



RABBIS & THEIR COMMUNITY: STUDIES IN THE EASTERN EUROPEAN ORTHODOX RABBINATE IN MONTREAL, 1896–1930

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*Rabbi Simon Glazer:
A Rival for the Chief Rabbinate*

Should a buzzing noise reach your ear [speaking] against me, know that it is the voice of a snake or snakes, and that it possesses not a grain of truth.... For thirty years I have engaged in holy work in this country, and despite all the troubles, I am at my post. – Rabbi Simon Glazer (1927)¹

In this chapter, we will be speaking of Rabbi Simon Glazer, a man who wanted to be chief rabbi of Montreal. We will see why he was not allowed to claim the chief rabbinate unopposed.

By 1906, Rabbi Hirsh Cohen had been positioning himself to assume the leadership role among the Eastern European rabbis in Montreal for several years and had come into his own as arguably the most prominent among their number. He was therefore set to claim the mantle of Rabbi Aaron Mordecai Ashinsky, who had left Montreal for a position in Pittsburgh.² He had taken over from Rabbi Ashinsky as the head of the Talmud Torah of Montreal. He had also been appointed Jewish chaplain at the Montreal jail. He was, furthermore, poised to be the major rabbi to certify the *kashrut* of meat in Montreal.³

However, in 1907, something very important took place in Montreal, and Rabbi Hirsh Cohen's leadership would be sorely and severely challenged by Rabbi Simon Glazer.⁴

What had happened was that a group of Montreal synagogues had decided to come together in a consortium to support a rabbi who would function as their chief rabbi. They needed to do so because no single

Eastern European synagogue in Montreal could afford to pay a rabbi anything remotely resembling a living wage. It was hoped, however, that if a number of congregations got together, then together they would be able to support a rabbi in a decent manner. The first move by the synagogue consortium was to attempt to entice Rabbi Ashinsky back from Pittsburgh. This move would have given the consortium instant credibility within the Montreal Jewish community, given the position that Rabbi Ashinsky had been able to make for himself in Montreal. However, that plan did not come to fruition.

One of the major reasons Rabbi Ashinsky did not come back to Montreal was because his congregation in Pittsburgh was very possessive of him. He tried several times to leave Pittsburgh for another rabbinate. In one of these instances, he had accepted an offer from a congregation in Brooklyn, New York. At that point, his Pittsburgh community took him to a rabbinical court of arbitration [*din Torah*]. The rabbinical arbitrators at this *din Torah* ruled that Rabbi Ashinsky could not legitimately leave his Pittsburgh congregation to go to Brooklyn and had to remain in Pittsburgh. He remained there until the end of his career, greatly honoured by his community.

When the leaders of the Montreal congregational consortium could not get Rabbi Ashinsky, who was both a formidable and familiar figure to Montreal's Eastern European Jews, they continued their search for a rabbi. Eventually they reached an agreement with Rabbi Simon Glazer. Rabbi Glazer was born in Erzwilg, Lithuania, in the Russian Empire on January 21, 1876. At the age of eighteen, in 1896, he left his native land. As you will recall from the discussion in Chapter 1, rabbis did not leave their Eastern European homeland without a reason. His reason was an eminently good one: he left Russia one step ahead of the Russian military draft. In this respect, he was like thousands of other Jewish boys who sought all sorts of means to avoid the threat that several years in the Russian army represented to Jews. When Rabbi Glazer left Russia, he did not go immediately to America. First, he journeyed to the Land of Israel. However, he found it impossible to make a living there, and within a year he found himself arriving in New York City.

In New York, while attempting to chart his course, he happened to meet with the editor of one of the major Yiddish-language newspapers in the city, *Die Yiddishe Gazetten*, which was read largely by Orthodox Jews.

The editor's name was Kasriel Sarasohn. The advice Sarasohn gave Rabbi Glazer changed the course of his life. He advised him not to enter the rabbinate immediately but rather to learn English first. Implementing this advice meant that Glazer would be distinguished from most of the other Eastern European immigrant Orthodox rabbis. The other rabbis tended to be in two categories. In the first category were those rabbis who never learned English well, and who perforce remained within the boundaries of the immigrant community. Within that community, communicating in Yiddish sufficed. Others did master English, to a greater or lesser extent, but most of them never achieved real fluency in it. When these rabbis needed to step out of the immigrant community and make themselves known to a broader constituency, lack of fluent English often hampered them, and the Eastern European Orthodox rabbinate's ability to communicate with North American Jews beyond the immigrant generation was severely limited in many cases.

Rabbi Glazer took Sarasohn's advice to heart. For fully four years, he studied English and other secular subjects intensively, while earning a living as a cantor and Hebrew teacher. Thus by 1902 he had mastered the English language to the extent that he was able to write entire books and to deliver sermons in English. He was able to interact with government officials without need for a translator. As may be imagined, this was a very important plus for him.

His first rabbinical position was in Des Moines, Iowa, starting in 1902, just after his marriage. By 1904, he had published his first book, a history of the Jews of Iowa.⁵ One must consider that this book, whatever its deficiencies, was the product of a man who had been in America for less than a decade. Moreover, he also began editing an English-language Jewish newspaper in Iowa, *The Jewish Herald*.

In 1905, he moved from Des Moines to Toledo, Ohio. There as well he began to edit an English-language Jewish newspaper, *The Jewish Compromiser*. In Toledo, he also published, once again in English, *The Sabbath School Guide*,⁶ a textbook for Jewish children's Sunday schools. Sunday school may not have been Rabbi Glazer's preference in terms of Jewish education in America, but it did constitute the reality he encountered, and he was determined that if Jewish children would be exposed to Jewish education only in Sunday schools, and in the English language, that they make the best possible use of this educational experience. What he could

readily see was that rabbis within the Reform movement had been writing the textbooks for Jewish Sunday schools for some time and that they had a virtual lock on the market. Rabbi Glazer was determined to break into this market and expose Sunday school children to the teachings of Orthodox Judaism. He remained in Toledo until 1907 when he moved to Montreal.⁷

However, he had made a sort of appearance in Montreal previously, in the columns of Montreal's English-language Jewish newspaper, *The Jewish Times*. He had written an apologia for the Talmud entitled "The Talmud: Fundamental Principles," which appeared in October 1903.⁸ The publication of this essay, which in most respects is a fairly conventional defence of Talmudic literature against its detractors, apparently played a part in a dispute that took place within the Montreal Jewish community, as elsewhere in North America, over the propriety of teaching Talmud to North American Jewish children. Whereas in Eastern Europe, Talmudic literature constituted the mainstay of any educational experience that passed beyond the elementary level, in North America, the emphasis of the curriculum in the Talmud Torahs, with their relatively limited hours of instruction, was almost wholly on the Hebrew Bible. What about Talmud? In some Talmud Torahs, the subject was given a grudging hour or two a week. On the other hand, there were schools that, on principle, did not want Talmud in their curriculum at all. It had a very bad reputation in many circles as a symbol of the obscurantism and benightedness of Orthodox Judaism, in general, and of Eastern European Orthodox Judaism, in particular. Thus, whereas there existed adult Talmud classes in Montreal, pioneered by Rabbi Hirsh Cohen, and whereas Rabbi Cohen also advocated teaching Talmud in the upper grades of his Talmud Torah,⁹ there apparently existed in Montreal an organized group of Jews who objected to Jewish children in Montreal studying Talmud.¹⁰ Thus Rabbi Glazer's article in praise of the Talmud appeared in *The Jewish Times*, not for the sake of refuting anti-Semites objecting to the Talmud, but rather to refute those Montreal Jews who opposed Talmud study on principle.

When Rabbi Glazer came to Montreal in 1907, he became chief rabbi of a consortium known variously as the "United Orthodox Congregations," the "United Orthodox Synagogues," or the "United Synagogue." In this connection it must be remembered that, for Canada, as part of the British Empire, the terms "chief rabbi" and "united synagogue" had a specific

resonance. Constitutionally speaking, the Jews of England were under the religious authority of a chief rabbi and a synagogue federation known as the United Synagogue. In England, the chief rabbi was in charge of the supervision of kosher meat. No purveyor of kosher meat in England could do so without a licence from the chief rabbi. No divorces were to be issued without the consent of the chief rabbi and his *Bet Din*.¹¹

Thus when Rabbi Glazer came to Montreal and was advertised as being the “chief rabbi” of a “United Synagogue,” it must have sounded to many ears as though he was claiming supreme rabbinical power in the community. Moreover, when Rabbi Glazer asserted that he possessed the authority to license kosher butchers or authorize Jewish divorces in Montreal, this was perceived by many Montreal Jews as a threat to the community’s status quo.¹² The established Jewish community in Montreal was worried that if this newcomer, who had been living in North America for barely a decade, were to be recognized by non-Jewish individuals and governmental agencies as chief rabbi of Montreal, there would be a number of important implications. Would it mean that Rabbi Meldola de Sola of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation would be in an inferior position to him? What about Rabbi Abramowitz of Shaar Hashomayim?

Therefore, from the moment that Rabbi Glazer arrived in Montreal, all his initiatives met with strong opposition. For example, he claimed that, as chief rabbi, he had the right to license kosher butchers. What did he do in order to establish this claim? He approached Montreal’s City Council with a petition. The Council referred this petition to its Committee on Markets. At the meeting of that Committee, Rabbis Abramowitz and Meldola de Sola appeared and stated that *Mr.*¹³ Glazer was not recognized by Montreal Jews as chief rabbi, and therefore should not be granted the authority he desired. Alderman Levy, representing a “Jewish” constituency, suggested that the Committee table the matter and let the rabbis settle things among themselves.¹⁴ This particular confrontation foreshadowed the course events would take in the succeeding decades. Questions of *kashrut* supervision would more than once be placed before the Montreal City Council as well as before the justices of the Quebec Superior Court. Judges and aldermen, possessing absolutely no expertise in the intricacies of rabbinic law, were called upon to decide what were for any non-rabbi extremely arcane issues because the rabbis themselves and their community were unable to arrive at a consensus.

At this point, having failed to carry his point at City Hall, Rabbi Glazer published a list of butcher shops authorized by him as kosher. He advised the public to patronize these stores. Thereupon all the butchers who were not licensed by Rabbi Glazer brought a libel suit against him on the grounds that he had impugned the *kashrut* of the meat they sold to the public.¹⁵ While the details of this particular case are not presently available, it is likely that it is similar to a suit that was brought in Toronto in 1913 by a slaughterer against Rabbis Jacob Gordon and Joseph Weinreb of that city. In that case:

The plaintiff [the slaughterer who claimed defamation on the part of the rabbi] explains and justifies his legal proceedings on the following grounds.

1. He was on examination as aforesaid found and is a shochet of learning and ability and has never been found guilty of or charged with any ignorance either in theory or in practice.
2. That the said rules did not bind the plaintiff as (he alleges) they were made without his privity or consent.
3. No rabbis have as of right any control or authority over shochetim and in particular the defendants had no control or authority over the plaintiff.
4. The defendants had no right to make a close corporation out of the shechita business.
5. The defendants had no certificates or diplomas giving them the right to practice as Rabonim [rabbis] and in any event they are incompetent.¹⁶

Concerning the libel suit brought by the butchers against Rabbi Glazer, *The Jewish Times* editorialized:

The position he has arrogated to himself as chief rabbi gives him no standing. His pretensions have been repudiated by the older and more well-informed rabbis of the city, and before he gets through with the trouble he has raised he may learn his place.¹⁷

Another establishment voice was raised against Glazer without, however, naming him specifically. This time the denunciation was not in the local,

Montreal Jewish newspaper, but rather in the *Jewish Chronicle* of London. On July 16, 1909, Maxwell Goldstein wrote:

The newcomers have not only founded congregations of their own, but they have even appointed a foreign Chief Rabbi for themselves. At one time he styled himself the Chief Rabbi of Canada, but now he is recognized by the foreign section as the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Orthodox Congregations. The difficulty with us is how to cooperate with these people. They must not be ignored. The only thing to do is to take them by the hand, and lead them by persuasive methods to recognize their duties to the community.¹⁸

The Montreal community had taken sides. Rabbi Glazer, his rabbinical court,¹⁹ and his congregations were on one side, the Montreal Jewish establishment and its three major synagogues, plus Rabbi Hirsh Cohen and his followers, were on the other side.

The communal dispute over Rabbi Glazer's claims did not stop with lawsuits. It also got physical. In 1907, Rabbi Glazer was assaulted in his office. This is how it was reported by *The Montreal Herald*, which was sensationalist in its presentation:

Because they assaulted their rabbi, Rev. Simon Glazer, in his study, on 29 Gilbault Street, warrents were sworn out for the arrest of Abraham Neanton, B. Blumenthal and a man named Macaroffsky. Neanton is under arrest and the police are looking for the other two. Macaroffsky is the one who is accused of striking Rabbi Glazer, but the other two tried, the rabbi alleges, to spoil his features. The trouble arose over the refusal of Rabbi Glazer, who has sole control of the Kosher meat business here, to grant a license as "killer"²⁰ to Wolf Goldsman, a friend of Neanton. Neanton wanted to establish a "kosher" shop, and wanted Rabbi Glazer to allow him to have Goldsman as his killer. The rabbi refused to accede to Neanton's request as his predecessors had refused to grant Goldsman a license, on the ground that Goldsman had a rather unsavory reputation. He said though that he would give Neanton a "kosher" license if he would buy his meats from other duly licensed Kosher butchers. This did not suit Neanton.

Rabbi Glazer heard that on Friday of last week and Monday of this week Goldsman had been acting as killer and sent his steward to Goldsman to tell him that he would have to discontinue and that he would take every measure to advertise Goldsman as an impostor even if he had to effect his arrest. It was this

ultimatum, it is alleged, that caused Neanton and Goldsman's sons-in-law to assault the rabbi.

Today to *The Herald* Rabbi Glazer gave the following account of the affair: "The three came to my house and asked me if it was true that I would not grant Goldsman a license. I told them that I certainly would not, and they began to curse me fluently and made a rush at me. I jumped for the rear door and got through but Macaroffsky went around the back way and punched me. Meanwhile, my servant had run downstairs and out on the street yelling 'Murder, police,' and her screams alarmed the trio who scampered downstairs, still swearing at me. They told me that I was not the 'Czar of Russia,' and I told them that they were in an enlightened country, and that I would have the law on them."

The article went on to state that:

The kosher business of Montreal amounts to nearly \$3,000,000 a year²¹ and Rabbi Glazer has the making of the appointments. He has eleven men to kill cattle and nine to inspect, sixteen to kill poultry, and forty-one retail dealers. When he pronounces meat unfit it is thrown away. In fact he is absolute master of the Jewish meat trade in Montreal. There is a great demand for the various licenses but the recipient has to be of unimpeachable character and reputation.²²

Whatever the real value of the kosher meat industry of Montreal, which supplied a community experiencing tremendous growth,²³ it was clearly important and worth fighting for.²⁴ Religiously inclined or not, members of the Montreal Jewish community in this era overwhelmingly bought meat from Jewish butchers who were or claimed to be selling kosher meat, though it must also be said that not every consumer was necessarily particular to verify the claims of *kashrut*. Rabbi Hirsh Cohen reported in 1933 the kosher butchers' estimate that 80 per cent of Jewish homes in Montreal purchased kosher meat.²⁵

By the teens or the twenties of the twentieth century, there had arisen a network of between sixty and ninety retail butcher shops catering to the Jewish trade. Each shop was relatively small and served an average of some five hundred Jews. Incidentally, this proportion of Jewish butcher shops to total Jewish population seems to be relatively constant, whether we are speaking of large communities like Montreal or smaller communities like Bangor, Maine and Johnstown, Pennsylvania, where, in the 1920s,

there were approximately 1,000 to 1,200 Jews respectively, or Madison, Wisconsin, which had a community of somewhat under 1,000; each of these smaller communities possessed two kosher butcher shops.²⁶

The kosher butcher shops in Montreal, whatever their exact number at any given time, were more than simple retail establishments. They constituted centres where Jews, and especially Jewish women, gathered. Given the lack of reliable refrigeration facilities in homes, trips to the butcher constituted a fairly frequent activity for housewives, especially since Jews in North America tended to rely heavily on meat in their diet.²⁷

Rabbi Glazer's battle with his opponents was often discouraging. Thus, in November 1908, he wrote the following to the leadership of the Beth David [Roumanian] Congregation:

The entire city of Montreal today eats meat that has no supervision. At many of the local butchers today, the meat [sold] is "meat which has been hidden from sight."²⁸ The butchers, not you as a community, control the *shehita* and the *shohtim*. A year's work has been completely nullified because the butchers did not wish to pay *shehita* fees.

All the Orthodox congregations of this city have united. They have established a rabbinical court, and made a contract concerning the *shohtim* and the *shehita*. Now only the butchers have [control over] the *shohtim*, not the congregations.

Since I, as rabbi of your congregation, am obligated to see that you have kosher meat to eat, I have literally put myself on the line [*moser nefesh*] for it. And now, unfortunately, I must request that you give your attention to the *shohtim* and butchers. As it is now, I can in no way be responsible for the *kashrut* of the *shehita* and of the butchers.

I ask that you hold a meeting as soon as possible to see how to help reestablish *kashrut* in such a manner that I could be able to testify, according to the laws of the holy Torah, concerning [the *kashrut* of] meat that such a mother city in Israel should be able to eat.²⁹

Rabbi Glazer was also at work in other areas. He was numbered among the co-founders of the Montreal Yiddish-language newspaper, the *Keneder Odler*. In fact, he is credited by its publisher, Hirsh Wolofsky, who was to become his inveterate enemy, with having suggested the newspaper's name.³⁰ When he was frozen out of the newspaper's leadership, he tried several times to found a rival newspaper, entitled *Der Stern*, with but little

success. This failure certainly worked to his detriment.³¹ Since he was opposed by Wolofsky, who controlled the *Keneder Odler* as well as (from 1914) the community's English-language newspaper, *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, Rabbi Glazer became, in the Montreal Jewish community, a media "non-person," while his arch-rival, Rabbi Hirsh Cohen, regularly appeared in the *Odler's* and *Chronicle's* columns. Thus Rabbi Glazer was forced to reply to the accusations and denunciations against him published in the *Keneder Odler* with handbills and libel suits,³² not a very effective method.

Rabbi Glazer was an activist in the area of labour relations. He was, apparently, a supporter of the organization of the Jewish Butcher's Employees Association of Montreal in 1909 and instrumental in getting this association recognized by other Jewish labour organizations.³³ He also intervened in other labour disputes involving Jewish workers, in one of which he incurred the wrath of one of the manufacturers for having denounced him in a sermon.³⁴

We are in possession of a number of interesting documents by Rabbi Glazer. By far the most interesting is a diary he wrote concerning his activities in the year 1909. His diary told what he was doing and how much he got for it. He recorded an annual income of \$1905.00, though we cannot know with any certainty whether this constituted his total income for that period. His monthly income ranged from a low of \$122.00 in January to a pre-Passover high of \$211.50 for March (which included \$95.00 for selling the *hamets*³⁵). In 1909, he earned \$189.50 for marriages, \$122.00 for divorces, and \$205.00 for what he described as "cases."

I will give you an example of one of the "cases" that Rabbi Glazer was called upon to solve:

Montreal, October 11, 1909.

We the undersigned, having been appointed as arbitrators and umpire respectively do render our final decision anent the differences of *A* vs. *B*,³⁶ which originated at the Austria-Hungarian synagogue during services of Simchath Torah last... In consideration of the fact that the said *B*, during sacred services, when the Torah was out of the Ark ... has willfully slapped the face of the said *A*, and causing him pain by knocking a tooth out of his mouth, and in consideration of the fact that the synagogue is sacred to us and our children, it is our decision

that the said *B* shall pay as an indemnity the following sums: to the synagogue he disgraced by causing a row ... \$50.00 ... to the Talmud Torah Anshei S'fard ... \$25.00; to the Montreal Home and Orphan Asylum ... \$25.00.... And, in consideration that he caused a tooth with bridge work to fall out of the mouth of the said *A* by slapping him, the said *B* shall pay the said *A* the sum of ... \$15.00.

Besides these, the said *B*, before being a good-standing member again in the said synagogue he disgraced, he shall have a letter of apology written to the said Austria-Hungarian congregation, and also an apology to the said *A*.

In consideration of the fact that the said *A*, without any due cause, in the synagogue while the Parnass³⁷ was attending his sacred duty, he, *A*, insulted the said Parnass.... *A* shall receive no ha-Kapha³⁸ for two years, and no Aliyah³⁹ for six months, unless the said *A* will, at a public meeting, offer a due apology to the Parnass, Mr. *C*,⁴⁰ and it shall serve as a warning so that the officers elected by the people shall be respected.⁴¹

Rabbi Glazer, therefore, was in the business of having his title of chief rabbi recognized and respected by his community. As he stated in 1910:

Am I the Chief Rabbi of the United Orthodox Congregations? Yes. And I would be misrepresenting my office, to which I was elected by ten congregations here and in Quebec, if I should renounce the title.⁴²

The difficulty was that whatever he did was countered by his opposition. Thus, for example, in 1909, there was a great dispute concerning matza. There was a matza factory in Toronto, run by a man named Weinstock. Weinstock attempted to get the Canadian Customs to levy a duty on imported matza so that American matza companies, like Manischewitz, would operate at a price disadvantage in Canada. Weinstock wanted Rabbi Glazer to issue a certification of the *kashrut* of his product. Rabbi Glazer refused, but, as it happened, his rabbinical arch-rival, Rabbi Cohen, was willing to do so. Rabbi Glazer, in response, issued a poster denouncing the Weinstock matza factory, giving reasons why he would not certify its *kashrut*. Among the reasons he gave was that "there are witnesses from Toronto who have testified that this factory is not merely manufacturing Matzas, it also bakes leavened bread. On Saturday nights there is hot, fresh bread⁴³ coming out of its ovens."⁴⁴

Rabbi Glazer did not merely issue the poster; he also travelled to Ottawa to meet with William Paterson, the minister in charge of Canada Customs. He made sure that no duty was imposed upon imported matza. His success meant that the Toronto matza factory failed. In one very biting article written by Rabbi Glazer against his rival, whom he called *Mr. Cohen*,⁴⁵ he stated “there is a lot of unused matza baking machinery in Toronto.” The rivalry between Rabbis Glazer and Cohen and their followers was very personal, and, as they were living in the same city and circulating in much the same circles, they could not avoid bumping into one another frequently. At one point in his 1909 diary, Rabbi Glazer recorded that he spoke at a public meeting at the Baron de Hirsch Institute. He wrote, “speaking at the same podium was my great enemy, Lyon Cohen [nephew of Hirsh], but I got the best of it.”⁴⁶

One of the incidents which was measurably affected by the rivalry between Rabbis Glazer and Cohen was the case of Solomon Lamdan, a poultry *shohet* who had been arrested for illegally slaughtering chickens near the St. Lawrence Market.⁴⁷ Rabbi Glazer attempted to get Lamdan kosher food and facilities for daily prayer but was constrained to work through Rabbi Cohen who had earlier been appointed Jewish chaplain at the jail.⁴⁸ Rabbi Glazer’s actions on behalf of Lamdan included contacting not merely the administration of the jail, but also the mayor of Montreal and the premier of Quebec. His actions were so consistently opposed by the Jewish establishment, represented by S. W. Jacobs, that it was observed by Keinosuke Oiwa, in his study of the Montreal Jewish community in this era, that “Uptowners seem to have been more concerned with the involvement of Rabbi Glazer than with Lamdan’s imprisonment itself.”⁴⁹

As we have seen, Rabbi Glazer was an activist by inclination and would not allow his reputation or the Jewish name in general to be impugned without attempting to intervene with responsible politicians.⁵⁰ Thus in 1910, when a French Canadian named Plamondon published a grave denunciation of the Talmud, as a book which was anti-Christian and taught inhumane doctrines, Montreal Jewry reacted. We know quite well what transpired from the point of view of the Montreal Jewish establishment, which sought redress in court and employed Rabbi Abramowitz of Shaar Hashomayim for this purpose.⁵¹ What is less well known is that it was Rabbi Glazer who intervened first, writing letters to the Quebec

City newspaper, *Le Soleil*, attempting to refute the anti-Semitic charges against the Talmud.

In 1913 a very sensational court case in Halifax, Nova Scotia, also drew the attention of Montreal Jews. The *shohet* of Halifax, a man by the name of Leavitt, had been arrested on a complaint by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The complaint specified that the traditional Jewish method of slaughtering animals was inhumane and cruel and in contravention of Nova Scotia's Cruelty to Animals Act. Thus confronted with a challenge not dissimilar to that of Plamondon, Rabbi Glazer went to Halifax, at his own expense, because he felt it was his duty as chief rabbi. He was the rabbinical expert witness for the defence in the case of Rex vs. Leavitt. The case was finally won by the Jewish side on the basis of the testimony of Rabbi Glazer and of other expert witnesses, especially a professor of physiology who testified that the kosher method of slaughtering was indeed a very humane one. Thus Rabbi Glazer's appreciation of his duty as chief rabbi of his congregations extended to other Canadian Jewish problems.⁵²

Rabbi Glazer was appreciated by his supporters, who, in 1912, contributed to a fund to build him a house. Who, exactly, were his supporters? Which congregations sided with Rabbi Glazer? Four lists of his congregations are extant. The first stems from 1909,⁵³ the second from 1912,⁵⁴ and the third from 1918.⁵⁵ The final one stems from 1927, long after Rabbi Glazer had left Montreal. It consists of those congregations in Montreal that supported the publication of his translation of Maimonides and may be taken as indicative of support for Rabbi Glazer during his tenure in Montreal⁵⁶:

1909	1912	1918	1927
Galician	Galician Kehal Yeshurun	Kehal Yeshurun	
Chevra Kadisha	Chevra Kadisha		Chevra Kadisha
Austrian Hungarian	Austrian Hungarian	Shaarei Tefillah	Shaare Tephilah Austria-Hungarian Congregation

1909	1912	1918	1927
Rumanian	Rumanian	Beth David	Beth David Rumanian Congregation
Beth Judah	Beth Judah	Beth Judah	Beth Judah
Beth Israel (Quebec)	Beth Israel (Quebec)		Beth Israel (Quebec)
	Kol Yisrael <u>Haverim</u> (Papineau)	<u>Haverim</u> Kol Yisrael	
	Tifereth Israel (Mile End)		Tifereth Israel
		Kerem Israel	Kerem Israel
	Shomrim Laboker		
	Beth Solomon	Beth Solomon	Beth Solomon

Some synagogues appear on all three lists, though sometimes under slightly different names. Thus the Galician synagogue, Kehal Yeshurun, appeared on all three lists. Others appear but once, and it is evident that congregational loyalties shifted over time. The most prominent Eastern European synagogue not affiliated with Rabbi Glazer was Bnai Jacob. Chevra Shas, which had been founded by Rabbi Cohen, also remained in opposition.

Rabbi Glazer lectured widely outside of Montreal, including in his journeys Ottawa and Toronto. He spoke publicly in English as well as in Yiddish. Thus in 1911, to celebrate the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary, a special thanksgiving service was held in the Chevra Kadisha synagogue in which Rabbi Glazer was advertised as speaking in English.⁵⁷ Rabbi Glazer was interested in looking beyond the immediate controversies within the Montreal Jewish community in which he was constantly engaged. He had begun an attempt to chart the future of North American Jewry and to influence what American Orthodox Judaism was going to look like. To this end, he wrote a very interesting book during his years in Montreal, publishing it in 1917.⁵⁸ Its title was *The Guide of Judaism*. The Hebrew subtitle, much to the same effect, was *Moreh ha-*

Yahadut.⁵⁹ Glazer designed the book to be a systematic work for the study and instruction of Judaism in its entirety. It takes its general structure from Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, which was designed as an all-inclusive work on Judaism.⁶⁰ Rabbi Glazer's guide to Judaism is completed in approximately 180 pages. From his preface, it is possible to understand not merely that he wrote in English, but also the high level of his English writing. He stated:

... the *vis vitae* of Judaism in the New World, its renaissance and its progress is possible only in this generation of patriotism and consciousness of self. The bricks of the great edifice of European Jewishness are being carried over the Atlantic. One Jewish center was always built upon the ruins of another. Such is our history and its philosophy.

The problems confronting Israel to-day are: How shall, or rather, how can Judaism be perpetuated in the face of Western civilization? Is Judaism really in danger because of its Oriental origin?

Eliminating Reform as a factor in solving these problems, the question arises: What alternative have the spiritual leaders in Israel to offer to the growing generation which is both free and cultured?

Judaism, since the last quarter of the eighteenth century, continued to develop among the great masses of European Jewries along three distinct lines: the Mendessohnian school, the Israel Baal-Shem school, and the Elijah Gaon school. Frankfurt, Warsaw and Wilna fairly illustrate the characteristics of the intentions of those schools. Will it be possible, or, facing conditions as they are, is it desirable to perpetuate the divisions and create a *Hassidic* Chicago, an *Ashkenazic* Philadelphia, or a *Pilpulistic* New York?

By means of observation during two decades among various types of communities, and alongside Reform colleagues and radical agitators, it is my firm conviction that the problems of Judaism in the New World can, and will be solved by only one means – by means of EDUCATION.

And, as an *avant propos*, I dedicate this work to American Israel, to the growing and grown generation.⁶¹

Glazer was thus a man who did not merely know English (and at least a smattering of Latin and French); he was also able to write a powerful essay, which expressed some very interesting ideas, and, indeed, a unique vision of Judaism's future in North America. One of the things he was

saying here is that the elements of European Jewishness were being carried over the Atlantic; however, the structure of Judaism that was going to be built would not have the same appearance. Though a “pilpulistic” Vilna existed, and was going to be a building block of the future North American Judaism, we will, nonetheless, not witness a “pilpulistic” New York. What will we have, then? Glazer’s vision was of a Judaism that is not Reform, and not radical, which were the two major rival structures of Jewish meaning offered to the immigrant Jews. It will be, therefore, a traditional Judaism. This traditional Judaism, however, will be studied – at least by the masses – not in Hebrew, and not in Yiddish, but in English. Nonetheless, Rabbi Glazer hoped that this Judaism would be true to its roots. At the beginning of the book, therefore, Rabbi Glazer presented, in Hebrew, the sources in Rabbinic literature and in Maimonides from which he derived his material.

Glazer’s book, in accordance with his Maimonidean model, begins with the existence of God and ends with the coming of the Messiah. Here is what he says concerning the messianic era:

When the Messianic era will dawn, the throne will be restored to the House of David, and all laws of Judaism will be in force again. But let no man think that the world will change in its physical appearance, or that the laws of nature will be changed. The Messianic era will be an era of peace among all nations, and between all nations and Israel, which will be permitted to enjoy its own undisturbed. But before such era will be inaugurated, great wars, the greatest in history, will come to pass, and thereafter all men will live in brotherly peace. May it come to pass in our days, Amen.⁶²

That last part, concerning the great wars before the coming of Messiah, is certainly part of the Jewish tradition, but it is emphatically not part of Maimonides’ description in his *Mishneh Torah*, which greatly de-emphasized the apocalyptic elements of medieval Jewish messianic thought. It is important, therefore, to bear in mind that Rabbi Glazer published this book in 1917, in the middle of an event contemporaries called “The Great War.” Did he possibly think that the Great War would inaugurate the messianic era? My educated guess says that likely he did, along with numerous other Orthodox Jews of his era.

In order to get a further idea of who Rabbi Glazer was and what he stood for, we will examine some selections from a book of sermons he published, in English, in 1930. Even though it is likely that these sermons were written after he left Montreal, they can still be said to represent his thinking in his Montreal period as well.

One concept that stands out in his collection of sermons is his conviction that the situation of North American Judaism and rabbis had undergone a dramatic change. Thus he wrote:

As Israel advances in years on this hemisphere, the gradual departure from the Old Country customs becomes more conspicuous every year. No longer is the Rabbi the actual head, the real teacher, the spiritual father of his community. Every congregation is a community by itself.⁶³

Some of the tensions found in North American Judaism by Rabbi Glazer can be illustrated in two sermons he preached on the festival of Hanukkah. In the first, he commented on the claim to the festival being made by the Zionists:

This festival which we celebrate to-day is universally known as Hanukah – dedication – in commemoration of the miracle of the cruse of ointment. True, it is historically called also Maccabean festival – Hag ha-Machbim – ; but it is, in a like measure, also known as the festival of lights – Hag-ha-Neroth. Perhaps this very fact, this inability to worship heroes, did not contribute to the well-being of Israel; perhaps, too, if this characteristic could have been claimed, Israel, as a nation, would have been a greater success. And, there are many today who unconsciously advocate such radical departure to cease worshipping the miraculous and commence worshipping the natural. Even this very festival, its very base, is being diverted to support another prop. Nationalism struggles hardest when it encounters a situation similar to that of Hanukah. The bit of ointment with the seal of the high priest was played up long enough, say they; it is high time that the military genius of the Maccabees be given the front page in the history of Hanukah. And, some well-intentioned zealots are sincerely angry, particularly at the Rabbis of old for having emphasized the miracle-end of Hanukah. The delightful misinformation which is distributed about the ancient Rabbis leads one to believe that they purposely ignored the heroic efforts of the Maccabees, and stressed

emphasis upon the miracle of the oil-cruse. "What benediction does one deliver when lighting the Hanukah-lights?"

Who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us. Where can one find such commandment? Rabbi Eviya said: "Thou shalt not turn aside from the decision which they will declare unto thee, to the right hand, nor to the left." Rabbi Nehemiah said: "Ask thy father and he will declare unto thee, thine elders, and they will tell thee" (Tractate Sabbath, 23a). Both, Rabbi Eviya and Rabbi Nehemiah, made an analysis of the religious character of Hanukah and found it a sound doctrine. There must be constituted authority in Israel. The question, "Where can one find such commandment?" covers a lot of ground; perhaps as much as the ground covered by all modern critics of the religiosity of the festival. Rabbi Eviya's commentary that it is based upon the edict of constituted authority amply satisfies the religiously inclined wing. But it fails to convince the national element, which was led to believe that the Rabbis were antagonistically inclined toward the Maccabees. This was the task of Rabbi Nehemiah; he supplied the necessary material to refute the charge. "Ask thy father and he will declare unto thee, Thine elders, and they will tell thee." The whole people of Israel, throughout the generations, in all countries, centuries after there was no more a Synhedrion, or any other constituted authority to dominate the entire Jewry, accepted the religious rather than the national, the miraculous rather than the rational view concerning Hanukah. The philosophy of the History of Israel, if it means anything at all to the student of Jewish life, teaches that neither the triumphs nor the defeats of our nation can be attributed to natural causes, to the normal march of events, to either the plans of diplomatists or the strategy of generals. The uninitiated might be lead to believe that the Jewish people was merely drifting through the ages. But that is not the truth. Every recorded event refutes such notion. Verily, when it comes to the events in Jerusalem, "be silent, all flesh, before the Lord; for He is aroused out of His holy habitation."

In the second Hanukkah sermon, we witness the ways in which the holiday was being swallowed up by all sorts of extraneous factors, while Rabbi Glazer was gently pointing out that there was yet an intrinsically Jewish part of Hanukkah in danger of being lost:

"The Hanukah-light which is set up above twenty ells is disqualified." (Tractate Sabbath, 22a). The Hanukah-minded people try to find a symbol in everything connected with the festival. The joy of the celebration, both physical and spiritual,

particularly on the American continent, is oftentimes misplaced and dislocated. The true lesson of the festival is to be found in its mystic fascination, in its almost perplexing many-sidedness. The boy and girl have presents; the baby of the home, the charm of the lights; the mother, her special delicacies; the father, his favorite game; the young man and the young woman, the ball; the preacher, the special theme; the Rabbi, extra sermon; the Hazan, the extra concert; the actor, the new play. Everybody is so busy about Hanukah, that Hanukah itself remains lonely, somewhere on a high pedestal, which no one can see. The lights are holy; they must not be used for week-day purposes; they must not be utilized for work, for ordinary light, heat, or power; they must be left burning, glittering, to be looked at and admired, to be seen as a work of the ages, more ancient than the works of the greatest masters in the world's leading museums. Seeing the lights, looking at them, one must also look for an answer to the question, What is Hanukah? And every one finds it. But not in the game he plays, not in the ball he attends, not in the special delicacies his wife gives him at the supper-table, even not in the Ze'dakah he gives. For the Hanukah lights have a meaning all removed from the senses, from the things pleasurable, earthly. The Hanukah light is the last defense of Israel; in gross darkness its small flame shows a path; in time of danger, an avenue of escape; in time of despair a ray of hope. One must see, must observe and take note of the light itself. Verily, "the Hanukah light which is set up above twenty ells is disqualified." No one can see it in passing. Its significance is lost. Its light must attract; its flame is holy.⁶⁴

Finally, like Rabbi Cohen, his rival, Glazer was an Orthodox rabbi who was, for all his faith in the Bible and its revelation, not a fundamentalist:

There are some denominations who take every word in the Bible literally; they are called Fundamentalists; and their errors are a mess of stupidity, because they do not understand the spirit of the Torah, and because they study it in languages other than Hebrew, so that they cannot see it in its true light. The Talmud has given us a clear conception of the Torah. The beginning of recorded history has nothing to do with the creation of the world. The formation of the universe, perhaps, took millions of years. God created the sun and the moon and the stars; each planetary system, according to the Talmud, received its own atmosphere, peculiar to its own region. For example, the atmosphere on our earth is altogether different than the atmosphere on the moon, or on Mars, or on Saturn, or on any other planet. There are countless solar systems; no human mind has

ever been able to calculate their number. Since creation scientists have come and gone, many things have happened, and no one has yet discovered that this statement of the Talmudists is erroneous. No one has as yet been able to master the secret of time and space, save only to learn that both are infinite. And, because of that, it is immaterial whether it has taken millions of years before the earth was created in its present form, whether it is the result of evolution, or whether it is the result of the great long process of creation. The Torah tells us the simple story that God created everything. It was the masterful hand of God which has made possible all of this to be. That belief is fundamental with us, not the length of time it took to form this massive universe in its present state. Now, as to the question of the flood: the fundamentalists maintain that the flood covered the globe; consequently, they ought to arrive at the conclusion that the earth is flat, and, if that should be considered a Biblical doctrine it is a contradiction to a scientific fact. On such premise science and the Bible can never be united; and there will always have to be people to believe that the earth is flat in order to respect the Bible. Nothing is further from the truth than such doctrine in Judaism. In the Talmud it is stated that the flood did not cover Palestine, but that it did cover Mesopotamia, because Palestine is higher, and the flood could not reach it. Abraham "ascended" to Palestine, and Jacob "descended" from Palestine into Egypt. Thus it is obvious that fundamentalism is not a necessary doctrine in order to believe in and revere the Torah, or that Judaism fears the light of science.⁶⁵

Rabbi Glazer stayed and struggled in Montreal for about a decade. He came to Montreal at the age of twenty-nine. Similarly, when Rabbi Ashinsky came to Montreal he had been barely thirty. In 1918, worn down by over a decade of relentless opposition and strife, he left Montreal for greener pastures. He first went to Seattle, about as far in North America as he could go, staying there for a couple of years. Then he went to Kansas City, where he reconstituted the idea of being a chief rabbi of a consortium of immigrant Orthodox congregations. Only in Kansas City he did not have the same sort of Jewish opposition to his projects as he had in Montreal. In Kansas City, however, he remained a fighter. One of the things he fought was the Ku Klux Klan, which was very powerful in the United States as a whole (and not merely in the southern states) in the twenties. He challenged the Imperial Grand Dragon of the KKK to a public debate, though that person refused to appear on the same platform with Rabbi Glazer.⁶⁶ In 1922, Rabbi Glazer played an important part in

the Jewish lobbying effort to get the United States government to endorse the Balfour Declaration and support the nascent Jewish national home in Palestine. Ultimately, Rabbi Glazer moved from Kansas City to New York, first to a congregation in Harlem, then to one further downtown in Manhattan, and finally to one in Brooklyn. He died in 1938.

When Rabbi Glazer left Montreal, his United Congregations sought to engage another chief rabbi who was equally strong and militant to inherit his responsibilities and troubles. Rabbi Glazer's successor, however, was a very different sort of man. Whereas Rabbi Glazer was a Lithuanian Jew, a *mitnaged*, his successor was a Polish *Hasid*. Whereas Rabbi Glazer wrote fluently in English, his successor was never comfortable in English, and the few letters written in his name in English are a far cry from Rabbi Glazer's elevated prose. His name was Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg, and we will speak of him and his tribulations in the next chapter.

