a heavy emphasis on seeking recruits to their cause. Both considered themselves outside the authority of the Johannesburg Beth Din, and both introduced certain practices and stringencies that had never been part of normative Orthodoxy in South Africa. For this reason, we referred to them collectively as innovators. As we have subsequently seen, they introduced a variety of innovations that have stuck.

As Chabad and the Kollel entered a period of consolidation in the early 1980s, some former Kollel members, now based in Jerusalem's Ohr Somayach Yeshiva, decided the time was ripe to export Ohr Somayach to Johannesburg. Rabbis Shmuel Moffson and Larry Shain established a permanent branch of Ohr Somayach in the suburb of Glenhazel; its membership was drawn from local residents, some of whom were observant before Ohr Somayach made its entry, and from students recruited by Moffson who simultaneously served as chaplain for the South African Union of Jewish Students. Building on its popularity, Ohr Somayach set about establishing branches and affiliates in other suburbs of Johannesburg. By the late nineties, Ohr Somayach found itself in a similar predicament to the early innovator movements that faced a decline in outreach a decade early. Its response took the form of a concerted effort by some Ohr Somayach founders to revitalize the institution as a kiruv movement.

Even as the innovators made inroads, the once powerful accommodators' camp was in retreat. At that time the world was recoiling from the political climate in South Africa. This meant more liberally minded Orthodox rabbis from overseas who may have once chosen a Johannesburg pulpit were now discouraged from serving in South Africa. Traditionalists and innovators, on the other hand, tended to adopt a more conservative or apolitical view.² Yet the triumph of right wing Orthodoxy in Johannesburg at the expense of the decline of those leaning leftwards was not due solely to local conditions. Global trends in the Jewish world

² The trend in favor of a politically neutral and conservative clergy was evident among Christian revivals as well, as mentioned earlier (See Goodhew, "Growth and Decline in South Africa's Churches, 1960-91," 361)

tended to follow a pattern of increased religious insularity, which allowed for less expression of inclusivism among religious advocates. By 1987, upon the retirement of Chief Rabbi Casper, the decline in the accommodators camp was palpable. In the subsequent selection of a new Chief Rabbi, a concerted effort was made to choose someone with a broad view of Judaism. For the next seventeen years, Cyril Harris obliged by filling this desideratum. Upon his retirement, there appeared to be an understanding that the next candidate would come from within the community. Despite his young age, the leading contender for the position, Warren Goldstein, was seemingly well equipped to follow Harris's lead. With a doctorate in laws and a book co-written with Mandela's grandson, he appeared to be in the mould of his urbane and politically savvy predecessor. Though he was a disciple of Goldfein, who was well known as a traditionalist, he was expected to retain at least some of the accommodationist philosophy of the previous incumbents of the position. As we have seen, the agenda that Goldstein has carved out appears to run contrary to what the accommodators envisaged.

In contrast to the significant decline of the accommodationist camp, the traditionalists have followed the opposite trajectory. Though at times disappointed and exasperated by the innovators, the latter served as a challenge to them, and perhaps spurred them in more innovative directions. Almost from the beginning of the innovators' arrival, traditionalist rabbis set about actively planning for the next generation of rabbis. Rabbi Azriel Goldfein led the way in the 1970s, first as the co-head of Yeshiva College and as head of their post matric Yeshiva Gedolah, and subsequently by establishing the independent Yeshiva Gedolah of Johannesburg in 1978. Though it began with few students, its reputation rapidly grew, and soon it was recognized as the successor to the failed Ministers' Training College, and as the sole institution for granting local rabbinic ordination. This earned it the Federation of Synagogues' moral and financial support, and propelled it into becoming one of the establishment's mainstays. Unlike the Training College, its educational philosophy was based primarily on intensive Talmudic study as practiced in the pre-World War II yeshivas of eastern Europe, and in their successor institutions in the United States and Israel. None of the broader culture, academic approach and practical rabbinics, as envisaged by Rabinowitz, was included in its curriculum. Yet potential rabbis were encouraged to be relatable to their prospective congregants, and to maintain the mentality that characterized South African Jewry. Heavy emphasis was laid on the supremacy of the Torah.

Warren Goldstein's orientation reflects the influence of Goldfein's philosophy. Notwithstanding his academic credentials, his activities have reflected a marked preference for traditionalism. He has succeeded in launching grand and highly publicized projects that include Generation Sinai, the Sinai Indaba, and the Shabbos Project. These are in line with Goldstein's philosophy of spreading Torah far and wide, in an accessible and relevant fashion. Unlike his predecessors, however, he has not given primacy to his pastoral and ceremonial roles, which have always been regarded as important in the Anglo tradition. Instead, he views his role as creating the archetype for other rabbis to emulate, emphasizing the centrality of Talmud study.

1. Tentative conclusions from population surveys

As highlighted in chapter one, population surveys have shown that over the last half century, Johannesburg-- as opposed to other Jewish centres in South Africa, and especially Cape Town -- has witnessed a strong turn to religion. Private observance of strictly Orthodox practices has increased more than twofold in this city. This dissertation has found that alongside this revival there has been the virtual disappearance of accommodator rabbis. The question remains whether the demise of these accommodators and the congregations they led are merely correlative to the religious revival, or are the result, inter alia, of being overwhelmed by a community overtaken by innovators and traditionalists. If the accommodators' fate was in part a casualty of the revival, we would expect those who had previously attended congregations governed by an inclusive mind-set to have chosen between turning rightwards or leftwards. Those who had been attracted to Orthodox practice, without feeling that the accommodators' broadmindedness and cultural depth was essential to their Orthodoxy, would have had little problem joining the ranks of the strictly Orthodox. Many others, however, for whom Judaism's cultural aspects and inclusivism was primary, and who only remained Orthodox out of admiration for their modern accommodator rabbi, would have probably declined joining a traditionalist or innovator-led congregation. To fill that lacuna this congregant would either drop out of Orthodoxy altogether and classify himself or herself as secular, or be attracted to the heterodox movements, which in South Africa is mainly Reform.³

Looking back at the population surveys we see that in 2005, the year Goldstein was inaugurated Chief Rabbi, an overwhelmingly large percentage (67%) of Johannesburg's

³ There is also an independent Masorti Congregation, see <https://masortiolami.org/community/shalom-independent-congregation>, accessed on 26 December 2021.

community classified themselves as traditional, with 18% defining themselves strictly Orthodox and 15%, secular or progressive.⁴ In 2019 the percentage of those in Johannesburg self-described as traditional dipped dramatically to 31% whereas the secular / progressive percentage rose from 15% to 20%.⁵ Over 14 years, the middle of the road traditional Jews dropped by a third across South Africa. This is evidenced in the 2019 Report, which stated that in line with international trends the Republic was witnessing a “thinning” or “shakeout” of the “middle ground.” Nationwide, although 45% of respondents across South Africa described their upbringing as traditional, only 31% were using the same label once they had grown up.⁶ Evident in the very high numbers of those in Johannesburg now defining themselves as all variations of Orthodox, it is indisputable that many who were brought up as traditional have now turned rightward in their religious practices. Yet some, admittedly a significantly smaller percentage, have joined the Progressive movement or now define themselves as secular. This attrition among those who in the past, would have considered themselves traditional may in part be due to the fact that few in the rabbinate now encourage or relate to those who follow a non-observant Orthodox lifestyle that once typified Johannesburg Jewry.

Shifts in self-classifications are not the only way of detecting what has become of those who once thought of themselves as traditional. In a report on the 2005 survey, the authors compare data of certain practices going back to the earliest surveys, conducted at the beginning of the 1970s, and up until the latest conducted in that year. It was found that from 1973 to 2005 there was very slight variability in performance of rituals considered as markers of a baseline Jewish identity.⁷ The greatest variability was candle lighting on a Friday night which hovered at around 75%, with an outlier of 84% recorded in 1974.⁸ For other observances there was much slighter variability so that throughout the period, fasting on Yom Kippur ranged from 89% to 91%, while attendance at a Seder varied between 92% and 95%. Surveys taken in 1998 and 2005 show that only 7% of the population consumed products containing pork. All the above observances appear to have experienced a dramatic decline in the most recent (2019) survey. As these data have not been presented for each city

⁴ Shirley Bruk and Milton Shain, *Jews in a Changing South Africa*, Cape Town: Kaplan Centre of Jewish Studies, 2006, 33.

⁵ *Ibid.*; Graham, *The Jews of South Africa in 2019*, 39.

⁶ *Ibid.* 38.

⁷ Bruk and Shain, 36; Allie Dubb, *Jewish South Africans*, 105-111.

⁸ See Bruk and Shain, 36 at note 30, where they explain that the 1974 question relating to candle lighting was very vague, and would have been answered affirmatively also by those who infrequently lit them. All other surveys related to those who always, or regularly lit candles.

individually, and reflect nationwide trends, the decline may in part be due to the noticeable move towards secularization in the city of Cape Town.⁹ This, however, cannot be the full explanation; Johannesburg's population is almost two and half times the size of Cape Town's.¹⁰ Be that as it may, candle lighting has fallen from an average of 75% to only 58%; Yom Kippur observance from around 90% to just 76%, and attendance at a Passover Seder has dropped more than ten points from a high of 95% to 81%. While only 7% previously consumed pork products, this number has swelled twofold to between 13% and 16%.¹¹ Clearly observances of these rituals and practices have fallen significantly. The reasons for this decline and dissociation with Jewish observance may be attributable to a multitude of factors. But in part they may reflect that the increase in religiosity in Johannesburg has come at a price. If Johannesburg's religious leadership can take credit for the fact that 48% of the Jewish population identify as Orthodox or strictly Orthodox, surely they can share some blame for the decreased participation in public observance that has characterized Johannesburg Jewry for close on half a century, if not longer.¹²

2. *Final Thoughts*

In an interview with the author, Chief Rabbi Goldstein vigorously disputed any causal relationship between his tenure and the overall decline of religious observance, later evident in the 2019 survey data. Instead, he pointed to a broader trend of drift in Jewish religious life, and declared it his mission to prevent it. Those who argued against his approach were, in his words, the “chattering classes” who did not represent the average Jew in the community. It is possible, as Goldstein has claimed, that recent drops in observance are the result of a global slide to secularism. It is equally possible, and, in the author's estimation, more probable, that the wholesale traditionalist redefinition of Orthodoxy has had some effect on those who grew up with a different conception of what it meant to be Orthodox, and now feel alienated. This is not to assign blame or impugn the motives of any of the innovative or traditionalist movements. The Chief Rabbi prides himself in having the courage of his convictions, and this, he has intimated, guided his refusal to share a platform with Progressive rabbis or to countenance female singing at public events. Yet he is understandably reluctant to

⁹ Graham, *The Jews of South Africa in 2019*, 38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5. Johannesburg roughly constitutes 58% of the Jewish population, whereas Cape Town constitutes 24%. The Johannesburg population is estimated at 30,000, whereas Cape Town's is estimated at 12,500.

¹¹ Graham, *The Jews of South Africa in 2019*, 38, 40 (see Figure 32).

¹² *Ibid.*, 5, 38. Public surveys have only been taken since 1970 but anecdotal evidence, as cited in the Introduction, indicate that for almost a century there was a high level of public observance of specific rituals. (see Introduction footnote 21).

acknowledge the possibility that his pursuit of an uncompromising adherence to Halacha has come at the cost of alienating those on the fringes who react negatively.

More than half a century ago, in 1967, Immanuel Jakobovits, Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, openly acknowledged that his plan to shift rightward would alienate some within his community. Nevertheless, he thought it worthwhile, since the “gains ... would outweigh the losses.”¹³ Likewise the first South African-born Chief Rabbi and his likeminded rabbinic colleagues may do well to acknowledge the transformation of Orthodoxy in Johannesburg has not come about without costs. Undeniably it has had an enormous impact and is the envy of many outreach professionals across the globe. This does not negate the perhaps inescapable polarization evident within the broader community. Radically transformed over the past decades, Orthodoxy in Johannesburg is now almost entirely unrecognizable from its form of a century ago.

¹³ Freud-Kendal, “*Minhag Anglia*”, 44.

GLOSSARY

All words are of Hebrew origin unless indicated otherwise. The pronunciations shown here is either Ashkenazi or Sefardi dependent on the context.

Aliyah	Literally ascension, it denotes the act of a Jew immigrating to Israel
Am Haartzim	Commoners/ Ignoramuses (Yiddish)
Baal Teshuva	Literally, a penitent, used to describe a secular non-observant Jew who has become Orthodox observant
Baalat Teshuva	Female Baal Teshuva* (singular)
Baalebatim	Literally property owners, refers to laity (Yiddish)
Baaley Teshuva	Plural of Baal teshuva*
Baalot Teshuva	Female Baal Teshuva* (plural)
Beth Din	Rabbinical / Ecclesiastical Court which primarily adjudicates religious disputes, oversees divorces and conversions, and provides kosher certification
Beth Hamedrash	Literally, “House of Study”, informal synagogue where religious study and discourses also take place
Chabad	A Hassidic sect which has an international network of followers and is highly effective in Jewish outreach
Chalav Yisrael	Kosher Supervised milk
Chassid	Variant spelling of Hassid*
Chavruotot	Form of study where pairs of students study, debate and discuss Jewish texts

Cheder	In South Africa: afternoon/ Sunday Hebrew school. In Eastern Europe: fulltime strictly Orthodox Jewish primary school
Chevra	Society, study circle
Chilul Hashem	Desecration of G-d's name, usually associated with unseemly conduct
Chumash	Pentateuch
Chumesh	Variant spelling of Chumash*, used by strictly Orthodox (Yiddish)
Chumras	Stringencies
Community Kollel	A Kollel* that engages in community outreach, and serves as an informal educational institution
Dat	Religion
Dati	Religious
Dayan	Rabbinical judge who sits on the Beth Din*
Dayanim	Plural of Dayan*
Decisor	A well respected rabbi who issues contemporary rulings on Jewish law
Ehrlichkeit	Integrity (Yiddish)
Farbrengens	An informal gathering among Chabad* Hassidim* which is usually accompanied by refreshment and words of Torah* (Yiddish)
Frum	Orthodox religious (Yiddish)

Frumkeit	Religiosity / religious fervour (Yiddish)
Gaon	Title given to a genius, normally a well-respected Torah* sage
Galut	Exile, sometimes used in reference to the diaspora
Gemara	One of the two components of the Talmud*
Get	Jewish bill of divorce
Golah	Diaspora
Halacha	Jewish Law
Halocha	Variant spelling of Halacha*, used by strictly Orthodox
Hanhala(t)	Management/ Executive Committee
Hashem	G-d
Havdalah	Ritual using wine, a candle and spices, symbolizing the end of the Sabbath
Haredi	Adjective related to persons or practices associated with the Haredim*
Haredim	Ultraorthodox, strictly Orthodox, usually non-Zionist
Haskalah	Jewish enlightenment movement
Hassidim	Sects that practice Hassidism*, popular among ultraorthodox in Israel, Europe and the United States
Hassidism	Mystical philosophy originating in Poland in the 18 th century
Hesped	Eulogy

Hiddur Mitzvah	Beautifying / Glorifying a commandment
Indaba	a meeting to discuss a serious topic (Zulu)
Kabala	Mystical teachings
Kashrus	Variant spelling of Kashrut*, used by the strictly Orthodox (Yiddish)
Kashrut	Dietary laws and/or standards
Kashruth	Variant spelling of Kashrut*, favoured by the press.
Kaddish	Mourner's prayer usually recited by a child for a deceased parent
Kiddush	Benediction recited over wine on the Sabbath and Jewish Festivals
Kinnus	Conference
Kippah	Skullcap
Kippot	Plural of Kippah*
Kiruv	The act or practice of bringing secularized Jews closer to Judaism, especially Orthodox Judaism (Collins Dictionary)
Kiruv Rehokim	See Kiruv
Klal Yisrael	The Community of Israel/ the broad Jewish community
Kli Mefoar	Literally, a "magnificent vessel". Adopted by Chief Rabbi Goldstein as a tool for Kiruv in which everything is presented in the most elegant and relevant way

Kol Isha	Literally- a woman's voice. The Orthodox prohibition of listening to female singing
Kollel	Seminary for married men who engage in advanced Talmudic studies, supported by a stipend
kosher	Permitted food
Kovod	Respect/ honour (Yiddish)
Litvak	A Jew from the areas broadly referred to as Lithuania during the medieval and modern periods
Litvish	Adjective describing, inter alia, persons, culture, food and scholarship originating from Lithuanian Jewry
Litvishe Derekh	Literally the Litvish* Way- normally used to describe customs, lifestyle, and study method (Yiddish)
Lubavitch	The town from which Chabad* Hassidism* was disseminated
Lubavitcher	Used to describe a follower of Chabad*, used interchangeably with Chabad* (Yiddish)
Mashke	Liquor (Yiddish)
Meah Shearim	Suburb of Jerusalem which hosts the more extreme Haredi* sects, used also as an epithet against those with stringent standards
Megillah	Scroll- usually referring to the Scroll of Esther
Mehadrin	Meticulous level- used often for higher standards of kosher supervision
Menorah	Candelabrum used for the Festival of Chanukah

Mikva	Jewish ritual bath used regularly by married women
Mikvaot	Plural of mikva*
Minhag Anglia	Literally English custom, a tradition among mainstream Orthodox Jews in England which emphasizes public Jewish observance and identifying with one's country
Minyan	A quorum of ten men required for public prayer services, sometimes used to refer to the prayer service itself
Minyanim	Plural of minyan*
Mishna	One of the two components of the Talmud
Misnagdim	Plural of misnaged*(Yiddish)
Misnaged	literally: the opposed, a general term applying to all non-Hassidim* (Yiddish)
Mitzvah	Commandment/ ordinance
Mitzvot	Plural of mitzvah*
Mussar	Jewish Ethics
Neturey Karta	An extremist anti-Zionist Haredi* sect, used also as an epithet against those with stringent standards
outreach	See kiruv*
Peruvian	A contemptuous name for a Jew, regarded typically as unsavoury, applies particularly to those from eastern or central Europe.(South African origin)
Pesach	Passover

Rabbanim	Plural of Rav*
Rabbanit	Rabbi's wife (Hebrew)
Rabbonim	Variant spelling of Rabbanim*, used by the strictly Orthodox (Yiddish)
Rav	Rabbi, often reserved for those with a reputation for higher scholarship
Rebbe	Grand Rabbi of a Hassidic sect (Yiddish)
Rebbetzin	Rabbi's wife (Yiddish)
Rosh Beth Din	Head of the Beth Din*
Rosh Hashanah	Jewish New Year
Rosh Kollel	Head of Kollel*
Rosh Yeshiva	Head of Yeshiva
Rov	Variant spelling of Rav*, used by the strictly Orthodox (Yiddish)
Satmar	Extremist anti-Zionist Hassidic sect with branches in the United States and Israel
Shabbat	Sabbath
Shabbaton	A weekend getaway organized by religious movements where participants are introduced to practical Sabbath observance
Shabbos	Variant spelling of Shabbat*, usually used by the strictly Orthodox (Yiddish)
Shaitl	Wig (Yiddish)

Shaliach	Emissary
Shavuot	Jewish festival of Pentecost
Shechina	Divine presence
Shechita	Ritual slaughter which renders the meat of an animal kosher
Shema Yisrael	A collection of verses from Numbers and Deuteronomy which is recited twice daily as an affirmation of Jewish faith
Shiur	Lesson / discourse on a religious subject
Shiurim	Plural of shiur*
Shlucha	Female shaliach (single)
Shluchim	Plural of shaliach*
Shluchot	Female shaliach* (plural)
Shochet	Ritual slaughterer
Shochetim	Plural of shochet*
Shtiebel	Small synagogue of mostly observant congregants with increased congregational participation (Yiddish)
Shtieblach	Plural of shtiebel (Yiddish)
Shomer Shabbat	A person who observes the Sabbath
Shomrey Shabbat	Plural of Shomer Shabbat*
Shul	Synagogue (Yiddish)

Simchat Torah	Literally Joy of the Torah*. Festival immediately following Tabernacles where the community dances with Torah scrolls
Sukkah	Temporary booth erected for the Festival of Sukkot*
Sukkot	Festival of Tabernacles
Talmidey Chachamim	Torah* sages. Title bestowed on someone who is exceedingly learned.
Talmud	Oral Law redacted into a multi-volume literary corpus that is foundational to Jewish scholarship
Talmud Torah	Afternoon/ Sunday Hebrew school – used interchangeably with Cheder* in the sense used in South Africa
Teshuva movement/ process	Literally return. The movement/process in which secular Jews have embraced an Orthodox or strictly Orthodox lifestyle
Tichel	Headscarf (Yiddish)
Tikkun Leil	All- night Torah* learning usually on the eve of Shavuot
Tisha B’Av	Fast of 9 Av, commemorating the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem
Torah	Literally the Law of Moses or Pentateuch, but often used to encompass the entire corpus of Jewish study, Jewish law and Jewish ethics
Toras Yisrael	The Torah* of Israel/ Jewish Tradition (Yiddish)
Treif	Variant spelling of Treife* (Yiddish)
Treife	Not kosher* (Yiddish)

Ulpan	An institute or school for the intensive study and teaching of the Hebrew language.
Yahrzeit	Anniversary of the death of a relative that is commemorated by the nearest of kin (Yiddish)
Yekke	A Jew of German extraction (Yiddish)
Yeshiva Gedolah	Senior post high school Yeshiva
Yizkor	Prayer recited on Festivals in memory of deceased relatives
Yom Hashoa	Holocaust Memorial Day
Yom Kippur	Day of Atonement

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