

KOPUL ROSEN 1913-1962

Introduction

There was a time when everyone in Anglo Jewry knew the name Kopul Rosen. He was a powerful and charismatic star in the rabbinic firmament. And even today nearly fifty years after his death, I still come cross people all round the world who remember his impact. But we go 'the way of all flesh' and new generations have come who have no inkling of the sort of giant he was. The only record is a book 'Memories of Kopul Rosen' edited by Cyril Domb in 1970. Occasionally one can come across second hand copies.

This is my contribution to his memory, sifted from records and what I recall of the man I loved and admired. I have never met anyone, Jew or non-Jew who compares.

Jeremy Rosen 2011

Chapter 1

Kopul Rosen was by common assent a remarkable man. His smooth modulated voice was compelling, convincing, and seductive. He was as impressive in a set speech as in a stand-up argument. He could move an audience to tears or to laughter. As a teacher he inspired.

Tall and elegant, strikingly good looking, his brown eyes could transfix you. When he smiled, his full lips revealed perfect white teeth. His imperial beard was perfectly trimmed. His walk was upright, confident and athletic. He carried himself like an aristocrat. He gave the impression he had just stepped out of Valhalla.

He was a populist with a feel for the small man, and could be 'one of the boys' on or

off the sports field. Yet he was a Spiritual Master, a Socrates and he could be a loyal friend. Each role came naturally to him. He was not perfect by any means. He could be impatient, moody and obtuse. He had his favourites and his faults. He was the sort of person who commanded respect and hero worship. Many of those who came under his spell struggled either to emulate him or free themselves from the debilitating burden of trying in vain.

Kopul Rosen (registered in the City of Westminster as Kopul but everyone used to call him Cyril) was born on November 4th 1913 in Notting Hill, London. In those days it was a poor and seedy part of London. Its main street market along the Portobello Road rivaled that of the better known Petticoat Lane in the East End of London where most poor Jews lived. These were the places one went to for cheap food, clothes, and possibly stolen goods. Street traders had their stalls, hawkers shouted their wares. Hustlers moved in and out looking for opportunities, or set up pitches on unoccupied patches of pavement and called out to draw attention to their scams.

Kopul's parents were quiet, modest immigrants from that part of Russia that changed hands between the Poles and the Russians so often, residents were often unsure to whom it belonged, neither did they care. Oppression was oppression, and suffering came from either side. His father's name Shlomo, or Solomon, can be found among the archives of Radomsko in modern Poland, alongside those of his seven Rosrazowski siblings. The family was loyal to the Hassidic Radomsker Rebbe, but Shlomo was no scholar nor was he a devoted follower. That was why he had been drafted into the Russian army as a teenage soldier. It was Russian policy to do its best to assimilate the Jews and detach them from their roots by forcing them to enlist for long periods. The days of the Cantonists, when children were taken in large numbers to be abused until they either converted to Christianity or died, were long over. But the basic ideology, the Russian way of dealing with

an unwanted minority, remained...force them in or out! The children of the rich were bought out of service. Scholars were hidden behind a communal protective wall. Even so, many deformed or crippled themselves to avoid military service. Shlomo had neither wealth, status nor support and he was not inclined to deform himself. One version of how all the brothers came to be known by their first names and lost their surnames was to avoid the draft. If so it did not work in Shlomo's case.

Shlomo served for almost twenty years, yet remarkably he remained devout. But at what cost? He became a sweet , soft and gentle man with a ready smile and an inoffensive mien. Family legend has it that, as a fifteen year old, while he was being taken away by the Russian press-gang, he made a promise to his sweetheart, Feige Bialystock, that he would return to marry her. Feige's mother was a Wilhelm, a famous Hassidic family most of whom migrated to Israel in the nineteenth century. So Feige was a woman of family character and genealogical significance. She was tough. She waited twenty years for Shlomo to return. I often wish I could have asked her why. Why she waited and why she was so certain that he would return. When, one day, finally Shlomo returned home, they married. They both decided they wanted to get out of Poland but it took a few more years before they could arrange to get out.

They made their way to the Baltic and onto a steerage passage to London, and arrived in 1910. There Solomon was reunited with Shlomo's father Zeyda Meir , three brothers and four sisters who had decided on arrival in Britain to change their names to Rosen. Then, further to complicate matters the brothers changed the way the way they were known. Solomon Rosen became known as Mr.Solomon to differentiate him from the other brothers Rosen. They went their separate ways, some emigrated, and they effectively disappeared from each other's lives.

Mr.Solomon was a small rotund man. Photos show a twinkle in his eye. He was a loyal husband and a supportive father, but not much of a breadwinner. Perhaps the stuffing knocked out of him in the army or he was naturally just a nice sweet man. At least he had a formidable wife to look after him. She was small too, but photographs of the couple show unmistakably that she was the powerhouse. Shlomo and Feige doted over each other and their two six foot tall boys who towered over them, Henry the elder, known in the family as Hashy, born in 1911 was six foot four inches and Cyril the younger, born in 1913 was one inch shorter. Yiddish was the primary language spoken at home and his Hebrew name was Yaakov. There was a well-established Yiddish diminutive of Yaakov, Yaakobl, or simply Kobl or Kopul. That was how he came to be known as Kopul.

He went to the local infants' school in Portobello Road and then to the nearest State junior school, St Marks, where a particularly gifted English teacher nurtured his talent for literature and amateur dramatics. Kopul played Bottom a lead role in the school production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A fading photograph of him smiling cheekily at the camera betrays his mischievousness. Kopul's Jewish education owed most to Rabbi Judah Newman who became the rabbi of Notting Hill Synagogue and gathered round himself the most talented boys of the neighbourhood and gave them a very thorough and inspirational classical Jewish Cheder education.

His talent for getting up and holding forth on any subject that animated him led to his being put on the platform at an area Labour Party rally at the tender age of ten when he is reported to have delivered himself of a diatribe against wealth and privilege. Kopul acquired a reputation as a speaking prodigy. He was often invited to 'say a few words' of Torah at receptions and festivities. Despite his Yiddish 'Mame Loshon' he made a point of learning the politically and socially acceptable 'received' English which placed him if not

among the aristocracy, then at least comfortably in the intellectual classes. He was able to switch easily in and out of both languages and was adept at responding appropriately to the different speakers he harassed or audiences he addressed. He became a regular heckler at Hyde Park where he would take the rostrum to argue on such issues as Socialism and Zionism.

He was thirteen when he delivered his first sermon, in a synagogue in Notting Hill, and soon his reputation brought him an invitation to speak in the East End. As a thirteen year old he gave on the subject of the 'Priests Trousers' (Exodus 28.42), the special underpants priests had to wear to protect their modesty as they climbed the ramps in the Temple. The risqué subject matter was bound to attract attention although the subject of the sermon itself was totally serious. Report, however, reached the ears of Chief Rabbi Hertz who declared, typically of those given high position in an Imperial country, that 'this young man was far too big for his boots'.

In the England of those days, and according to a 1918 Act of Parliament, only Primary Education was free, until the age of 14. Kopul's family could not afford a secondary education for their son, which meant that the only other option then was a yeshivah. So at 14 Kopul went full time to Ets Chayim Yeshiva in Thrawl Street, Whitechapel in the East End to continue his Jewish studies. There a whole generation of Rabbis, teachers, and lay leaders was in the making. The massed immigration of the previous generation gave way to English born and bred youngsters eager to make their mark, but still too poor to afford a secular higher education. The Yeshiva was the hub of young Jewish life among the poorer less privileged Jews of the East End and other London ghettos. Study was not always taken too seriously but those who wanted to could advance and in addition pupils were encouraged to go out and teach Jewish subjects or preach at various synagogues and religion schools. This

was also a modest but useful source of income.

Not only could students spread their religious wings outside the yeshiva, they could extend their secular education by attending courses now offered increasingly by socialist societies and working men's colleges. Kopul took full advantage of these opportunities, to attend concerts, the opera, plays, and lectures. This together with his rigorous primary education gave him a tremendous admiration for Western culture, Literature, Music, and Art. The impact of the 'outside' was felt inside the yeshiva when Kopul helped launch the yeshiva magazine called HaChayim to which he contributed a poem "At Sinai" and an essay "Modern Problems through the spectacles of a Yeshivah student." In the latter he wrote

"The idea of providing beautiful cantors and preachers is in itself degrading. Do we need Prima Donnas in our synagogues to make us aware of our Judaism? If the ideal of prayer can bring no response, if the love of our Maker can bring no reply, then this petty system of moral bribery can have no permanent effect."¹

In addition to the British political upheavals, the decline of the Liberals and the rise of the Socialists, this was also a time of Jewish ferment. The great ideological battles of Russian Jewry, the Communists, the Bund, the Fascists and the Nihilists, the Zionists and anti-Zionists, all continued their battles in exile. London was a great place to hear great Rabbis and Zionist campaigners, oratory of all styles

His modest background gave him a natural affinity with the Labour Movement and anyway he was by nature a radical. At one stage in his life, he told me, he was approached to consider being adopted as a prospective Member of Parliament for the Labour Party. But he had decided early on that it was the Rabbinate that gave him the freest rein for his religious idealism and the religious and national opportunities he felt himself drawn to most

¹ Memories of Kopul Rosen. Cyril Domb ed 1970

of all.

In a class-ridden society the affectations of the aristocracy assumed exaggerated significance and attracted admiration from poor ambitious young men like Kopul. This meant that he felt keenly his not having a Public School or University education for which institutions he had an exaggerated respect. To compensate for his own lack of golden spoons he read widely and gained much from private study. Kopul also had a sense of dignity and elegance. Despite his poverty, he dressed well and was something of a dandy. He soon learned how to mix with and feel at ease in any society: one of his greatest attributes was to seem at ease and to fit in no matter with whom or where he was. He was the *wunderkind* of the new immigrant generation.

Kopul stood out not only because of his stature and popularity but because of his involvement in the fledgling Zionist Youth movement, Habonim, and in communal affairs generally. It appeared, however, and despite his stature, that the 'Golden Gates' of Anglo Jewish leadership were closed to him because he had no secular secondary or tertiary education and could not afford the qualifications to enter either university or Jews College, the Rabbinical Seminary of mainstream Anglo Jewry.

In 1931 one of the leading young Zionists died tragically and Kopul was invited by the organization to deliver a sermon at the memorial service at the Great Synagogue in Dukes Place. But he needed a certificate from the Chief Rabbi to speak at one of his synagogues. But Kopul was not a student at Jews College nor was he recognized in any way by the Chief Rabbi. He refused. The movement protested and as a result the chief rabbi relented and Kopul spoke.

He had nobody to help him rise in Anglo Jewry other than himself. There was however one crucial intervention, that of the brilliant, mercurial scholar, the Gaon,

Yechezkel Abramsky. He had arrived, a refugee from Communist Russia, in London in 1932 to head the Machzikei HaDass community. Chief Rabbi Hertz had persuaded him to take over as head of the main Rabbinical Court of London, the Beth Din of the United Synagogue. He was the giant of Orthodox Jewish life, recognized around the world as one of the greatest Talmudic minds of his generation.

One of his pet tasks was to identify talented young men to make up a corps of future orthodox leaders who were rooted in the Eastern European version of Judaism rather than the pale diluted specter that characterized Anglo Jewry. Eytz Chayim Yeshiva was the main centre of Orthodox study in Britain at that time and Dayan Abramsky as he was known, heard of a talented student there who was not being fully extended and was perhaps in danger of being too easily distracted by London life. He decided that Kopul needed the rigorous training and discipline of the Jewish equivalent of Oxbridge. So he personally arranged for him, together with a group of other young men from the British Isles to travel to Eastern Europe to study at the great Mirer Yeshiva in Lithuania in 1934 (according to Henry Shaw)². Abramsky had promised that Kopul would be assisted financially for his parents were in no position to help. Abramsky was supposed to take care of the arrangements, but somehow other things got in the way. Kopul was often penniless and starving in his cold Eastern European garret relying on what few and occasional pounds his family could send him. According to Sybil Shaw, his brother Henry scrimped and saved to send money to Kopul whenever he could.

Here is an extract I have come across, from a contemporary at Mir, the late Rabbi Teddy Lewis who was a contemporary of Kopul's at Mir and later became rabbi of Rhode Island synagogue in the USA, which gives a flavour of the life they led there

² Memories of Kopul Rosen p.50

"I learned in the Etz Chaim Yeshiva for a couple of years, and then, on the advice of Rabbi Yechezkel Abramski (z"l), I set out with the late Kopul Rosen to learn in the celebrated Mir Yeshiva, Poland. It was 1935, the time of the Italian-Abyssinian war. Some people, afraid that Europe would be embroiled in the conflagration, tried to dissuade us, but we took little notice of their well-meaning advice. We embarked from Dover and set sail for Ostend, then to Brussels, Berlin, Warsaw, and finally to Mir.

Mir was situated sixteen kilometres from the railway station. This required that we travel the remainder of the journey by road. We arrived in the middle of the rainy season and experienced the muddy and marshy roads, for which Poland is famous. We breathed sighs of relief when our bus arrived at our destination, as we were debating in our minds whether the dilapidated and battered vehicle would overtopple in the uninviting mud and slime.

Mir was a small town situated in eastern Poland, not too far from the Russian border. Approximately 500 Jewish families lived there. Non-Jews lived mainly on the outskirts of Mir. Very few of them lived in the town. The students of the Yeshiva were an important source of income to the townspeople. The inhabitants were mainly shopkeepers and scribes. The shopkeepers depended largely on the support of the students of the Yeshiva and on trade on the weekly market day, when peasants of the neighboring farms came into town to sell their produce, and to buy their week's supplies of necessities. The scribes were famous for their beautiful handiwork and they exported scrolls to Jewish communities all over the world.

Many of the other Jewish inhabitants depended entirely on support from relatives in

America, England, and South America. Indeed, the whole community was a poor one. In many homes, the poverty was acute, some lacking even the bare essentials of life. The staple diet was potatoes and bread of poor quality. Their position was particularly pitiful during the long, dark, winter months. The streets were snowbound, with snow piled many inches high on the pavement and on the roads. It was not an uncommon sight to see an old woman during the intense frost, dressed in tatters, dragging a small sled, in which she placed logs of wood which she had collected from her kindhearted neighbors.

The Yeshiva had no dormitories, so the student boarded with the townspeople. Small groups of six to eight students banded together in private homes and hired the baalaboste, the wife or widow of a house owner, to look after them. In general, the homes were only able to accommodate two students for sleeping.

Every week, a peasant woman would come to pick up our laundry and return it a few days later, clean and pressed. The students who came from other countries, came from homes where they had all the modern amenities, found it difficult and inconvenient, not to have indoor toilets. Instead, there were outhouses in the back of the homes. This became very inconvenient in the cold, winter months. To the best of my recollection, the Yeshiva had the only modern, indoor toilets in the region.

As there was no indoor plumbing in the homes, water was unavailable from the faucet. Instead, water had to be transported, physically, in buckets from a well in the center of the town. Some poor Jews eked out a meager livelihood by filling two buckets of water at the well and carrying them yoke-wise and selling the water to the house owners.

There were two doctors and a dentist in Mir. They provided care for the

townspeople and Yeshiva students. Operations and serious illnesses were referred to hospitals and specialists in larger cities. Prescriptions were compounded at a drug store in the town.

Mir had a police station and a post office. Yosef, the postman, distributed mail in the town. When I arrived in Mir, I lodged for a time in his home. There was also a fire department, manned by volunteers. There were a number of tailors in town who developed a specialty in taking an old suit apart and re-sewing it inside out. This did not cost as much as having a new suit made. I still remember, with awe, the skill and competence of Schmerel, the tailor who could not read or write, and, yet, he was able to produce the most elegant and stylish suits. He would measure his customers with a long piece of brown paper and for measurements, he would put a nick in the paper at the appropriate places.

The streets in Mir were paved, mainly with cobble stones. After the winter, when the snow had lain on the ground for months and had melted under the warm rays of the sun, it became very difficult to walk in certain areas, on account of the mud. Travel between Mir and outlying areas, was either by a bus of ancient vintage, or by a horse and cart. In the rainy season, this became hazardous and messy, as travel was slow owing to the mud. In the winter, we sometimes enjoyed the diversion of sleigh rides over the snow filled roads.

The Yeshiva was a huge stone building. Six large windows lined each side, vitally necessary, if the eyesight of students, who studied commentaries printed with small type, was not to be impaired. The furniture of the Yeshiva consisted of rows of seats and hundreds of lecterns. Each student had, in fact, a lectern to himself. At one end of the Yeshiva were two ovens, which provided the heat for the entire building

during the cold weather.

My first impression of the Yeshiva was a soul stirring one. It was at night, when all the students were engaged in the study of Mussar - personal ethics and piety. As I traversed the grounds of the Yeshiva, I heard a voice of yearning, a yearning towards spiritual uplifting, a voice sublime, which made all things material recede in the distance. I can still hear that sound, its deep emotion ringing in my ears. It is one of the few experiences I will never forget. As I entered the glass doors, a most impressive scene met my eyes. Over four hundred young men were poring over books of Mussar, in which they were intensely engrossed. The sincerity of the sight, which I witnessed, moved me profoundly.

In the morning, I was taken to the Rosh Hayeshiva, Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Finkel, one of the world's most famous authorities on Talmud. Great credit is due to him for his indefatigable labor in raising the standard of study in the Yeshiva. At all hours of the day, students would come to his private residence to hear his opinion, on a "Chiddush", an original interpretation. Indeed, the Chiddush had to be of high standard to satisfy the critical mind of Rabbi Finkel.

After a couple of weeks in the Yeshiva, I was able to take stock of my fellow students, with whom I was destined to remain for a period of four years. The majority of the students were naturally of Polish origin. But about a fourth of the total were "Auslander", that is from other countries. There were, in fact, about forty Americans, thirty Germans, six Austrians, three French, one Swede, one Dane, eight English, three Irish, three Canadians, two South Africans, four Belgians, etc.

Some of the Auslander had qualified in Universities as Doctors of Medicine, others in Law. All were well advanced in secular education. They were very fine

types. Each had the same object in view, to become knowledgeable in the abstruse problems of the Talmud; to obtain a profound and deep knowledge of Judaism; to refine their character and personality. In accordance with the ethical way of life as propounded in the teachings of Mussar. To achieve their object, they did not think a journey of thousands of miles, from modern cities to a small, remote village in Poland, too much, or the exchange of the modern amenities of life, for a more primitive mode of living, too great a sacrifice. Some had even brought their wives with them and settled down in this small outlying village. They were willing to forget accustomed pleasures and conveniences for the discomforts of this village, because they knew that they were acquiring something of higher and more lasting worth than material values.

The Polish students were outstanding scholars. Some were known as prodigies in the Yeshiva world. As Mir was one of the largest and greatest Yeshiva in the world, only those who had reached a very high standard of proficiency in Talmudic studies were admitted. They were for the most part brilliant keen-minded, and of an exceedingly pleasant disposition. The majority of the students were mature men; the rest, youths, in their late teens.

Hours of study were rather long. Officially, nine hours of study a day were required, but few were content with so "limited" hours. The majority of the students studied until the early hours in the morning, and on Thursday nights, some students studied until five o'clock in the morning. Electric light was switched off in the whole town at one a.m. From that hour, study was only possible by the flickering light of huge oil lamps, which were suspended from the ceiling. This, however, did not deter the students. No difficulty, which was connected with study, was deemed

insuperable. At the end of the term when books were put in order, and the library was temporarily closed, most students felt life difficult. It seemed that some vital component had been removed from their lives. Everybody studied with boundless zeal and enthusiasm. All had but one thought in mind - to waste as little time, and to gain as much knowledge as possible.

Twice a week, the Rosh Hayeshiva,, and his son-in-law, Rabbi Chaim Shmulewitz, an eminent scholar, delivered a Pilpul, a casuistical address to the assembled students. These Pilpulim were eagerly looked forward to, as they concerned very abstruse problems, which necessitated the mind of a genius to unravel. After the Pilpul, the Rosh Hayeshiva was subjected to a veritable bombardment of questions put to him by the students. Groups would then form, debating heatedly, the various points raised by the Rosh Hayeshiva and by Rabbi Chaim.

The Mashgiach, Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz, the spiritual leader of the Yeshiva, delivered ethical and moral discourses several times a week. Many newcomers found it difficult to understand the profundity of thought involved in these philosophical expositions, which disclosed deep erudition. The Mashgiach would discuss one subject for a couple of weeks introducing in each discourse, different quotations from Rabbinic sources, and giving new and original interpretations to sayings of the Rabbis. The students, who greatly prized these lectures, arranged themselves in a huge square around the place where the Mashgiach spoke. Not a sound was to be heard during the entire invariable ninety minutes of the discourse."

Mir had a profound effect on Kopul. It is true that he suffered materially. He was always short of money and wrote letters home complaining about the harsh conditions,

particularly during the freezing Russian winters. Nevertheless his time at Mir was the most seminal of all his formative experiences. Bright and talented as he was, for the first time he was in a situation of being dwarfed both spiritually and intellectually by many of the students. More significantly Kopul came under the influence of the magnetic Rav Yerucham Levovitz, one of the outstanding exponents of the Musar Movement.

Teddy Lewis's memoir helps explain some why Kopul became so entranced Rav Yerucham and Musar. The Musar Movement was one of those periodic revivalist returns to core values that all religions experience. Spiritual renewal had always been a feature of Judaism from the period of the Prophets onwards. It was an assertion of the spirit as well as but not to the exclusion of the Law. The Jewish world of Eastern Europe had been split in the eighteenth century by the Hasidic movement which proclaimed populist, mystical, charismatic values. Its leaders appealed primarily to the downtrodden, uneducated masses of Eastern European Jewry. The political upheavals, the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648, and the internal social divides between the wealthier urban Jews and their country cousins had, together with the failure of a series of false Messiahs such as Shabbetai Zvi and Jacob Frank, created a thoroughly disillusioned community of Jews who were impoverished in every sense. Hasidism brought with it a message of joy and hope and it elevated experience and feeling over intellectual achievement. Songs, stories, and parables were vehicles to enable the Jewish masses to feel that they belonged and mattered in an otherwise cruel and alienating environment. The Baal Shem Tov, which literally translates as "The man with a good name" but more accurately means that he was "The Honest Man of The People", started a movement which swept through the Jewish world very much as did the Protestant Schism which divided Christianity. The reaction of the established rabbinical leadership was to issue the equivalent of excommunications which, although they soon fell into abeyance,

indicated the strength of the divide.

Hasidism, in its earliest forms, asserted feeling over knowledge and the established academies reacted by redoubling the emphasis on academic excellence. One of the results was that after a period of time the academies tended to lose something of the reflective, meditational, mystical elements of Judaism that tended to balance the emphasis on the Law. The Musar Movement, initiated by Rabbi Israel Salanter (1810-1883), set out to redress the balance. It also wanted to combat the inroads that Secularism was increasingly making into the Ghettos of Eastern Europe. It won adherents among the academies of Eastern European Jewry. It could be extreme and ascetic, as in the case of Novardhok, but, in a reflective, self-disciplined but moderate form, it was the dominant disposition of Mir. Although later on in his life Kopul turned away from Musar and towards his own family's roots in Hasidism, his Mir experience was absolutely crucial. He always had a photograph of the Mashgiach, Rav Yerucham Levovitz, on his desk and he named me, his first born son after him.

When Kopul came to write a monograph for an external M.A. at Manchester University (which recognised his Rabbinical diploma as the equivalent of a B.A.), the subject he chose was 'Rabbi Israel Salanter and The Musar Movement'. It was this mixture of the disciplined self-analysis and the rigorous pursuit of both study and prayer that matured Kopul and prepared him for his entry into the rabbinic lists.

This combination in him of Eastern European orthodoxy and Western culture and thought was unique. He neither fitted the mould of Anglo-Jewish United Synagogue ministers trained in rabbinical seminary, nor was he as closed-minded and of as limited a perspective as many of those who had only a traditional Eastern European orthodox education. Kopul was as at home in the Orthodox, Yiddish speaking, Eastern European,

modest atmosphere of his home as he was at the Royal Opera House at Convent Garden. His 'brand' of orthodoxy was at that time seen as much more positive than the established norms of 'orthodoxy.' Kopul was a very modern man and he represented a highly attractive expression of Judaism, a model in living intensely and with commitment in both cultural worlds. Kopul came into the rabbinate from a very orthodox position and even towards the end of his life had no inkling of the sea change that would in a generation sweep away his type of rabbinic leadership.

Kopul only came back to England once during this period, in 1936. His brother Henry married Sybil Lyons and Kopul was the Best Man. He stayed for two weeks and returned to complete his studies.

Much of the material here can also be found in 'Memories of Kopul Rosen' Edited by Cyril Domb and Published in 1970.

This chapter owes most to Henry Shaw's contribution to that collection of essays 'Kopul's early years.'

Chapter 2

The Rabbinate

The Jewish community to which Kopul returned in 1938 after three years in Poland was about to change more fundamentally than most people realized at the time. Anglo Jewry was still dominated by the 'Old' Anglo Jewish semi-aristocratic families most of whom had arrived in England around a hundred years before the massive immigration from poverty-stricken Eastern European ghettos. They were now more Anglo than Jewish. Their

virtual disappearance from the ranks of practicing Jewry today confirms their priorities then. When the waves of immigrants began arriving from Russia and Poland the reaction of many Anglo Jewry's lay leaders was to try to discourage the newcomers from disembarking in the first place. When that failed, they set out to try and Anglicize them as quickly as possible, a course of action that, to be fair, many immigrants were only too pleased to accept. They assumed that establishing oneself in British society required abandoning one's Orthodoxy. Even if they did not think in such utilitarian terms, their escape from their primitive lives in the east was usually seen as an opportunity to cast off most of what they associated with it. They soon adopted a mood of uncomfortable apology for being different and of wanting to be more English than the English.

The established Jewish community was predominantly anti-Zionist and misread the mood of the masses of Jews. They, like their equally assimilating American cousins wanted to be seen as Englishmen (or Americans) of the Jewish persuasion. Their preference was to down play their Jewishness, to be excessively worried about charges of dual loyalties. In the late thirties, for example the grandson of Sir Moses Montefiore and Neville Laski, both of whom had been significant lay leaders, opposed Jewish marches of protest against Hitler on the grounds that it would not 'look good' for the Jewish community and the President of the Board of Deputies, Selig Brodetsky, actively tried to undermine Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld's desperate attempts to rescue as many German Jews as he could from Hitler. There were of course exceptions, but in the main this conservative, cautious mood that pervaded the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association resulted in the fact that most of the creative forces in Anglo Jewry have come from later generations of immigrants or outsiders.

The main synagogue organisation, the United Synagogue, was the official voice of

the 'Established Jewish Church'. It had been recognised by Parliament in the nineteenth century as the official representative religious organization of Jewry. It appointed the Chief Rabbi. There were, even then (and more so today), other Jewish religious denominations to the right and to the left, more Orthodox and less Orthodox, which did not accept its authority or that of the Chief Rabbinate. But so dominant was the United Synagogue that its detractors could only fulminate in private or undermine surreptitiously.

The United Synagogue then, if less so today, tried to ape the Church of England (some would say the City of London as well). At one stage only the Chief could be called 'Rabbi,' all others had to be called Reverend. Canonicals similar to those used by the Anglicans were and sometimes still are worn. And in many synagogues the atmosphere more closely resembled that of a church. This may well have been considered praiseworthy in some quarters but it was not the traditional Jewish experience of spirituality or prayer.

The main Orthodox synagogues in London were under the control of the United Synagogue. To get a position in one of them, one needed the approval and the certification of the Chief Rabbinate and, even then, without ordination from Jews College and a secular degree, there was no chance of landing one of the plumb positions.

There were one or two independent Orthodox synagogues in Britain, mainly in the provinces. But in the capital the only significant orthodox alternative to the United Synagogue, was called The Federation of Synagogues. It had been set up by Samuel Montagu, 1st Baron Swaythling (21 December 1832 - 12 January 1911) who had founded Samuel Montague and Co. He was made aware that the new immigrants from Eastern Europe found the Anglo style of religious practice and liturgy of the United Synagogues, completely alien. They preferred the smaller, more informal shtiebelach, more familiar back home. So Montague helped establish The Federation of Synagogues to unite the disparate

chapels and prayer rooms centered around the East End into an organized institution with a voice of its own. The Federation had far fewer and less prestigious synagogues than the United Synagogue and it as it lacked a powerful centralized authority it was subject to factionalism and schisms. Neither the old Machzikei HaDass nor the newer Adath Israel gave up their independence and in due course the Adath would supersede the others. But at the time it was marginal.

When Kopul returned to England look for a job he was an outsider, regarded with suspicion by Chief Rabbi Hertz (who had good reason to worry about this firebrand he had clashed over before), and looked upon as a greenhorn by the old Anglo Jews. The United Synagogue, however, was not as dominant in the provinces as it was in London so Kopul looked to opportunities there and was soon offered his first position.

It was in Manchester in February 1939³ that he became first rabbi of the new, independent Higher Crumpsal Hebrew Congregation with a salary of £6 a week. His impact was immediate and dramatic. Here was a young man able to address the issues of the day articulately, with vigour, and with a commanding presence. He started a magazine, Hamevasair, “not for those who want to say something but for those who have something to say.” He had experienced the anxieties and the turmoil of Eastern European communities as news of what was happening in Germany spread eastwards. And he was a passionate Zionist, all the more so for having witnessed the inability of Eastern European orthodoxy to seize the opportunities that Zionism offered. His yeshiva, Mir, was in a part of Eastern Europe where the traumas of post- revolutionary Russia were profoundly and immediately felt. This reinforced his belief in the need for a Jewish homeland as amelioration of the Eastern European Jewish crisis as well as a return to religious and historical authenticity.

³ JC April 21 1939

Nowadays it would be unusual for a young rabbinic graduate of a very orthodox yeshiva to be as positively identified with Zionism as Kopul was. His involvement in the Zionist movement gave him a ready-made platform to plead for realistic solutions to the so-called 'Jewish problem'.

As a young single man he gathered around him a number of other youngsters, some local Mancunians and some refugees, and they would study together, debate, and play. Amongst his closest friend was Yaakov Newman who went on to become the rabbi of Croydon and then a suburban community in Johannesburg before settling in Israel. I once asked Yaakov about my father. I wondered whether Yaakov would tell me more about him. He replied cryptically that my father was not perfect. But when I asked him to clarify or expand he would not. I knew of course he was not perfect, but the most I could ever get out of people was that he sometimes had a short fuse or that he did not suffer fools gladly. My mother once said he got bored easily and often at public events took a book or a paper and retired into a corner to read if he could. I would often come across people who remembered Kopul from his bachelor days and the Friday evening Oneg Shabbat gatherings he arranged and inspired. His youth, his charm, his oratory, and his compelling personality turned him very quickly into a speaker sought after all around the country.

One of his lectures in 1940 took him to Cardiff where he met and fell in love with Bella Cohen. She was then a student at the University, a beautiful, bright girl who had been brought up in a strict and traditional atmosphere which was, for the time, a surprisingly enlightened one. Her father, Moshe Yaacov, known as M.J., had come as a boy from the Ukraine to live in Tredegar in the Welsh valleys. He started, as many did, hawking haberdashery around the mining villages. Hard work brought success and his own business. To be nearer a hub of Jewish life, he moved to Manchester for a while but he later went

back to live in Wales and established himself in Cardiff. Unlike some who in those difficult times saw religious observance as an obstacle to success, he remained devoutly orthodox throughout his life. Nevertheless, like many upwardly mobile immigrants, he wanted his children to have the best of everything, including a good secular education.

In time he bought a very elegant house with a tennis court, a conservatory, and a kitchen garden. It was called Mozanne, a combination of his name Moses and his wife's, Annie and was on Cyncoed Road, then backed by fields and farms. Its elegant dining room was furnished in the very latest Bauhaus style. Other reception rooms were in a more conventional 'British contemporary' upper Middle Class style. His children went to good academic schools in Cardiff. Bella was taught tennis and ballroom dancing and when she graduated was sent to Aschers, a Jewish institution in Switzerland, the nearest thing Jewry had at that time to a finishing school. Her traditional values, her poise and elegance, made her an ideal foil, and support, for Kopul. They were married on August 27th 1940. She abandoned her academic studies and she set about dedicating herself to his career, to the point of self-denial.

Shortly before his death Kopul wrote a letter to his father-in-law and said

"I do not believe...that there are many couples who have known such a deep love and sense of partnership as we have known...Had we not been united by the deepest bonds we could not have faced all our problems together and triumphed."

The Manchester experience was one that Kopul always looked back on with warmth and the connections. Friendships he made stayed with him throughout his life. He served on the Beth Din and was President of the Torah VaAvodah youth movement of Mizrahi, the religious Zionist movement. Manchester was the first step in his exciting career and an idyllic period before he had to face serious opposition and setbacks.

His reputation as a powerful, independent rabbi with an unusual oratorical gift spread. In December 1943 he was invited by Sir Maurice Bloch to become the Communal Rabbi of Glasgow.⁴ This represented a sudden leap into national prominence. There were no communal rabbis in the U.K. apart from Manchester, where Rabbi Dr. Altman presided and hitherto there had been no Communal Rabbi in Glasgow. This was a choice appointment. The author Chaim Bermant records that when Kopul Rosen had finished his induction address an elder of the community was seen to walk away shaking his head.

"What's the matter?" he was asked, "don't you think he's good?"

"Good? He's marvelous."

"Then why are you shaking your head?"

"Because a man like that will never stay here for long."

And he was right, though possibly for the wrong reasons. The Rosen family' sojourn in Glasgow lasted for just two years.

Jews are great individualists. It is their strength and sometimes it is also their weakness. There is no religiously sanctioned central authority nowadays nor has there been since the Sanhedrin was brought to a close nearly two thousand years ago. Practically speaking every rabbi is his own authority and he chooses those to whom he will defer on either legal or spiritual matters. Community or Chief Rabbis were more often than not communal or political appointments and not primarily religious ones. More scholarly or traditional rabbis resented having some less learned colleague foisted upon them, all the more so, because those chosen for public positions were usually more eloquent and often more modern, less rigid. The rabbis of the 'Old School' might have projected an outward appearance of saintliness but they were often vicious in their attempts to undermine

⁴ JC Archives Dec 3.1943

whomsoever they resented.

In Biblical times, the Priests sometimes worked with the Kings and sometimes against them, and the Prophets were usually unhappy with both. During the Second Temple period, the priests formed their own political party, the Sadducees, in opposition to the populist party of the commoners, the Pharisees who get an awful press in the New Testament. They were after all the real challenge to embryonic Christianity because they were so successful in appealing to the Jewish masses. That made them the primary target of Christian polemic. There was no point in going for the Sadducees who manifestly had lost the struggle for religious authority. After the collapse of the Temple and the Priesthood there were attempts to establish a formal rabbinic structure, both in Israel and in Babylon. For several hundred years Israel or more specifically the Galilee, remained the primary authority until the Byzantines abolished the rabbinic authority. The Babylonian Exilarch continued but from then on each community accepted the authority of its own rabbi, in theory anyway. Divisions and conflicts arose. There was rivalry and rabbinic authority fragmented. It is now characterized by the expression first used in the Bible against Moses: "Who does he think he is to tell me what to do anyway".

So it was in Glasgow. The lay leadership appointed and funded the Community Rabbi. But many of the older rabbis, in particular those from Russia, were not going to be told what to do by any young English-born upstart, no matter what his credentials. Kopul had tried to prepare himself for this: he spent some time in further study under the famous Eastern European Rabbi Dessler who was temporarily in Gateshead; he grew a beard and he wore a classical frock-coat to fit in with traditional rabbinic garb. Still, he had a tough and sometimes acrimonious struggle. But, for all that, the community adored him: he wooed them, he provoked them, he stood up to them and they loved it.

Kopul soon discovered that different rabbis were arrogating to themselves separate authority on matters such as the supervision of kosher food and conversions. Dealing with conversions was relatively easy. He could simply withhold recognition of conversions where he believed they were insincere or motivated by pecuniary considerations. Getting a grip over the kosher food business was much trickier. On one occasion he personally battered down the door of kosher butcher to find as he thought he would, non-kosher meat products that the owner had brought in to pass off as kosher. This actually led to court proceedings in which Kopul was admonished for breaking in illegally, but praised for his zeal in upholding religious standards.

Another famous and typical episode took place on Kol Nidre night at Queens Park Synagogue. Kol Nidre is the most solemn Religious Service in the Jewish calendar. It initiates the Day of Atonement. Jews who never put a foot inside a synagogue often seem inexplicably drawn to attend at least this one Service in the year. Most synagogues are full. Queens Park was packed as people were drawn from all over Glasgow to hear Kopul as much as to open their hearts to God. At the moment when the rabbi delivers his sermon at the start of the Service, he rose and walked to the pulpit. He paused and waited for everyone to settle down, surveying the scene and looking purposefully around the synagogue, the lower parts where the men sat and the gallery with its ladies. Just as Rav Yerucham had done in Mir before he began his celebrated Musar talks.

Then, quietly, he began:

"You have all come here this evening, the holiest moment in the year. You should have come here to pray to God, to open your hearts and bare your consciences before the Almighty. Instead you have come to be entertained by me. That is not why I should be here. That is not why you should be here."

And with that he turned, sat down, and, in the stunned silence of disbelief, motioned the Cantor to carry on with the Service. Of course he made up for it later on in the service when he rose to speak at a different juncture and gave a more conventional, if no less stirring sermon.

In a typical letter to his congregation he started off

“Dear Friend, At the outset I must explain what is the purpose of this letter. Briefly it is this. The people do not come to the rabbi and so the Rabbi must go to the people.”

Kopul's reputation as a fighter, as someone who could command popular support, soon filtered down to London where Chief Rabbi Hertz was locked in battle with Sir Robert Waley Cohen, formidable President of the United Synagogue. Their conflict was the culmination of a struggle for power between the old, patronizing Anglo-Jewish aristocrats who were on their way to assimilation and were not practicing orthodox Judaism; against the trend, they tended to be anti-Zionist too. Yet, out of a (misplaced) sense of *noblesse oblige*, they ran and determined policy for institutions with whose constituents they had little in common. Hertz represented innovative assertive trends in Orthodoxy. He had spent time in the USA and he sympathized with the injection of new life and leadership from the European refugees coming to England from Russia and in the wake of Nazism. He had locked horns with Waley Cohen and the rest of the Lay leadership and he needed an ally. He had hoped his son-in-law Solomon Schonfeld would play that role. But he was too identified with the more Right Wing Adath and had proved himself too erratic and unreliable in dealing with the establishment. Recognizing the value of my father's gifts, Hertz started to court him. The proposal soon came that my father should join him in London to support him in his battles.

At this time The Federation of Synagogues, was looking for a Principal Rabbi.

Then as now they did not recognize the authority of the Chief Rabbinate but agreed to present a front of unity to the outside world by calling their top man 'Principal Rabbi' instead of 'Chief'. Hertz urged Kopul to take the job. Kopul knew that if he had problems in Glasgow, they would be child's play in comparison to what would await him in London, but he was excited by the challenge and was aware that this was too a crucial a time for him to refuse to take it up. It was also an astonishing position for one so young. So, in 1945, when he was just 32 Kopul, Bella and their two sons moved to London.

Even before he had been officially installed he was asked by the Chief Rabbi to go to the Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp to report on what progress was being made to rehabilitate survivors who were still blocked in camps because there was no agreement as to where they might go⁵. He was made an honorary Chaplain and given the rank of Colonel for his efforts. He returned even more determined than before to press for Britain to allow more to go to Palestine.

Kopul was officially installed as Principal Rabbi of the Federation by Rabbi S Rabinow in February 1946.⁶ Kopul's fiery oratory was in great demand in London. The most significant issue facing the Jewish world at this moment was the situation of Jews in Palestine. Kopul was now the Vice President of Mizrahi, the Religious Zionist Movement and so he was a central figure in Anglo Zionist affairs. The community had to react to the policies of the post war Labour Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin. He together with the Foreign Office, had little sympathy for Jewish aspirations. Rather he supported Arab demands to prevent the Jewish population increasing and he proceeded to block survivors of the Holocaust from entering Palestine. The Zionist movements rallied and campaigned in support of the Jewish community in Palestine and Kopul together with other rabbinic leaders, was passionately

⁵ JC July 12 1946

⁶ JC Feb 22 1946

involved in the Zionist cause. The Anglo American Committee of Inquiry into Palestine met in 1946 and held hearings in London as well as elsewhere. In London Kopul made a powerful and moving speech in giving evidence to them. It was the talk of the town and an American member of the committee, Bartley Crum, wrote about Kopul in 'Behind the Silken Curtain.' And that was where he made the acquaintance and friendship of Richard Crossman who was one of the few members of the committee well-disposed to the Zionist cause.

At the same time he championed Jewish education at home. He helped found the North West London Jewish Day School.⁷ He campaigned in Liverpool for a Jewish Day School.⁸ And he was heavily involved in youth activities too. He took Jewish Study Groups to Switzerland for Summer holiday camps. He worked to expand Bachad and Torah VaAvodah, orthodox Zionist movements designed to encourage youngsters to go to Palestine. And of course he continued in private and public, his protests against British Government policies in the Mandate. In 1947 he would be unanimously elected President of British Mizrahi.

What was also exciting for Kopul, young as he was, was the serious and surprising possibility that, after Hertz's sudden death in 1946, he was considered to be a front running candidate for the Chief Rabbinate. Later in life he would disparage that position, claiming that as a representative role it was too circumscribed to exert real power and that the pressures were such that they would soon emasculate the strongest of men. At that time, however, it seemed to be a golden opportunity.

It was not to be. His lack of a formal academic education, his youth, and above all his reputation as a fearlessly outspoken maverick, counted against him, particularly among the Anglicized laymen who comprised the selection committee. That a Chief Rabbi should be selected by people who were not particularly spiritually minded or religiously informed was

⁷ JC Feb 16 1946

⁸ JC April 12 1946

and remains today a rather sad reflection on a community, which, in Kopul's words, got the leadership it deserved. Of course that was his biased view then.

In the end they appointed Israel Brody in June 1948⁹. He was an Oxford man, an Army Chaplain, a polished if unexciting speaker, a moral, kind and good man. However when faced with challenges of office he proved to be a weak and indecisive man. In some respects a better man than Anglo Jewry deserved but a poorer leader.

The State of Israel was declared in that year. Kopul and Bella were invited to South Africa as guests of the United Israel Appeal and the South African Mizrahi. They went out on a P&O ship and stayed for six weeks touring the southern continent. He was a great success and renewed his deep friendship with the Chief Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz. His diary included the note 'As soon as circumstances permit I shall leave the rabbinate...I must get away from the atmosphere of the paid professional preacher with all its histrionic posturings and communal intrigues.'" In November of 1948 he made a similar trip to Australia.

Kopul's time at The Federation was not a happy one. His youthful dynamism brought him into constant conflict with the unimaginative lay and religious leadership. What sustained him was his energetic campaigning for Zionism as the emergence of a Jewish state seemed possible and the satisfaction he derived from his success in communicating with many sections of metropolitan Jewry, in particular the disaffected and alienated. He was one of the few Rabbis who ever tried to reach out to the anti-religious Jewish socialists and politically active working classes, and for a while he succeeded. In addition to his Federation position he was also President of Mizrahi, the Religious Zionist Movement. Having campaigned so hard for a Jewish state he now had to help raise money to support the

⁹ JC June 4 1948

religious kibbutz movement and support the party in Israel.¹⁰ And of course he continued his support of Israel in general even though he was dismayed at the politicization that inevitably came with establishment of the Jewish State.

The time Kopul and Bella spent in London had its more relaxing moments. When the demands of the rabbinate were less onerous, in addition to the time he spent studying Torah, Kopul together with Bella attended painting classes. This was a hobby they both became very proficient at. The time they shared was precious, all the more so because once the next phase of their life together began, the pressures would be so overwhelming that it would be years before they could spend time together in pure relaxation.

There was now nothing attractive left in the Rabbinate for Kopul beyond continuing aggravation with The Federation. So he began to think of other ways in which he might use his talents and energies for the benefit of the community. He was 35. Interestingly, and ironically for one who was a devoted Zionist, he did not at that moment look to Israel, as did many talented Jews of the time or indeed to the USA; but chose, rather, to concentrate on the educational future of Anglo-Jewry.

Chapter 3

Carmel College

Kopul was a man of enthusiasms and whatever he was enthusiastic about everyone else had to be as well. In that sense he was a true missionary. He had a vision of the ideal Jew. And that ideal was, whether he would have admitted it or not, himself. He dreamt of creating a whole generation of young men (and then young women) who were steeped in Jewish learning, who practised their religion with warm enthusiasm and

¹⁰ JC January 16 1948

without fanaticism. Yet at the same time, they were educated and familiar with Western culture. In addition he thought it would be nice if they could also be articulate, good at sports, music and art, be well groomed and elegant at all times.

This was no small dream. It was difficult enough to be cultured and at ease in one civilisation let alone two. Kopul had always stressed the importance of knowledge. His vision of 'the authentic Jew' was of someone steeped in Jewish knowledge and at home in his Jewish culture as in the secular world. He often used to say that an ignorant Jew could not possibly be proud of something he knew little about. His vision was simple, The Best of Both Worlds. Who would turn their noses up at the best of both, at two for the price of one? Unfortunately he encountered lukewarm support and often virulent opposition.

At first he applied his energies to Day Schools and campaigned throughout 1946 and 1947 to combat the ignorance of the Jewish community. The sad fact was that two World Wars had not only decimated two generations but also meant that two generations had been deprived of any substantive Jewish education during formative years. He looked around him and he saw fine young Anglo-Jews at good non-Jewish schools who, through lack of knowledge were growing away from their Jewish roots. On the other hand he saw others so steeped in their Judaism or indeed Zionism that they were rejecting or devaluing Western culture and manners.

The most famous schools in Britain at the time were the old 'Public Schools' based on Arnold of Rugby's 'Robust Christianity.' Doctor Arnold's innovation had profoundly influenced English education and helped create a cadre of young men who helped build the British Empire. Kopul admired these Public Schools although he certainly objected to the excesses of 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' and some schools still held on to archaic traditions.

He thought that if he had pupils in his environment which would discard the dross and combine the best of the English and the Jewish he would be able to persuade Anglo Jewry of the value of his vision for Jewish education in an open society.

In Britain in those days parents who wanted a child to succeed in British society aspired to giving their children a public school education if at all possible. Of course most could not afford it. They had to rely on State schools. Some were very good. If one could pass the 11+ exam and get into a 'Grammar School' one could rise and shine. Otherwise one would be consigned to the Secondary Modern system universally regarded as a poor option that would not normally lead to a university education. The very notion of Jewish education in those days was regarded as reactionary and if anything an extra to be suffered until one was Bar Mitzvah and then dropped. It was only in the late 1960's when a doctrinaire Labour Government scrapped the Grammar schools and brought in Comprehensive schools that the flight to Jewish education took off and Jewish schools became the norm rather than the exception.

In 1948 however those who could place their children in good Day Schools Public or Private did so, and these were the cream of the Jewish community. The apostles of English Public Schools argued that it was unhealthy to have separate Jewish Schools. They were prepared to have segregated Jewish houses at non-Jewish schools and did not consider this to be unhealthy. But this was not really an honest debate. The real and deciding factor was snobbery and a Jewish Public School, like a Catholic one was always going to be second best.

On the other hand arguments against Public schools were that they had outlived their original purpose. Some of them it was true had very high and impressive academic standards but their hierarchies and values were not those that Orthodox Jewish parents put

much store by. And for the vast majority of Jews in Britain the cost of private Boarding education was forbidding, regardless of how good the education might be.

So Kopul decided to found his own educational laboratory. Initially he started canvassing the idea of a Jewish Boarding School while he was committed to the Federation rabbinate. He found some support mainly amongst the Mizrahi Religious Zionist community which had already set up its own residential centres in Britain to train youngsters to go to Palestine as agricultural pioneers. He gathered around a group of traditional Jews who agreed to help him start a project while he continued to be the Principal Rabbi of the Federation.

When he realized the rabbinate would not be his future he threw himself wholeheartedly into this new educational venture of his and established Carmel College, first as a Limited Company and then as a charity. The roll-call of the founding Governors remains a fascinating reflection of the 'Modern' religious or at least traditional community in London of the time; Joe Gilbert, Alexander Margulies, Abba Bornstein, Bernard Homa, Oscar Philip, George Shipman and Oskar Rabinowicz. After two years Philip, Homa and Shipman resigned. Leslie Paisner, Armin Krausz and Jacob Braude joined briefly.

The Governors provided the encouragement and the seed money to set the school up. In 1947 Kopul found an estate on Greenham Common, Newbury that had during the war been Eisenhower's headquarters. The main building was a mock Elizabethan country house that had been built at the turn of the century. It had elegant wood panelling, minstrels' gallery and imposing main staircase. It stood in beautiful grounds, with huge Rhododendron bushes around an ornamental lake. The main building was supplemented by stables, out houses, barns and garden huts. It needed a lot of work done to it. And money was tight from the outset.

Kopul started looking for pupils. He appealed to the bright children of poor families but although some heard his call, boarding education was not as attractive to poor, urban Jews as it was to wealthy country gentiles. So he offered scholarships to gifted poor children and particularly to the children of refugees. He turned to wealthier families whose children could not get into the best schools and he also found individuals who wanted something unique and more suited to their children's non-conformist personalities. Thus he established the school with a group of mainly gifted individuals who did not fit any conventional mould. Those exceptions helped establish the academic reputation of the school. But they remained very much, exceptions. And very few of them came from religious let alone orthodox homes.

The dream was the perfect synthesis of the Public School with the Yeshiva. His ideal pupils would, on graduating his school go on to study in both. But apart from one or two pupils, who were more influenced in this religious direction by their parents, it was not fulfilled in Kopul's life and even less so after his death. This does not mean that the school he founded was not a success. Just that it did not succeed in the way he originally intended it to.

Carmel was named after the 'mountain' in Israel partly because of the link with Zion and also because of its Biblical connotations, New and Old, Jewish and Pagan. It was a struggle from day one. If the founding Governors put up the money to buy the original building, the day to day, running budget had to be covered by Kopul. Even with some twenty pupils and a few members of staff, the task of finding the cash was monumental. A third of the original pupils paid no fees. Helping the disadvantaged was from the outset a cardinal principle.

The Jewish community was sceptical. Most of the wealthy members whom Kopul approached expressed admiration for him but antagonism to the idea of a Jewish school. Arguments ranged from the absurd "If a child is going to be exposed to anti-Semitism let him get used to it early on" (if he is going to suffer pain, if he is going to be crippled, let it be now!) to the manifestly false "Children who go to Jewish schools will not be able to mix with non-Jews later on ". Amongst the Orthodox opposition was mainly because the curriculum was too secular and Carmel seemed too much like a non-Jewish Public School for their liking. Most Orthodox Jews tended to want to keep their children at home before sending them off to Yeshiva at a later stage.

In those days Public schools were far more Spartan than they have become. Those were the days of early morning cross country runs and cold showers which Carmel adopted. Kopul loved to tell the story of Dov Weinberger. Dov was the brilliant son of two cultured German refugees who had settled in Jerusalem. His father was a successful lawyer. His mother Gustle was well known on the international Inter-Faith circuit. Dov was a passionate student but athletically uninterested and uncoordinated. He argued strongly against the obligatory morning run and protested this waste of time and glorification of pagan Greek ideals with all the means at his disposal. In the end the crude force of school discipline won and he went on his first run. To everyone's surprise he came back in exceptional time, amongst the leaders. When Kopul was next at the school he went up to Dov to congratulate him. Dov looked at him with blazing eyes and said

"I only did it to get back to my studies as quickly as possible."

Initially Kopul, who had decided to call himself Principal, left the day to day running of the school in the hands of a Non Jewish Head or Senior Master. The Rosen family still lived in London in an elegant detached house in Farm Avenue and Kopul continued as the

Principal Rabbi of the Federation. But as relations with the leadership of The Federation deteriorated the atmosphere in London made it inevitable that Kopul would seek a more congenial atmosphere to work in. He and Bella were invited to South Africa by the United Palestine Appeal to help raise money for the nascent State. He was a great hit and they had a wonderful time. But when they returned the Federation officers complained he had been away for too long. This did not deter him. In November they went on another long speaking trip via America to Australia. Once again the officers of the Federation grumbled. Kopul was getting fed up and wanted his independence. Carmel offered this possibility.

Kopul had always said that the Federation treated him badly (but then most Jewish organisations treat their employees pretty shabbily) and eventually in March 1949 he resigned¹¹ and moved with his family into a two-roomed apartment in the main building at Carmel. Bella took over the catering and cleaning and Kopul brought his charisma to bear on pupils and staff alike. He enthusiastically cast off his Rabbinic frock coat and adopted academic garb, the gown during the week and the mortarboard and cape on formal occasions. Nevertheless whenever he appeared in Jewish circles he still wore his Homburg and preferred dark suits.

Life in the countryside was idyllic. The gorgeous grounds were full of secret groves and lakes and pools alive with newts, frogs and water beetles. There were magnificent trees, Cedars, Pines and huge banks of Rhododendron bushes that bloomed each with gaudy blossom and received visiting hosts of noisy starlings that performed their massing whirls and chattering manoeuvres in their season. There were farms to visit and calves to cuddle and have their sand-paper tongues rasp your hands and cheeks. Gypsy caravans and fun fairs passed and sometimes stayed on the adjoining Greenham Common.

¹¹ JC March 18 1949

During vacation time the school was rented out to visiting groups. Jewish Agency Seminars organised by Levi Gertner and their Israeli atmosphere, with the folk-dancing, Modern Hebrew courses and the courting couples. Kopul would enjoy the company of visiting scholars and as a passionate Zionist and philo-Israeli culture he revelled in the atmosphere of the seminars.

Altogether he seemed to love his new life and the opportunities it gave him relax and interact with different people. Most people were completely unaware of his financial problems and the tremendous pressures and worries he laboured under. Throughout the rest of his life he was burdened by the constant need to find funds to keep the school alive. On many occasions tradesmen refused to deliver because bills were not paid. Too often he had to beg and just as often he was humiliated by refusals.

He had withdrawn from the London Jewish scene in more senses than one. Like Achilles he was seen as having retired to his tent to nurse his wounds. His final rift with the Centrist Orthodox community came over the issue of Religious Parties in Israel. He had been the leading light and major personality in the Religious Zionist movement, Mizrahi.

When Mizrahi decided to form itself into a political party and entered the Knesset in the fledgling Jewish State Kopul believed that political considerations would lead to the 'prostitution of Religion for political ends.' He expressed his unhappiness but still he felt an obligation to Mizrahi and continued as President through its fractious conference in 1950.¹² But he was feeling increasingly alienated. His fears were realised. The entry of religious parties into Israeli political life bred resentment, exacerbated the antagonism between secular and religious. It led to constant resentment when religious practices were imposed as a result of coalition bargaining. It was argued that given the reality of the political

¹² JC Jan 27 1950

situation in Israel and the antagonism of the secular parties to Religion, Mizrahi had no alternative. Kopul felt that the losses outweighed the gains and religion became sullied by the machinations of its representatives. He resigned from the Israel party but remained as President in the U.K where officially the organisation remained a politically independent charity. His position as President also gave him a position as Vice President of the European wing of the World Jewish Congress. This was how he came to be associated with Nahum Goldman the world President, a man very far from Kopul spiritually but whose contacts and influence would help in Kopul's second dream of establishing a Carmel College in Israel.

On the 27th of December 1950 Kopul's parents died tragically in Dublin where they had gone to live during the Depression and made a modest living from coating buttons. It was Feiga, Fanny's custom very Friday afternoon to bake challot and while the oven was doing its work. She and Solomon would take a pre Shabbat nap. On this occasion the flame went out. Their little cottage only had two rooms. The gas soon filled the room they slept in and they died in each other's arms. It was a tragic but romantic end to their lives. Kopul's loss was compensated for when in August 1951 a third son, David Solomon was born to Kopul and Bella at Newbury.

In starting Carmel College Kopul had recruited a strange assortment of staff, Jewish and non-Jewish. The criterion was the best man for the job. But who would join what looked like a shaky experiment? Only people who found it difficult to fit in anywhere else or the unemployable with the odd young starry eyed idealist joined the founding team .The original staff was an idiosyncratic mixture of brilliance, lunacy and confused aims and goals. Kopul's genius was to unite them in a mission to succeed. Success was to be judged in terms of academic excellence and conventional State and University examination results.

The financial pressures continued. Things were often so desperate that on one occasion Bella's engagement ring went to a tradesman as security to provide the pupils with breakfast. And yet the all-pervading presence of the founder kept the whole project together as term followed term, the numbers slowly increased and something resembling a school began to emerge. An important factor in the success of the school was the increasing numbers of students from abroad who were attracted by the possibility of a genuine English education in a Jewish social context.

In 1952 a junior school was acquired at Crookham Court, a few miles just across the Common from the main estate. New staff were appointed and the business of education continued. Alas things were not to run smoothly. No sooner was one crisis over when another struck.

It was announced that the American Air Force would return to Greenham Common and build a new runway to take its huge intercontinental bombers. There was no possibility of staying and teaching in buildings a few hundred yards from roaring jets but it was unlikely that many would rush to buy an estate so near the exhausts of the massive U.S.A.A.F. bombers.

So, with hardly any resources, a valueless estate and a student body approaching 150 Carmel had to look for another home. After months of exhausting search Mongewell Park near Wallingford was found and over the summer of 1953, aided by a gang of willing pupils, the school moved. In many ways the estate was far more suitable. It was a blessing in disguise.

Kopul increasingly withdrew from Mizrahi and concentrated instead on the World Jewish Congress. Finally in September 1953 he resigned reiterating his objections to

Mizrahi's involvement in politics in Israel.¹³ A terse statement from the organization commented on how in fact Kopul had not been involved in recent years.

The founding Governors were increasingly at odds with Kopul. It seems to be a common disease of Jewish school governors (I cannot speak for other varieties of this breed) that they think of education as a business. It does seem a trifle disingenuous to invite them in and then complain if they only see things in the way they have been trained.

In a way it is the fault of the educationists. They want businessmen on the board to help with the finances and then realise that they are riding a tiger that only speaks one language. The Governors were unhappy about the finances of the College, in particular they objected to the cavalier way my father handed out scholarships and gave reductions in the fees when there were no endowments to cover them. They had contact with the Senior Master, an impressive Chemist called Romney Coles. They knew he was unhappy and thought that his role as the senior secular teacher was more crucial than my father's in the day to day running of the school.

The Governors were all involved in Mizrahi and it can be no coincidence that the very moment at which Kopul's resignation was made public, they went into action to remove him from the school. They asked him to move away or resign and remain only as the figurehead otherwise they would withdraw their support. Kopul refused. The governors then wrote round to all the parents expressing their lack of confidence in him. Naturally enough he counter circularised asking for a vote of confidence, which he duly received. Gilbert, Margulies, Bornstein, Homa, Rabinowicz, Paisner and Braude resigned taking their backing with them. This meant that Carmel had no funding and its mortgage was in doubt. It might have been foreclosed.

¹³ JC Sept 18 1953

Kopul immediately set up a new Governing body under the distinguished chairmanship of Jock Collier of United Draperies one of the wealthiest of Anglo-Jews at the time although he was a sick man and in effect only a figurehead. But the problem of money remained .To Kopul's rescue came Isaac, later Sir Isaac Wolfson.

Isaac Wolfson provided the funds to pay back the founder Governors. The School was a charitable trust and so long as he was satisfied that a reasonable board of new trustees, Governors, would accept responsibility he would be happy to pay up and leave the rest to them. Kopul never forgot that debt. What was surprising was that after his victory he magnanimously made it up with his opponents and I for one never heard him recriminate or even pass a critical remark. He was fond of saying that if you expect things of people you will always be disappointed. Perhaps he was referring to those pupils who seemed to show no gratitude for his support of them, financially and emotionally. On the other hand it could also have applied to the wealthy Jews he would go asking for support from, only to be cruelly rebuffed. They would court him when they needed him, but rarely reciprocate.

One of the people who refused Kopul help was Jack Cotton a successful property developer from Birmingham. But he did, shortly after turning Kopul down, give a lot of money to build a monkey house at London Zoo. Soon afterwards Kopul spoke at a JIA fund raising dinner and referring to Cotton's donation quipped that people naturally gave money to causes closest to their heart. Cotton was present and Kopul had to apologize.

Kopul had more success with the Wix family who helped put up several buildings at the school. Still it was galling for pupils to see the way Kopul, who most of them regarded with a degree of awe barely short of Divinity, to see him make a fuss and kow tow to donors in his desperate need for support. He would often respond by making not too subtle remarks such as "You can tell what the Almighty thinks of money by the sort of people He

gives it to.” Kopul held regular classes and discussion groups, particularly over Shabbat and Festivals. It was intoxicating to listen to him on any subject. But particularly his critique of Anglo Jewry, its lay and rabbinic leadership and Jewish life in general, was invigorating. It gave pupils a sense of their special position in the community, being part of it and yet at the same time critical outsiders. This often impacted long afterwards in a sense of alienation and dislocation but it gave one a bond, a feeling of belonging to privileged group around and an impressive guru.

Chapter 4

Triumph and disaster

The Joshua Podro affair in 1954 illustrates another side to Kopul. His elder brother Henry Shaw known as Hashy, was similar in the timbre of his voice. But although he was taller he did not have either Kopul's handsome genes or his charisma. Neither was he as intellectually incisive. But he was a wonderfully warm, kind man. He had a great sense of humour, was a great raconteur, the sort of person you simply could not help liking and Henry was as universally loved as Kopul was controversial. He was largely self-taught nonetheless he was highly educated in Judaica. He loved Hazzanut as much as a Requiem Masses. He was less rabbinic than Kopul but still as committed Jewishly.

Henry had trained as a social worker but in the 1950s he was the religious director of the Association of Jewish Youth. In 1954 he was appointed the Director of the Hillel Foundation, a department of the Bnai Brith, and its London Student residential centre Hillel House in Endsleigh Street London. He and his devoted wife Sybil were surrogate parents and friends to thousands of Jewish students from the UK and abroad who passed through the doors of Hillel. Their Shabbat meals were a feature of London Student life for many years.

Henry and Sybil had no children so they were able to really devote themselves to their temporary charges. Kopul and Henry were close, but rarely saw much of each other. Henry did not come down to Carmel nearly often enough but when he did he radiated affection and avuncular warmth. He was a welcome contrast to Kopul's disciplined and authoritarian parenthood. His nephews adored him.

Henry was now responsible for most of the student activity that went on in London. In 1954 Robert Graves, the well known poet and writer combined with Joshua Podro, born a Jew, who had converted to Christianity, to write several books about Jesus of Nazareth that were controversial. The London Jewish graduate Society with Henry's approval invited Podro to address them.¹⁴ Kopul was incensed. He objected on two grounds. Podro had publicly and unpleasantly repudiated Judaism. He had written several books highly derogatory of the Bible and Jewish interpretation. Kopul was furious with Henry for approving the invitation. He objected to Jewish Students being exposed to Podro. This was surprising given Kopul's hatred of censorship. Henry refused to budge. Kopul wrote to the Jewish Chronicle explaining his opposition. He thought Henry would still relent but he did not. In the end Kopul took some students from Carmel with him to London to hear the lecture and was given the floor to express his objections. The incident was soon forgotten.

The Jewish community remained aloof from Carmel despite Kopul's involvement in a range of educational projects like supporting Rabbi Pinter's Yesodei HaTorah School in Stamford Hill¹⁵ and the establishment of Lubavitch House. The Orthodox had written Carmel off as being too liberal and the non-orthodox thought it was only a training ground for rabbis. In fact the student body was predominantly non-Orthodox and they suffered the imposition of Orthodox standards with ill grace at best and sullen resistance

¹⁴ JC Jan 1 1954

¹⁵ JC March 11 1955

in the main. Most parents, not themselves religious, conveyed to their children the fact that their priority was the secular and not the religious programme. It was only the presence and personality of my father that offered a perception of Jewish commitment that was attractive in theory. In practice however the Carmel experience even of that golden period certainly did not convert many pupils to an Orthodox life style or even a taste for Jewish learning. It still did achieve something worthwhile, in some cases staving off assimilation (even though in others it hastened it) but it was not successful in the terms that my father originally dreamed that it would be. Kopul took comfort from small gains. He often expressed his satisfaction that an increasing number of Israeli boys who came to Carmel from secular, even anti religious homes typical of the Israeli elite, left with at least an appreciation of the value and contribution of Judaism. In Kopul's optimistic world, something was always better than nothing.

The quality of Jewish teaching at Carmel was poor but what positive attitude towards Judaism it did offer revolved around Kopul himself. He was a brilliant charismatic teacher and occasionally he would fill in for sick or absent teachers in anything from literature to mathematics (not his strong point) as well of course Jewish studies. He tried hard to provide additional extra-curricular Talmud to the few pupils really interested in extra study. But he was regularly away in London and elsewhere constantly trying to raise money for the school (not to mention his trips to South Africa where he was extremely popular and campaigned both for Israel and Jewish Education). His magnetic personality was really felt only over weekends and festivals.

An example of his unique style was the way the school would gather on Saturday nights for the final service of Shabbat. Between the late afternoon and the evening prayers there would be a period of silent contemplation and then Kopul would start singing softly

and slowly some contemplative Musar melodies he had learnt in Mir Yeshiva in Lithuania. These combined with moving tunes for Psalm 23 created a remarkable spiritual atmosphere. It would be followed by evening prayers and the final Havdala ceremony ending Shabbat and then everything returned to its mundane routine. For most of the Jewish studies program Kopul had to delegate the teaching of Jewish studies and as a result it suffered.

It was Kopul's commanding presence on Shabbat that had an impact. At meals he led the singing, insisted on picking poorly prepared boys to sing verses or to say the Grace after meals and giving spiritual pep talks. His commanding presence was felt in the synagogue where he sometimes led services but more often than not encouraged pupils to try. It was a feature of the long summer Shabbat afternoons that in fine weather he would gather the whole of the school on the grass behind the Main Building and get everyone to learn one short Hebrew saying from 'The Ethics of the Fathers' by heart. The bright ones were away and free after a few minutes. The weaker ones stayed there for hours.

Kopul revelled in the 'academic' atmosphere of the school. He loved gathering the Jewish teachers, of whatever background, around on Friday nights at home. He created a kind of salon, somewhere where ideas were exchanged and debated. Men like Helmut Schmidt or Doc Friedman contributed to a cosmopolitan atmosphere he delighted in. He discussed German social historian Koebner with Schmidt, Chinese history and art with Doc and grammar and Talmud with Toby.

He loved other things too. He introduced classical Music to school meal times during the week. This way he hoped the background of serious music might counterbalance the trashy popular stuff most pupils were brought up on. He loved playing sport. He was better at cricket than soccer but many pupils just loved his performance as a spectator. He shouted phrases of abuse picked up on the terraces of Tottenham Hotspur during his youth. He

encouraged school teams but criticized players, demolished them, making fun and exposing their shortcomings to ridicule. But ultimately he was desperate for Carmel to win against its opponents and very proud when they did. He made a point of coming out to support the teams whenever he could. And when rowing became a major sport he followed the school crews from Herefordshire to Durham. He spoke about his dreams of seeing Carmel row at Henley, which was fulfilled in his day and having Carmel boys in opposing crews of the Oxford and Cambridge Annual Boat race, which did not happen!

He did actually play soccer in the Staff Pupil matches held each year. He was an artful forward but lacked stamina and aggression. Kopul's favourite sport was swimming but that was something he did only when no pupils were around when he took to the River Thames and swam strongly up river to Wallingford Bridge before hitching a lift on cruiser back down stream to the School campus.

In many ways Purim was the highlight of the year when dignitaries and favoured parents were invited down to the school to witness or judge a fancy dress competition and then a revue which always included teachers making fun of pupils and vice versa. Not even Kopul was immune. Nevertheless he always invited Governors and potential donors down for Purim celebrations even if he knew full well that he would be the butt of jokes. He gave as good as he got and was very good at composing rhymes that made fun of people impromptu, a skill he picked up from the Yiddish Yeshivah tradition of 'gramen.'

Kopul always cultivated protégés. He fancied himself as a cross between a Pied Piper and a Hassidic Rebbe. Amongst his earliest was David Stamler. He was one of a group of young men Kopul had taken under his wing during various youth summer schemes he ran while in the Federation for religious Zionist youth and Study Groups. Kopul consciously tried to groom young men to become future leaders of the

community. His earliest favourite and by far the most talented was Jerrold Roston. On one of the groups holidays in Switzerland in 1947 Jerrold tragically had drowned in Lake Geneva.¹⁶ Later the most prestigious prize the school had to offer, the Roston Cup, for the pupil who best represented the twin ideals of the school, was named after him. The impact on Kopul of Jerrold's loss was profound and in looking for a replacement he focused on the nondescript but loyal David Stamler. It was difficult to understand why he invested so much in David Stamler particularly as the more gifted Murray Roston was on the staff before emigrating to Israel to teach at Bar Ilan University. Stamler became Kopul's understudy. Even before he graduated, he started teaching at Carmel on and off. Then he got into Reading University but switched to Oxford in his second year where he graduated and went on for a diploma in education. After a year at Brandeis in the US he returned with an American wife to become Assistant to the Principal in 1956.¹⁷ Eventually he would take over as headmaster when Kopul died.

The financial pressures were constant. Kopul would spend more and more time in London trying to raise funds and often returned to Carmel dispirited and depressed. But the fact was that he also enjoyed travelling, South Africa first in 1948 and later that year to Australia. He travelled again to Israel in 1954, South Africa in 1954, 1955 and Australia in 1956.¹⁸ He was back in South Africa again in 1957.¹⁹ He was in demand everywhere as the most powerful orator and speaker in Anglo Jewry. Fund raisers saw him as the obvious local attraction. He was very successful raising large sums for other causes, not his.

In 1957 he lost a close friend and supporter Irving Goldstein. He was only 33 and died on holiday in Sicily. Kopul had regarded him as a gifted potential leader of Anglo Jewry.

¹⁶ J C August 15 1947

¹⁷ JC Aug 17 1956

¹⁸ JC Nov 2 1956

¹⁹ JC Aug 9 1957

He came from a distinguished and wealthy family Kopul was close to. He combined a worldly sophistication with a Jewish commitment and he was an ally Kopul had come to rely on. His obituary in the Jewish Chronicle said as much.²⁰ Almost exactly ten years after the loss of Jerrold Roston, the tragedy affected him deeply.

Kopul of course had to carry on. He felt he needed to keep himself involved in communal affairs even at a distance. He was surprisingly a member of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, a notoriously ineffectual talking shop yet recognized as the primary forum of Anglo Jewry laity. He represented an old defunct Synagogue in Glasgow, the Great. And very occasionally he went to London to speak at Board meetings.

The strain of maintaining Carmel told. He aged quickly. He became very moody and his travails had an impact on the school too. When he was in a good mood the sun shone. In a bad mood a cloud settled on the campus. But it would be wrong to think of Kopul only struggling. Photographs of his playing cricket against a team from the Jewish Chronicle show him enjoying life too.²¹ However much pressure he was under he gave unstintingly of his time for other schools. He was guest of honour at Rabbi Dr Solomon Schonfeld's Avigdor School in 1957²². He got on extremely well with Dr Schonfeld. He was even more mercurial than Kopul and a man of immense charm and ability. Kopul regretted he was not playing a more forceful role in the community. It was not known then he was suffering from an early form of dementia and on several occasions Kopul wrote to the Jewish Chronicle to defend him and praise his achievements in public.

New blood joined the Governing body and increased Carmel's profile in the Jewish community. Fund raising events for Carmel were held and Kopul excelled in giving them his

²⁰ JC April 5 1957

²¹ JC July 19 1957

²² Ibid

magic aura, his dynamism, his oratory and his personality. For the first time, serious money started coming in to the school and it prospered during the mid fifties as it began to gain wider recognition. And as it did Kopul's mercurial spirit began to look for new adventures.

One was his dream of establishing a school in Israel. He had sold the project to Nachum Goldman of the World Jewish Congress. He had even had a brochure published when he was in South Africa fund raising for Jewish education in August 1956, outlining the scheme. Land was allocated outside Zichron Yaakov . But illness, first Goldman's, then his, delayed and finally ended the scheme.

Another scheme of his was to buy farm land to the north of the school bounding Crowmarsh. Renting out farmland would provide some income of course for the school. But Kopul dreamed of building a Jewish village for people who wanted a country retreat with easy access to the religious facilities and services the school provided. His dreams were not confined to schoolboys. He also talked about building a Girls School.

Kopul invested a great deal in the Old Carmeli Association. He wanted the alumni to stay in touch with him and the school. He was worried that graduates of Carmel might not be able to find partners with the same Jewish experiences that they had. To Kopul Carmel's Judaism meant a commitment to living a Jewish life but at the same time openness to secular culture, a committed yet open minded Judaism. He used to arrange dances for Old Boys and tried to match them with suitable young ladies. Not too successfully it must be said.

Both in Newbury and at Mongewell Park the Rosen family had lived in a small apartment in the main building. Whatever advantages this might have had for a commanding presence at the centre of the school it was hardly the most conducive to any personal life. It was not until 1958 that the Governors were able to authorize the building of

a house for the Rosen family and a bungalow for the Stamlers across the lake at Carmel. For the first time since leaving London, Kopul and Bella Rosen had their own house.

In 1958 Kopul was involved in a political dispute over the building of Heichal Shlomo in Jerusalem. Isaac Wolfson had been persuaded to build a Rabbinic centre in Jerusalem that he envisaged might be seen as a new Sanhedrin. He wanted Kopul to be its director.²³ But he did not understand the nature of religious politics in Israel. The Charedi community immediately issued a ban on anyone entering the building. Wolfson then denied he intended to establish a Sanhedrin and insisted the building was simply the headquarters of the Israeli Rabbinate. This did not appease them and Kopul was flown out to speak to the Brisker Rav to try to get him to change his mind. He did not succeed. But the work proceeded nevertheless under a more modest remit.

While in Israel Kopul also found time to visit Be'er Yaakov Yeshiva where he was reunited with his old roommate from Mir Yeshiva, the Rosh Yeshivah Moshe Shapiro. He was accorded the rare honour of giving a public lecture (a Shiur Kellali) to whole yeshivah. And he paid a visit to Kfar Chabad to give his moral support to their vocational programmes.

When Kopul returned home he reiterated his opposition to religion mixing with politics in the form of religious parties at a public meeting²⁴. Having experienced at first hand the combative mood of religion in Israel, he also excoriated intolerance. He never feared to express his views. Later on in the year, in May, he and Bella were flown out to Israel as guests of the Wolfsons for the official opening of his Centre.²⁵

1959 was a particularly significant year. In January Kopul and Bella's only daughter Angela Fay was born. The school was given a holiday in celebration, serendipitously called

²³ JC. Jan 10 1958

²⁴ JC Jan 10 1958

²⁵ JC May 9 1958

Fay Day!²⁶The Carmel campus was growing, becoming more beautiful and Kopul's life was emerging from the stress and deprivations of the previous ten years.

That year an incident occurred that highlighted the gulf that existed between Kopul and the established Orthodox community. In October 1959 the distinguished sculptor Sir Jacob Epstein died. He had a grandson at Carmel. On a visit to Carmel he had expressed to Kopul his desire to be buried in a Jewish cemetery even though his current wife was not Jewish and he had had little to do with Jewish affairs. When he died, Lady Epstein had phoned Kopul to tell him that Sir Jacob had indeed told her he wanted to be buried in a country burial ground but that if no Jewish spot was suitable she would insist on his being buried in non Jewish Putney. Kopul immediately contacted the main Orthodox burial organizations to get any one of them to bury Sir Jacob in a Jewish plot. He thought it important not only for Jacob's own wishes but for Anglo Jewry that so significant a man should be recognized and buried as a Jew. Kopul failed to get any authority to act and agree to do anything. He fulminated at the petty minds and administrative paralysis that he felt characterized Anglo Jewry. Sir Jacob was buried at Putney.

In August 1959 some friends came to visit Carmel on their boat and Kopul went out for a cruise up the Thames with them. On way back jumping from the boat to the concrete landing stage he lost his footing and fell heavily. He broke a collar bone, arm, ribs and thigh. As he was being taken into the ambulance he reminded Bella of their conversation the night before, of how fortunate they were, everything they had struggled for, for so long was coming right. Kopul was never superstitious in any way. But he repeated the old phrase 'Al Tiftach Peh LaSatan,' Dont open your mouth for the Devil.' It roughly means that one should

²⁶ JC Jan 30 1959

not boast about the good things in case one gives the Satan an opportunity to give one bad luck.

One illness followed another in hospital, pleurisy and then pneumonia. When he returned home he was bed ridden for months. But during his convalescence he completed his PhD thesis for London University on 'The Concept of the Mitzvah.' He also wrote a collection of letters addressed to a young Jewish student trying to reconcile tradition with modernity which he called 'Dear David.' They are dated but still even at this distance give an impression of his vigour, charm and persuasive style. As Kopul's health deteriorated, his Assistant Headmaster David Stamler began to play a more prominent role in running the school. When Kopul and Bella went on a convalescent trip to Gibraltar, Stamler became acting Headmaster.

I was a prefect in school at the time. It was over Purim that they were away and I invited some friends back to my parents' house to celebrate. We raided the drinks cabinet and feeling merry decided to play a prank. It started by pushing David Stamler's car from in front of his house into my parent's garage a few yards away. The Stamlers were sitting in their kitchen but as their car was open and it was a dark night, it was an easy matter to get in and push it away silently and hide it. After some more wet reinforcements we decided to go further. We moved five cars on the estate. Jacob Epstein's Austin ended up at the end of the playing fields. Helmut Schmidt's Messerschmidt bubble car was lifted and precariously balanced over the waterfall between the lake and the river. The sports car of Matrons boyfriend who has staying overnight went down to the nearest pub in Crowmarsh and another car ended up in North Stoke. The whole procedure took several hours. No damage was done and we parted company before dawn, mightily pleased with ourselves. The following day I was summoned to David Stamler's office. He knew, he said it was me

because no one else would have dared move his car into my parent's garage. One of our party had handed in the other names. We were de-prefected and demoted to the junior ranks. It sounds laughable now. It mattered then. The Captain of the School Raymond Dwek was supportive of us and felt we had been punished too severely. When my father returned he smiled and said he thought it as innocent enough and David Stamler had over-reacted but he had to support him. A few weeks later order was restored.

Me and my father

As a pupil I was a problem and added to my father's difficulties. Academically I only studied what I enjoyed but I was constantly in trouble. I guess partly it was to attract attention. I was jealous of the time and attention my father paid to others and resented his 'favourites.' From a very early age I rebelled even though I loved and admired my father and craved his attention. My brother Mickey responded to the challenge by being good, I by being bad. But I also suffered because I was the son of the headmaster. Others felt I was given preferential treatment or that I went to my father with stories about what was going on. I felt unloved by everyone and was indeed an unpopular kid. On many occasions I was sent to my father's study and was caned for insubordination. My father was worried about me and tried to balance strictness with attention. When I was thirteen he took me on a lecture tour to South Africa and being alone with him certainly made a significant difference. Nevertheless I was not doing as well in school as he hoped. He was very preoccupied. As I grew in stature and was better at sports my position improved. But I was still far from an ideal pupil and was showing scant interest in things religious.

At the age of 15 my father decided I needed a completely different environment. To my consternation he decided to send me to a yeshivah in Israel for a year. I protested to no

avail. One did not argue with Kopul. In fact the year proved transformative and when I returned I was a mature and nicer person. This is not the place to write about my own experiences in depth but during that year in Israel I was pressurized to stay on in yeshivah against my father's wishes. But he would brook no dissent. I had to return to complete my education in England. It was another indication of the force of my father's personality and the clarity of his ambition for me. There were to be no easy ways out, no soft options.

I returned a different, more disciplined and religiously inspired a person. Being a good sportsman, soccer and rowing, helped me reintegrate into the school and I soon became prefect. The aim of all prefects was to become Head Boy. I was a strong candidate despite being demoted because of the car incident. But Kopul was very sensitive to charges of nepotism and so he decided that for the only time so far that the whole of the school should have a vote and to my genuine surprise I was elected. By then I was enjoying school tremendously. But the incident indicates how Kopul wanted me to succeed and yet felt constrained by 'appearances.'

During his last years he made an effort to spend much more time with his two 'babies' David and Angela. They helped raise his morale and kept him positive and optimistic. Mickey too engaged with him and his teenage enthusiasms contributed to family debates and occasionally our father's impatience. He did not like being disagreed with. Whenever he could and despite his weakness Kopul still accepted speaking engagements. He symbolized a non-conformist, anti-Establishment figure and this appealed to students. He was at the time the President of the Inter University Jewish Federation of Jewish students and in December 1960 he asked me to drive him to their annual conference in

Newport Pagnall. There he spoke about the nature of Jewish Law and how it dealt with difficult challenges.²⁷ He did his best to maintain as busy a schedule as possible.

Those were turbulent times in Anglo Jewry. Rabbi Dr Louis Jacobs had been blocked from becoming the Head of Jews College on grounds of heterodoxy. Kopul had supported Louis and had written to the press, criticizing the witch hunt. They were in regular touch. Simultaneously Kopul was being canvassed to succeed Chief Rabbi Israel Brody who was being pushed into retirement. He was flattered but expressed no wish to leave Carmel for communal politics. He advised Louis against allowing himself to be manipulated by William Frankel the editor of the JC in his campaign to introduce Conservative Judaism into England. Once the child of Eastern European Orthodoxy, Kopul had often spoken out against the increasing narrowmindedness and insularity of Charedi Orthodoxy. He might have moved away from their fundamentalism a long time ago but he was still firmly rooted in the traditional camp. He identified with Louis' rational academic approach but felt one needed to keep within the committed community. He feared Louis would be used as a tool.

I recall an incident that illustrated the variety of Kopul's interest in all aspects of school life. In 1960 the pupils of Carmel were playing the staff at football and were winning 5-0 at half time. I was playing for the pupils. My father was standing on the touchline, leaning on the stick that he now used to get around. At half time he called our team over and asked if we minded his inviting a friend to join in the second half. We didn't of course. A modest looking middle aged man trotted onto the field. The sports teacher kicked off and tapped the ball to this newcomer who stood in the centre circle. He looked up aimed at our goal and shot the ball straight into the back of the net. We were stunned. Still we kicked off. The newcomer rushed at our man, took the ball off him and dribbled through our team

²⁷ JC Dec 30 1960

before sidestepping the goalkeeper and netting for number 2. Ten minutes later the score was 5 -5. My father was roaring with laughter so I asked him who this great player was. He replied "Havent you ever heard of Jackie Milburn?" Jackie Milburn of course was a legend, one of the greatest English football players of his day, still a hero after his retirement. He had come to Reading, the nearest big town to us, to do some coaching at Reading FC and Kopul had engaged him to come down to Carmel once a week to coach us. I told Jackie on one training session that I was going up to Cambridge University. He said I was good enough to get a 'blue.'

I said I wouldn't be able to because i didn't play on Saturdays for religious reasons.

"Oh, Lad" he said "I'd never let a small thing like that get in the way."

He stayed for a season and then both he and I disappeared from the Oxfordshire countryside.

It was in 1961 that Kopul gained national attention over the Eichmann affair. He appeared on the BBC program 'Meeting Point' in July to discuss the trial of the Nazi Eichmann, in Jerusalem. He said that he opposed the Death Penalty under all circumstances including this case. A courageous stand given that the Jerusalem Court condemned Eichmann to death and he was executed. He had a feeling for what might cast Judaism and the Jewish people in a more positive light.

As I considered my future path Kopul began to explore career options with me. He said that if I wanted to consider the rabbinate I ought to have an alternative career so as not to be dependent on petty lay authority. This was a revealing reflection of his experience in the rabbinate. So he encouraged me to consider architecture and I responded enthusiastically. He also insisted that I apply for Cambridge even though it meant that I had to pass examinations in my weakest subjects, Latin and Mathematics to get in. I had wanted

to take the easy option of applying to the less demanding Architectural Association. But he insisted I would have more options and better prospects if I applied to Cambridge which I did. It was a repeated theme of my father's that one should aim for the best of both worlds. One should try for the best university, the best Yeshivah and I shall always be grateful for being pushed against my selfish and lazy nature in this direction. Having gained a place at Pembroke, I asked for a two year remission to study in Yeshivah and I returned there in late 1960.

The end

In September 1961 Kopul was diagnosed with terminal Leukaemia. News soon spread of the seriousness of his condition. The school, indeed the community, was in a state of shock. He made light of his condition. He told people not to trust in fallible doctors but to have faith in higher authority. He communicated with Dayan Abramsky in Israel who called me to see him and commanded me to return to England.

Amongst several letters he wrote to friends was one to Rabbi Dr Louis Rabinowitz former Chief Rabbi of South Africa

"This week the doctors were able to confirm I am suffering from a form of leukaemia. I need hardly reassure you that no matter what the doctors say, they can make no difference to my inner peace and spiritual vision...the quantity of my life depends only on god, the quality of my life depends only upon me."

I was shocked at my father's weakened state and surprised by his sudden enthusiasm for Chabad Hassidism. He started to invite close friends down to the school to talk and plan but above all to share a new more spiritual man, reconciled to whatever life would bring. He had been taken to New York to meet the Lubavitcher Rebbe at the urging of an old friend Rabbi Laizer Spector. His encounter with the Rebbe had a profound impact on

him. He had for so long, probably since his time with Rabbi Dessler, felt alienated from so many apparently great rabbis. Now he felt himself to be in the presence of a great and genuinely spiritual man. He had asked to become a Hassid of the Rebbe and he had replied that he was already a partner in the great educational work they had embarked upon. The Rebbe suggested he grow a full beard so that his pupils would be left with an image of a man more traditionally bearded than his present imperial style. And he recommended that he study the Tanya, say Psalms every day and wear a gartle when he prayed, all things one could never have imagined Kopul agreeing to in anything other than a highly sensitized and even desperate state. Kopul returned inspired and tried to inspire others.

He was determined to keep up a working schedule. He was delighted to be invited on to the BBC Religious Television Show 'Sunday Break' at a time when it was very rare for rabbis to appear in the British Media²⁸.

He appeared in London on a symposium on the state of World Jewry organized by Bnai Brith in October²⁹. Robert Graves gave a lecture on Biblical Myths at Hillel on October 23rd. This really angered Kopul and reminded him of the old campaign he had waged against Joshua Podro. He wrote deploring the invitation to a man who made fun of the Jewish Bible calling it all myth (though Graves defended himself by defining the term much less derogatorily than others). He argued that Jewish students without learning should not be exposed to such a demolition of their tradition.

In a letter to the Jewish Chronicle he wrote

“I listened attentively to the lecture by Robert Graves took many notes; after serious reflection I can only describe the sum total of his utterances as a monumental example of superficial pseudo- scholarship.”

²⁸ JC Nov 24 1961

²⁹ JC Nov 3 1961

In his last year the Jacobs affair reached a climax. He was sad when he heard that Louis Jacobs resigned from Jews College after he was blocked from succeeding Isidore Epstein as Principal.³⁰ He wrote to the Jewish chronicle saying he would not encourage graduates of Carmel College to go to an institution such as Jews College if it censored dissenting or innovative voices. Still, he predicted that Louis would alienate and isolate himself from the orthodox community. I recall Louis coming to visit Kopul on his sickbed and Kopul urging him not to allow the Editor of the Jewish Chronicle, William Frankel, who also a very old and good friend, to manipulate him into talking on the Establishment of Anglo Jewry. Sadly the result of the 'Affair' was that Louis was marginalized and Orthodox Jewry lost a reasoned scholarly voice.

By December he was moved only from home to hospital in Oxford. He pushed himself to make a final brief trip in January to New York to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe. It raised his spirits for a while. But when he returned he was very weak and spent more and more time at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford where he was given regular transfusions of blood. Nevertheless he was still writing letters to JC in January.³¹

Here is an extract from a letter he wrote to friend in Australia on January 17th 1962

"I am very eager to tell you about the saintly, wise leader of Lubavitch...my meeting with the Rebbe brought me into contact with a person who seemed to be on a plane quite different from what I had experienced hitherto...I am guilty of no exaggeration when I say that in the course of my life I have never met a man who impressed me more profoundly and in whose presence I sensed a greater feeling of wisdom, insight and utter selflessness."

³⁰ JC Dec 22 1961

³¹ JC Jan 19 1962

It was increasingly hard for him to engage or even talk. Finally he died on the 9th of Adar Sheni 5722, March 15th 1962.³²

Of course I am biased as his son but I have to say I have yet to come across anyone who comes near him for charisma, warmth and passion for Judaism. Not a day goes by when I do not think of him and miss him. He exercised such a powerful magnetic influence that he certainly all but determined my life even though he often insisted he did not want to influence me and I should make my own decisions. I went up to Cambridge and started the architecture course. But by then I knew without question I wanted to follow in his rabbinical footsteps. After a year I decided to get the sort of education that would help me in a rabbinical career. I combined English Literature with Philosophy and after graduation returned to complete my rabbinical studies in Jerusalem. For the rest of my life I have continued as if he were behind me and conscious of my failure to live up to his expectations and wondering how different it would have been had he lived longer. Every now and then I have the identical dream; that he returns and tells me he just needed to escape the pressures. In one way I am blessed. I was spared the process of a long and slow decline and instead my memories of him are predominantly of a young, powerful and vigorous man in his middle age.

Jeremy Rosen New York 2011

³² JC March 16 1962