

Minhag Anglia: The Transition of Modern Orthodox Judaism in Britain

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Zusammenfassung

Die Hauptströmung der orthodoxen jüdischen Gemeinschaft in Großbritannien, die vollständig integriert ist und am britischen Leben teilnimmt, scheint in gewisser Hinsicht, als ein beispielhaftes Modell für ein modernes orthodoxes Judentum gelten zu können. Der Begriff „Minhag Anglia“ kann jedoch auch verwendet werden, um die oftmals unsystematisch von statten gehende Vermischung von Jüdischkeit und Britentum zu beschreiben, die als anglo-jüdische Lebensweise charakterisiert werden kann. In diesem Beitrag wird in Erwägung gezogen, ob der allgemein unreflektierte Charakter des „Minhag Anglia“ es ausschließt, dass dieser als eine Strategie des modernen orthodoxen Judentums fungiere.

Abstract

In certain respects the mainstream Orthodox Jewish community in Britain, fully engaged and integrated into British life, appears to offer an exemplar of a Modern Orthodox Judaism. However the term minhag Anglia may be used to capture the nature of the often unsystematic blending of Jewishness and Britishness that can characterise Anglo-Jewish practice. This paper considers whether the broadly unthinking nature of minhag Anglia precludes its ability to function as a strategy for Modern Orthodox Judaism.

Introduction

Judaism in Britain, still dominated by mainstream Orthodox affiliation, can often appear from the outside to provide some sort of exemplar of a Modern Orthodox Judaism. British Jews have successfully acculturated into their host society so that at least certain aspects of the modernism of their Orthodoxy goes unquestioned. At the same time, they maintain strong and authoritative Orthodox institutions, overseen by a single chief rabbi, serving the synagogal, educational, dietary, and more broadly halakhic requirements of a large pro-

portion of the Jewish community in Britain. Yet while the primary institutions of British Jewry seem to point to Orthodox dominance and synagogue membership figures show mainstream Orthodoxy accounting for more than half of all those Jews affiliated to synagogues, numerous studies have shown how the actual levels of religious observance among members of Orthodox synagogues are rather low.¹ There is a clear dissonance between religious affiliation and ritual practice. In certain respects the term *minhag Anglia* captures the nature of this Anglo-Jewish approach to Orthodoxy.

The gap between identity and practice among purportedly Orthodox Jews is by no means unique to British Jewry. Many acculturated Orthodox communities in the United States and Western Europe have contained members who are non-observant Orthodox Jews. For a variety of social and historical reasons, association with Orthodox Judaism is maintained despite an unwillingness to uphold the standards of religious observance associated with Orthodoxy.² Two features can be seen to make *minhag Anglia* distinct. First, it has for many years represented the dominant means of being Jewish in Britain. While elsewhere non-Orthodox forms of Judaism have been able to achieve ascendancy, Progressive Judaism in Britain has always been in the minority. For many British Jews, then, choosing to identify as Jewish in religious terms involves association with Orthodox Judaism. Of course this undoubtedly influenced the nature of the Orthodox institutions with which such Jews identified. The chief rabbinate and United Synagogue were initially formed with the intention of functioning as umbrella institutions, seeking to serve as many Jews as were

¹ See Vulkan, Daniel; David Graham: *Synagogue Membership in the United Kingdom in 2010*. London 2010, p. 8; 12, which suggests that some 74 per cent of Jewish households in Britain are affiliated to a synagogue. Of these, mainstream Orthodox Judaism accounted for 55 per cent of synagogue affiliation by British Jews. Yet a 1992 survey of members of the mainstream Orthodox United Synagogue found that only 10 per cent identified themselves as strictly Orthodox, observing the Sabbath. Kalms, Stanley: *A Time for Change: United Synagogue Review*, p. 41, 242. An in-depth survey of one London community in the 1970s found that 91 per cent of households in the community affiliated to a synagogue. Of these 77 per cent were members of an Orthodox synagogue, yet only 9.7 per cent attended synagogue weekly. Kosmin, Barry; Caren Levy: *Jewish Identity in an Anglo-Jewish Community*. London 1992, p. 7, 10.

² Consider the argument developed in Ferziger, Adam: *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Nonobservance, and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity*. PA 2005. See also Liebman, Charles: 'Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life'. In *American Jewish Year Book*. (1965) 66, pp. 21–97; Gurock, Jeffrey: 'Twentieth-Century American Orthodoxy's Era of Non-Observance, 1900–1960'. In *The Torah u-Madda Journal*. (2000) IX, pp. 87–107.

willing to associate with the brand of Judaism they sought to foster.³ In more recent years, the instinct to inclusivism that this inculcated has diminished. Orthodoxy in Britain has followed trends seen in many other Modern Orthodox communities and shifted towards greater religious stringency.⁴ However, here too, the strength of minhag Anglia has limited these influences. The central Orthodox institutions of British Jewry may reflect broader theological shifts; growing numbers of mainstream Orthodox Jews have increased the levels of their religious observance, and more ultra-Orthodox forms of Judaism have been notably strengthening in Britain. Nonetheless, the proportion of Orthodox affiliated Jews observing the mitzvot associated with Orthodoxy remains limited.⁵

So how is minhag Anglia to be understood?

The term minhag Anglia has a somewhat unclear history, largely reflective of the setting in which it developed. In some instances it has been used in what could be understood as its peshat meaning to characterise the distinctive liturgical practices developed in Britain to amalgamate the varied minhagim

³ For a history of the development of the United Synagogue, the major synagogal organisation of Anglo-Jewry (though it is, in fact, primarily a London based institution), see Newman, Aubrey: *The United Synagogue, 1870–1970*. London 1976. For the development of the chief rabbinate see for instance Roth, Cecil: 'Britain's Three Chief Rabbis'. In *Jewish Leaders 1750–1940*. Ed. by L. Jung. New York 1953, pp.477–90; and Alderman, G.: 'The British Chief Rabbinate: A Most Peculiar Practice'. In *European Judaism*. (1990) 23:2, pp.45–58.

⁴ On the rightward shift in Judaism see for example Heilman, Samuel: *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy*. Berkeley 2006; Shapiro, Marc B: *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised*. London 2004. See also Liebman, Charles: 'Extremism as a Religious Norm'. In *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (March, 1983) 22, 1, pp.75–86; Waxman, Chaim: 'The Haredization of American Orthodox Jewry'. In *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*. 15 February 1998. Available at: <http://www.jcpa.org/cjc/jl-376-waxman.htm>, accessed 13/02/2012; Gurock, J. 'Twentieth-Century American Orthodoxy's Era of Non-Observance, 1900–1960'.

⁵ See for example Graham, David: *Religious or Secular? The Outlook of London's Jews*. JPR Report No. 3, London 2003. This report found that 46 per cent of those who identified as "Secular" or "Somewhat Secular" were members of mainstream Orthodox/United Synagogue communities. The proportion of respondents overall who said they did not travel on the Sabbath was just 11 per cent. Graham notes how "This contrasts with the findings of the AJIS study, in which a secular outlook was associated with a relatively low level of affiliation." p. 16 referencing E. Mayer, B. Kosmin and A. Keysar: *American Jewish Identity Survey 2001. An Exploration in the Demography and Outlook of a People*. New York 2002, p. 47.

that immigrants brought to the country.⁶ Yet there is no established minhag book for Anglo-Jewry; there was no formal process by which these practices were reached. Expediency often played as important a role as religious considerations. The so-called ‘Singer’s Prayer Book’ in some respects captured the essence of this aspect of minhag Anglia. By bringing together the prevalent liturgical traditions in the mainstream synagogues, these practices became established as components of what could be labelled an Authorised Prayer Book for the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire.⁷ Interestingly, a new Machzor for Rosh Hashanah produced by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in 2011 contains explicit reference to minhag Anglia, understood in terms of the specific liturgical tradition developed in British synagogues. It acknowledges that changes to this tradition have occurred but it is suggested that this Machzor represents an effort to preserve what is distinct in minhag Anglia.⁸

⁶ See for example *Jewish Chronicle*, March 21, 1924, p. 18. The absence of a clear developmental history to the term could be seen to denote the perception that there was little especially notable about the religious practices of Jews in Britain.

⁷ *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire with a new Translation by the Rev. S. Singer*. London 1890. Examples of Anglo-Jewish *minhagim* include this *siddur*’s exclusion of prayers such as the *Al Tiro* after *Aleinu*, and the morning recital of Temple sacrifices and the Binding of Isaac, and the inclusion of the *Yigdal* prayer to be recited at the end of the Friday night service. Overall this *siddur* is presented as conforming to *minhag Polin*, although J. H. Hertz’s revised edition of the Singer’s *siddur*, London 1947, p. 401, notes a 1722 *takkanah* of the London community which stated that they followed the Polish *minhag* as established in Hamburg. For a detailed study of the development of the varied liturgical practices established in Britain see Lerner, I.: *Torat Haminhagim: Studies of the Nusach Ha’Tefillah and other minhagim of the United Synagogue, London*, 2nd edn. London 2006. As Lerner notes, the early rule books produced by the original Ashkenazi synagogues in London cannot really be seen as useful sources of *minhagim*. Their primary focus rests on such matters as the legislation for appointing honorary officers, the fines to be levied for refusing synagogue functions, or deciding which level of member should be allowed to be the one individual to recite the mourner’s *kaddish*. Lerner consequently examines the *siddurim* which influenced the Singer’s Prayer Book. He generally found precedents for the deviations from what may have been expected in this *siddur* but acknowledges that Singer may have been unaware of these precedents when deciding on his prayer book’s content. Additional important influences in the development of *minhag Anglia* were the liturgical reforms approved in 1880 by Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler (1803–1890, Chief Rabbi 1842–1890) and in 1892 by his son Hermann Adler (1839–1911, Chief Rabbi 1891–1911). Whilst kept within the boundaries of what these chief rabbis viewed as permitted by the *Shulhan Aruch*, a number of reforms designed to appeal to Victorian sensibilities were permitted, such as the removal of many *piyyuttim*. See Lerner, p. 12 ff.; see also Alderman, Geoffrey: *Modern British Jewry*, Oxford 1998, pp. 106–110; Apple, Raymond: *The Hampstead Synagogue, 1892–1967*, London 1967, pp. 27–31.

⁸ *The Koren Rosh Hashanah Machzor*, Translation and Commentary by Jonathan Sacks, Jerusalem 2011. In particular see Binstock, Ivan: ‘Preface to the UK Edition’, pp. xiii–xiv.

Another account of minhag Anglia relates to the Anglo-Jewish inclination to emphasise the decorous in religious worship. The original expectation in United Synagogue congregations that men wear a high hat in order to be called up to the reading of the Torah reflects an interest in raising British symbols of gentility to an elevated status in religious settings.⁹

However, in more general terms, minhag Anglia is quintessentially the somewhat unthinking means of being Jewish in a British setting. It indicates a lax Orthodoxy, which emphasises maintenance of received traditions without giving too much thought to the wider halakhic framework in which these practices fit. Conformity to established traditions, in both the Jewish and British spheres, is prioritised. Minhag Anglia provides a means of combining two modes of living into some muddled-together whole.

There are a number of factors that we can identify as contributing to the development of minhag Anglia. The absence of an intellectual debate regarding the place of Jews in British society contributed to the somewhat unthinking approach to Judaism and Jewish ritual found among British Jews. Beyond feeling little pressure to try to explain their place as Jews in British society, the general tolerance they experienced enabled them to engage in a wide range of intellectual fields. Consequently, few Jews appear to have directed their intellectual efforts to a study of Judaism. Hence Todd Endelman, for example, notes that there were already nine Jewish fellows admitted to the Royal So-

This work offers an updated version of the *Machzor* produced by Routledge, first published in 1906, that had previously upheld Anglo-Jewish traditions but which was broadly being displaced by alternative publications, most notably by ArtScroll. On the inroads made by ArtScroll in popularising their own prayerbooks and translations and commentaries on the Bible see Stolow, Jeremy: *Orthodox by Design: Judaism, Print Politics, and the ArtScroll Revolution*. Berkeley 2010.

⁹ See the letter sent to the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* by an individual signing himself as an “Anglo-American” who complained that he was not permitted to be called to the reading of the Torah, or indeed to be allocated a decent seat in synagogue, because he preferred to wear a low “billycock” hat. He noted he had worn this hat in the presence of the President of the USA without detriment and suggested the Anglo-Jewish insistence on wearing a high hat provided “remarkable evidence that Jews are only too ready to follow the ways of the nations among whom they dwell.” August 20, 1886. Victorian depictions of synagogue services in London newspapers and journals capture the nature of a community driven to establish the British credentials of their Jewish observance. They portray the men’s sections of synagogues filled with individuals with *tallitot* draped over their top hats and morning suit. See for example *The Graphic*, November 16, 1889, p. 600.

ciety in the eighteenth century, the first having been elected in 1723.¹⁰ The characterisation of British Jewry as rather non-intellectual in Jewish terms was exacerbated by the low value traditionally attached to religious education. Often the arrival of outsiders was necessary to introduce new ideas on Judaism to British Jewry – either through inspiring individuals or mass immigration. Jews' College, the mainstream Orthodox rabbinical training institute established in 1855, exemplified this approach. For many years its remit was not to provide the standard of religious instruction that would produce rabbis worthy of *semikhah*. Rather, it was designed to create pastoral leaders to serve congregations that functioned as umbrella organisations willing to welcome as many Jews as could be encompassed within rather loosely defined boundaries. A 1910 United Synagogue Council report explicitly stated that the ministerial training at Jews' College should by no means emphasise Jewish education:

“other requirements should not be sacrificed to the attainment of profound scholarship ... What is wanted is ... the formation of the habit of mind that thinks no task degrading if it be for the benefit of the Community.”¹¹

Cecil Roth (1899–1970), the noted polymath of Anglo-Jewry, reader in Jewish Studies at Oxford from 1939 to 1964, is famed for his apologetic historical accounts of the Jewish settlement in Britain in which he presents an idealised account of the Jews' acceptance into an entirely tolerant host society. Yet on the Anglo-Jewish community itself and its approach to Jewish intellectual activities Roth was scathing. In 1961 at a Bnai Brith dinner he asserted that no other Jewish community placed Jewish intellectual endeavours on a lower level than British Jewry and viewed the Jewish intellectual with such contempt.

The voluntary nature of the Jewish community in Britain, alongside the influences of the Victorian social setting in which British Jewry engaged in its most active stage of institution building, also contributed to the development of *minhag Anglia*. Parallels can be drawn here between the experiences of British and American Jews. Both had to address the consequences of voluntary membership and experienced some pressure to demonstrate their morality and respectability through identification with their religious community. Yet in

¹⁰ Endelman, Todd: *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714–1830*. Philadelphia 1999, pp. 262 f. It should, however, be noted that the *haskalah* was far from absent from British shores. See Ruderman, David: *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought*. Princeton and Oxford 2000.

¹¹ Cited in Hyamson, Albert M.: *Jews' College, London, 1855–1955*, London 1955, p. 85.

Britain, the influence of the Church of England and its alignment with the State would help not only to prioritise synagogue membership but also centralised institutional structures for British Jewry. This emphasis on religious identification required no concomitant acceptance of the beliefs which one's identity may have implied. It is therefore unsurprising to note Jonathan Sacks' recollection that one of his teachers used to characterise minhag Anglia as Anglican Judaism.¹²

Significantly, growing use of the term minhag Anglia is a relatively recent phenomenon. For example, the Jewish Chronicle archives only begin regularly to contain references to the term after the 1970s. After this time it is often used nostalgically, to recall an earlier stage in British Jewish history that celebrated inclusivism and eschewed religious stringency. There are two questions to consider: What brought about this change? And does the broadly unthinking nature of minhag Anglia preclude its survival, undermining its ability to function as a strategy for Modern Orthodox Judaism?

The place of minhag Anglia in Britain post-1960s

In 1959, Louis Jacobs (1920–2006), a promising rabbi whom many lay leaders saw as a successor to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie (1895–1979), resigned from his lectureship at Jews' College. He was disappointed that promises he had received regarding his imminent elevation to the Principalship of the College had been scuppered by Brodie, who as chief rabbi had the final veto over the

¹² Sacks, Jonathan: *Community of Faith*, London 1995, p.9. V. D. Lipman, comments on the absence of concern over religiosity in the founding statements of the United Synagogue in his *A History of the Jews in Britain Since 1858*: Leicester 1990, p.26. See further Endelman, Todd: *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History: 1656–1945*, Bloomington, Indiana: 1990, pp. 81ff; Goulston, Michael: 'The Status of the Anglo-Jewish Rabbinate, 1840–1914'. In *Jewish Journal of Sociology*. (1968) Vol.10.1, pp. 55–82; Sharot, Stephen: 'Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy in London, 1870–1914: The Synagogue Service'. In *Jewish Journal of Sociology*. (1973) Vol.15.1, pp. 57–78, and his 'Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy in London, 1870–1914: Rabbinate and Clergy'. In *Jewish Journal of Sociology*. (1973) Vol.15.2, pp. 167–187. By way of contrast with American Jewry, consideration of data on religious affiliation offers one indicator of the differing approaches to Jewish identity that developed in Britain. The US National Jewish Population Survey of 2000–01 suggests that no more than 46 per cent of American Jews are affiliated to a synagogue (see http://www.jewishfederations.org/local_includes/downloads/3905.pdf, p.7, accessed 13/02/2012), as compared to 74 per cent in Britain, see note 1 above.

appointment. In the subsequent furore that engulfed British Jewry, it was suggested that Jacobs' promotion had been prevented because of theological views he had expressed on the nature of divine revelation. Jacobs had developed these views in an effort to address the conflict he had experienced between his Jewish and British identities following his university studies of modern biblical scholarship. These studies had brought his yeshiva teachings on revelation into sharp relief. The details of the Jacobs Affair, which led to Jacobs' exclusion from mainstream British Orthodoxy, lie outside the scope of this paper.¹³ Of significance is the wider issue of whether British Jews had generally been prepared for intellectual encounters between the worlds of Judaism and the wider horizons represented by British culture. The inability of the yeshiva world to prepare Jews for an intellectual encounter with the surrounding society was precisely demonstrated in the experiences of Louis Jacobs. Yet minhag Anglia too had in many ways prevented British Jews from being given the tools with which to address the intellectual clash between Judaism and the ideas of the surrounding society. There was merely a practical tradition for combining Britishness and Jewishness. This provided rather weak foundations on which to build.

An increasing sense of security about their place in British society developed among Jews in post-WWII Britain as the country started to develop new post-Imperial identities that more readily celebrated difference. This would enable Jewish identity in Britain to change and develop along two primary trajectories, towards growing religious stringency and alternative cultural forms of Jewish identity. Among those who, for one reason or another, did not become more religiously observant the hold of minhag was diminishing. Without an appropriate religious education in place, without sufficient understanding of the principles upon which Jewish ritual was built and the rationales behind their observance, the hope of arresting this trend was limited.¹⁴

¹³ For further details on the Jacobs Affair see Jacobs, Louis: *Helping With Inquiries: An Autobiography*. London 1989, and his *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*. London 1999. See also Freud-Kandel, Miri: *Orthodox Judaism in Britain: An Ideology Forsaken*. London 2006, pp. 123 ff.; Cosgrove, Elliot: *Teyku: The Insoluble Contradictions in the Life and Thought of Louis Jacobs*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, June 2008.

¹⁴ An interesting example of the waning appeal of Judaism to British Jews was highlighted in a series of interviews with young Jewish writers printed in the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1958–1959 under the title 'The Man behind the Pen'. These demonstrated a severing of feelings of connection to the Anglo-Jewish community and the Judaism it espoused and were presented as reflective of 'a wider but inchoate body of sentiment.' *Jewish Chronicle*, December 19, 1958, p. 18. A study of changing approaches to Jewish cultural identity among British

When Immanuel Jakobovits (1921–1999) acceded to the Chief Rabbinate in 1967, in the aftermath of the events of the Jacobs Affair, he arrived equipped with a system of thought that had broadly been developed outside Britain. In a number of his sermons and writings it becomes clear that Jakobovits viewed minhag Anglia as an unsatisfactory foundation upon which to build any sort of Modern Orthodox Judaism. Rather than use the theology he brought with him to try potentially to strengthen minhag Anglia, providing it with more thought-through foundations, he chose to undermine it.

In an address on the topic of Jewish education and its place in Anglo-Jewry Jakobovits, in certain respects, captured the nature of minhag Anglia:

“Anglo-Jewry has always been a community distinguished for its solid devotion to tradition. Until now this strongly conservative trend has served us well and preserved the essentially Orthodox character of our communal patterns and usages ... But it was not our own God we worshipped; it was mainly our fathers’ God. Children simply carried on the traditions of their parents without asking why.”¹⁵

In addressing a community that he viewed in these terms, Jakobovits, from the time of his installation address as chief rabbi, sought to teach British Jews the importance of moving beyond received traditions to achieve a genuine understanding of Judaism. The story of the wealthy congregant who always prepared her chicken soup for the Sabbath in two saucepans illustrates some of the aspects of British Jewry that Jakobovits sought to counter. It seems this woman followed the practices she had observed from her mother unaware that it was not ritual requirements but poverty that had led to her mother’s use of two smaller pots, the cost of an additional large pot being prohibitive. Jakobovits wanted to try to improve British Jews’ knowledge of their Judaism to enable them to move forward from this point.

From the time of his Installation Address as chief rabbi, he explicitly rejected the umbrella model that characterised much of Anglo-Jewry and its institutions:

“I will do my best to serve and unite all sections of the community, but I am not prepared to replace the Torah by an umbrella, either open or closed, as the symbol

Jews is provided in Kahn-Harris, Keith; & Ben Gidley: *Turbulent Times, The British Jewish Community Today*. London 2010.

¹⁵ ‘Jewish Education: Is the Alarm Justified?’, Sermon delivered at Marble Arch Synagogue, Eighth day Passover, 10 April, 1969. In Jakobovits, Immanuel: *The Timely and the Timeless: Jews, Judaism and Society in a Storm-tossed Decade*. London 1977, p. 195.

of my office. In any event, I anticipate fair weather rather than rain or hail, and we should not require any umbrellas.”¹⁶

When celebrating the centenary of the United Synagogue, the great centrist, umbrella institution of Anglo-Jewry, he recounted the comment of the Chafetz Chaim: “in the middle of the road only horses walk.”¹⁷ Rather than emphasising the shared traditions which unified British Jews in their ‘Anglican Judaism’, Jakobovits was keen to introduce a better understood Judaism into Britain. If this came at the expense of minhag Anglia then so be it. He often commented that Newton’s laws of physics could equally be applied to religious life. By improving religiosity and pushing Anglo-Jewry to the right of a religious scale of values there would be an inevitable falling away of those on the left of the scale. Among those unwilling to commit sufficiently to their Judaism in practice, rather than primarily through synagogue membership, the type of Judaism Jakobovits sought to instil was often viewed as unpalatable. However, Jakobovits felt that the gains to be made from this process would outweigh the losses.¹⁸

In certain respects, the theology that Jakobovits would espouse during his Chief Rabbinate could be said to be suitable for the Anglo-Jewish community he was to lead. Although it was explicitly opposed to minhag Anglia, it was built on the principles of a Modern Orthodox Judaism. As a result of the influence of his father and his German Orthodox upbringing, Jakobovits’ theology consisted of an interesting combination of the teachings of Torah im derekh erez alongside support for the principle of the *grossgemeinde*.¹⁹ In Jakobovits,

¹⁶ ‘Spiritual Leadership – The Heritage of Priest, Prophet and King’, Installation Address delivered at St John’s Wood Synagogue, London, on 11 April 1967. In Jakobovits: *The Timely and the Timeless*, p. 56.

¹⁷ ‘Milestones and Millstones’, Address delivered at the Centenary Service of the United Synagogue, July 1970. In *The Timely and the Timeless*, p. 65.

¹⁸ See ‘The Evolution of the British Rabbinate since 1845: Its Past Impact and Future Challenges’. In *The Timely and the Timeless*, pp. 274, “like Newton’s laws of physics, this movement [to the right] has also produced an equal and opposite reaction. The same forces which have attracted a qualitatively significant element towards the right have repelled an element of corresponding quantitative significance from even the modicum of religious loyalties to which they or their parents used to subscribe ... The process impelled, then, by the ‘unauthorised’ rabbinate and its followers [of the right-wing] is beginning to dissipate the strength of the powerful moderate centre which characterised Anglo-Jewry in the past.”

¹⁹ Both these positions reflected the views of his father, Julius Jakobovits (1886–1947), who, upon arrival in Berlin in 1928 to serve as a Dayan of the *grossgemeinde* chose to send his children to be educated by Rabbi Ezra Munk at the school of the separatist *Adass* community. Julius Jakobovits, though born in the ‘seven communities’ of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, moved away from the more ultra-Orthodox theology in which he was raised and trained at

Anglo-Jewry thus had a Chief Rabbi in place who, ostensibly, was in favour of Jewish interaction in the surrounding society. His *grossgemeinde* principles, meanwhile, enabled him to support the idea of the Chief Rabbi as the religious representative of British Jewry, willing to work with all Jews to try to unite a fractured, post-Jacobs Affair community.²⁰

However, a closer examination of both these issues highlights a more complex situation. While Jakobovits may have theoretically supported the principle of engagement in the ideas of the surrounding society, in practice his negative perception of the nature of society undermined his appreciation of what it may actually be able to contribute to Judaism. In one of his radio broadcasts, on the occasion of the Jewish New Year, he noted how: “in the spurious name of progress, our permissive society has reincarnated the spirit of our antediluvian ancestors, with their loose morals.”²¹

the Pressburg Yeshiva, towards a more *Torah im derekh erez* theology. This was reflected in his decision to undertake a second semikhah from D. Z. Hoffman, following his studies at the Berlin Rabbinical Seminary and his doctoral studies at the University of Berlin. In 1917 he was appointed rabbi in Koenigsberg where he persuaded the *austrittsgemeinde* to remove its opposition to re-joining the *grossgemeinde*. For more on Jakobovits’ upbringing see Persoff, Meir: *Immanuel Jakobovits: a Prophet in Israel*. London 2002; Bermant, Chaim: *Lord Jakobovits: The Authorized Biography of the Chief Rabbi*. London 1990; Shashar, Michael: *Lord Jakobovits in Conversation*. London 2000.

²⁰ Jakobovits described his upbringing in an interview where he noted that the circle in which he was raised identified with the ideals of *Torah im derekh erez* and he explained how “I was raised from an early age in an atmosphere that the world around was not to be ignored, but was to be related to, albeit critically, and at times with reservations.” Michael Shashar, *Lord Jakobovits in Conversation*, p. 18. His detailed study of the thought of S. R. Hirsch, reprinted in his *The Timely and the Timeless*, pp. 251–258, also noted the support for interaction in the surrounding society which characterised the theology of *Torah im derekh erez* with which Jakobovits identified. His opposition to the secessionist position adopted by certain Orthodox groups and his consequent support for the principle of the *grossgemeinde* is a theme that re-emerges in many of his statements and addresses. See for example, Jakobovits, Immanuel: *Prelude to Service: A Selection of Statements, Letters and Interviews prior to his installation as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth of Nations*. London 1967, pp. 23–25; *idem*: ‘Orthodoxy’s Strengths and Weaknesses’, in *The Timely & the Timeless*, pp. 96–98; *idem*: ‘Halachah in Modern Jewish Life’, in *The Timely & the Timeless*, pp. 281–287; Shashar, *Lord Jakobovits*, p. 62, 73, 120.

²¹ New Year Broadcast 1969, in *The Timely and the Timeless*, p. 160. Prior to his arrival in Britain a still more vociferous condemnation of the surrounding society can be found in a Yom Kippur sermon delivered from the pulpit of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue he served in New York from 1958–1967: “morally, we seem to be slipping back into the barbarism of antiquity, to the garish ostentation of ancient Rome, to the body-worshipping cult of the Greeks, to the obscene perversities of the pagans, and to the shameless immodesty of the primitive jungle.” ‘The Moral Revolution’, Yom Kippur – *Musaph* sermon, 1963. In *The Journal of a Rabbi*. London 1967, p. 346.

Jakobovits' understanding of Torah im derekh erez generally worked in only one direction. He was certain that Judaism had much to contribute by engaging in British society, though he implied it had little to gain.

“Perhaps the most significant feature of our contemporary social and moral philosophy is that we define our basic human imperatives mainly in terms of rights. We speak and think of human rights, constitutional rights, international rights, political rights, labour rights, student rights, racial rights and what have you. The whole motivation of our social behaviour is galvanised by our clamour for rights which we are pressed to assert as our due ... In the moral vocabulary of the Jewish discipline of life we speak of human duties, not of human rights, of obligations, not of entitlements. The Decalogue is a list of Ten Commandments, not a Bill of Human Rights.”²²

The real nature of the interaction Jakobovits was to advocate was therefore somewhat limited. Meanwhile on the issue of communal unity, the desire of the Jewish community in Britain to be represented by a single chief rabbi had been drastically diminished through the events of the Jacobs Affair.

It appeared that for Jakobovits the best means of avoiding a repeat of the Jacobs Affair, an event that in certain respects highlighted minhag Anglia's failure to prepare British Jews for an intellectual encounter with the ideas present in the surrounding society, was to displace minhag Anglia with a more coherent theological system. The usefulness of minhag Anglia as a strategy for Anglo-Jewish living was discredited by Jakobovits. While it may have kept the community unified in some respects there were serious concerns over whether minhag Anglia could keep Jews in Britain Jewish. An alternative model of Modern Orthodoxy was thus introduced. This alternative theology that was intended to replace minhag Anglia had largely been developed outside Britain. In its increased religious stringency and disinclination to view the surrounding society in a particularly positive light the new model reflected broader changes that have been identified in Modern Orthodox Judaism beyond British shores as it moved from the 1970s to the contemporary period.

²² ‘Human Rights and Human Duties’, Address delivered at the Institute of Directors Annual Conference, Royal Albert Hall, London, 9 November, 1967. In *The Timely and the Timeless*, pp. 127–128. Generally Jakobovits' writings exhibit an inclination to condemn contemporary society for its views on gender, sexuality, and social ethics. He characterised AIDS as punishment for homosexuality and generally adopted extremely conservative views on issues such as women's rights.

By the end of his chief rabbinate, Jakobovits' efforts to strengthen the Jewish identity of those who chose to remain associated with Orthodoxy had enjoyed some success. One of the key markers of this shift was a steady reduction in membership of the United Synagogue and growing association with more ultra-Orthodox communities. As he had predicted: "Thus will Jewish life ultimately be regenerated. Like a seed sunk into the ground, the bulk decays and dies, while the tiny seminal kernel strikes root and sprouts forth anew in another generation of flourishing life."²³ The concern among the lay leadership of the United Synagogue was that, aside from the financial implications, this process of waning mainstream Orthodox synagogue membership was leaving growing numbers of British Jews feeling unrepresented by centralised institutions that had previously served them. Jakobovits' strategy was leaving non-observant Orthodox British Jews to construct cultural forms of Jewish identity to replace religious ones. It is worth noting that this strengthening of Jewish cultural identity can also be seen to reflect broader shifts in global Jewish identity. Yet as a result of the prior strength of minhag Anglia it is a phenomenon that developed markedly later in British Jewry than in many other Jewries.²⁴

Conclusion

By 1992, at the end of Jakobovits' chief rabbinate, a United Synagogue report reflecting on the changing nature of Orthodox Judaism in Britain looked back with some fondness to the ideas tied up in the concept of minhag Anglia. It noted:

²³ "The Evolution of the British Rabbinate since 1845", op cit., p.274–5. Between 1970–1983 survey figures of male synagogue members in Greater London showed the mainstream Orthodox share falling from 72 per cent to 66 per cent, while right-wing Orthodoxy grew from 2.6 per cent to 5.3 per cent. See Waterman, S., & B. Kosmin: *British Jewry in the Eighties: A Statistical and Geographical Study*, p.31. By 1996, a survey of household membership showed the mainstream Orthodox share in Greater London falling further to 55.4 per cent and right-wing Orthodoxy continuing its steady growth to 8.7 per cent. Schmool, Marlena; & Frances Cohen: *British Synagogue Membership in 1996*. London 1997, p.7.

²⁴ See Kahn-Harris, Keith; & Ben Gidley: *Turbulent Times, The British Jewish Community Today*, pp. 119 ff.

“The traditional United Synagogue had a clear message, affectionately summed up in the phrase *minhag Anglia*, a celebration of the twofold blessing of being Jewish and British.”²⁵

It was acknowledged that among the religious leadership of the community, as the twentieth century was closing, *minhag Anglia* had largely ceased to be viewed as an acceptable means of combining Jewish and British identities. Alongside any influence that Jakobovits had exerted, internal adjustments to British society, alongside global shifts in late twentieth century Orthodox Judaism had helped to ensure that Orthodox affiliation was increasingly associated with Orthodox practice. Yet a significant proportion of the laity still identified with the more practically oriented muddle that *minhag Anglia* offered, those who had yet to ‘decay and die’ leaving mainstream Orthodoxy. Jakobovits had sought to ensure that there were only two options available to these Jews, increased religious observance, which could be seen to represent a more theologically coherent Modern Orthodox Judaism, or a move away from Orthodoxy towards either progressive alternatives or cultural forms of Jewish identity. He saw no long term value in *minhag Anglia*. The question facing the United Synagogue was whether another option could be provided. The report concluded that an alternative was needed as Jakobovits’ strategy was broadly rejected. The principle of inclusivism continued to be identified with British Modern Orthodoxy.²⁶

Yet when examining the nature of Modern Orthodox Judaism it is worth considering the extent to which theology plays a genuine role in determining how Jews act. When contrasted with ultra-Orthodox communities, the authority and influence rabbis exert over Modern Orthodox communities can be more limited. Sociological studies of Jewish practice suggest that it is often not theology or even religious identity and affiliation but practical considerations that determine how Jews act and what rituals they observe.²⁷ In this respect,

²⁵ *A Time for Change: United Synagogue Review*, p. 37.

²⁶ A study of the success enjoyed by the United Synagogue in fostering this inclusivism during the chief rabbinate of Jakobovits’ successor has been undertaken in Persoff, Meir: *Another Way, Another Time, Religious Inclusivism and the Sacks Chief Rabbinate*. Boston 2010.

²⁷ See Eisen, Arnold: *Rethinking Modern Judaism, Ritual, Commandment, Community*. Chicago 1998. Some of the sociological studies already cited measured attitudes to belief as well as ritual observance. The United Synagogue’s *A Time for Change* found that, aside from the 10 per cent who identified as strictly Orthodox (see note 1 above), ‘the large gulf between the practising, traditional Jew and the non-observant, secular Jew is not clearly related to fundamental differences in belief.’ p. 243. This survey found that 52 per cent of respondents

minhag Anglia can be seen to reflect the type of unthinking approach to Judaism that, in fact, often prevails rather widely. While efforts may have been undertaken to undermine minhag Anglia, and despite the manner in which much of Modern Orthodox Judaism appears to be characterised by a growing attachment to ritual, the role of theology in determining religious practice remains unclear. Understood in these terms the growing stringency to be identified in Modern Orthodoxy would appear, to some extent, to reflect sociological factors. So while minhag Anglia may not provide a strategy for Modern Orthodoxy it may well continue, for a little while yet, to reflect a social reality regarding Modern Orthodox Judaism in Britain.

agreed with the statement that 'The Jewish people have a special relationship with God'. At the same time, 58 per cent agreed with the statement that 'The universe came about by chance', p. 242. A study carried out by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research on religious outlook among London's Jews highlighted the popularity of attending a Passover seder, even by those who identified themselves as entirely secular in religious outlook. Of the secular group, 47 per cent said they attended a seder every year and 82 per cent of this group said they attended a seder 'some', 'most', or 'every year'. See *Religious or Secular? The Outlook of London's Jews*. JPR Report No. 3, pp. 13 ff. See also Kosmin, Barry; Caren Levy: *Jewish Identity in an Anglo-Jewish Community*. London 1992, pp. 15–18.