



Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No 5

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**First posted in Isaiah Berlin Online
and the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library
24 June 2023**

Last revised 12 July 2023

Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No 5

Conversation date: 27 November 1987

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Selected topics

Herbert Hart and the Katzenellenbogens

Marie and Mendel Berlin and pressure on IB to study

IB not a scholar

Professor Kupfer in Riga, 1920

Cramming for exams

IB's poor command of Hebrew and German

Unimportance to IB of his Hasidic background

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The Lubavitcher Rebbes

Gentile and Jewish friends at St Paul's

The Goldbergs

Halpern, Ettinghausen [Eytan]

Rabbi Shem Tob Gaguine

Emil Marmorstein and sex

Duschinsky [Duchin]

The Gasters

Marmorstein and Kedourie

[...]

GC I forgot to tell you that Herbert Hart is from the Katzenellenbogen family.

IB That I never knew.

GC He has an uncle.

IB But are there any Katzenellenbogens in Germany?

GC There were.

IB Yes. But in the nineteenth century were there?

GC Yes. It's a family that goes back ...

IB In Russia there were plenty.

GC To Padova.

IB In Russia there are plenty, and in Germany. I'm not sure about the nineteenth century, we'll check. You can.

GC Doesn't matter, anyway.

GC Herbert's uncle established all ...

IB It does not matter, anyway. His name was Tzadik, wasn't it? His grandfather's name – his great-grandfather's name was Tzadik.

GC Of who, of Herbert?

IB Herbert.

GC Yes.

IB The name is Tzadik, not Katzenellenbogen.

GC Yes, I know.

IB They are related, and it comes from Magdeburg.

GC No. The Katzenellenbogen is the yichus [aristocracy] there, because Katzenellenbogen was a famous Rabbi in Padova in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

IB Yes.

GC And it went back there, and that's why his uncle, who is an orthodox Jew from Sheffield ...

IB Oh. I know.

GC You know?

IB Yes.

GC He's a nuisance. But he could publish the book and so on and so forth.

IB I know all about that.

GC And I could at least prove that he was right. I checked the history of Padua. All right.

IB All these people are always trying to be pedantically correct.

GC All right.

IB Katzenellenbogen, yes. The only one I knew was very remote from Padova. Spoke only Yiddish.

GC The question is whether the Katzenellenbogens that we know in Israel, are from Russia or from Germany.

IB St Petersburg.

GC Probably from Russia.

IB Not from Germany.

GC And I suspect ...

IB Look, there are no Katzenellenbogens from Germany.

GC No. I know a family that came from Russia, and I'll check, and as I told you, there was – the most distinguished dermatologist in Hadassah in the 1930s and the 1940s was a Katzenellenbogen. I'll see what his name was. He is probably one of those who came from Russia and studied in Germany, like all the best physicians.

IB I'm trying to remember his first name.

GC I'll find it.

IB I knew it once. Yes.

GC However, some odd questions that remain from the – I think that when I first asked you about your mother, you tried to minimise her role.

IB As what? As anti-goy?

GC No. It can't be that she didn't press you in studies, or ...

IB Oh, she certainly didn't.

GC She didn't?

IB No.

You repeat it. Because when I saw her ...

IB She didn't. If anyone objected, it was my father, who was not a strong character, who used to be very disappointed that I didn't do well. My mother had no idea, and did not take an interest.

GC It's not like ...

IB I assure you, she did not. Of course I was the apple of her eye, she thought I was wonderful.

GC And yet she was ...

IB She never pushed me.

GC I wouldn't believe it. How interesting.

IB In any degree.

GC Because when met her I saw ...

IB She was like a Jewish mother.

GC You can see why I thought so.

IB She is like a Jewish mother in New York.

GC Yes.

IB She's, absolutely – no, never. My father used to lecture me on the need to work. When I came over, when he would read the report. My mother wouldn't read the report. My father would read the report and say, 'This is very bad. Why couldn't you work a bit harder?' and so on. But I was never lectured by my mother.

GC Now, when you say that they criticised you, on the other hand, you got the second prize in English the second year you were in England.

IB First year.

GC I mean the first year. Which means ...

IB They were quite pleased.

GC sometimes you count as the best.

IB Yes, sometimes. But in general, what I mean is, I was never bad.

GC No, that's for sure.

IB I never came bottom, but I used to come seventh, sixth, fifth; I wasn't particularly near the top, because I didn't work, of course. By nature I'm idle.

GC That I can see.

IB Sometimes I did, even – the things I used to work at. Mind you, St Paul's was a cramming school. It gave too much work. It still is. So I did more work than I wanted to. I cheated and I regularly used cribs, translations. I never learned Latin or Greek properly, because I cheated quite heavily. I used to go to Charing Cross Road, where all these second-hand bookshops were, which is what everyone else

did, and used to buy literal translations of the Classics, which I used. That's why I never became a Latin scholar or a Greek scholar, because I couldn't bear the drudgery. I had no talent for languages.

GC From the very beginning, apparently, you were not taken, neither by Latin and Greek, or earlier by Talmud. I mean, this kind of ...

IB Scholarship, never a scholar.

GC Of this kind.

IB I was never a scholar. No, I never did any more of it. I was never a scholar. Of any kind.

GC That's a matter of definition, of course. We'll see, we'll come to it.

IB No. I never was a scholar in the sense of being erudite. I was never a scholar in the sense of the minutiae.

GC Yes. That I can see.

IB You see, I used to make general propositions. There were always some exceptions. I used to make sweeping things. Ideas I was always interested in. But I was not a scholar in the proper sense, ever. I am not now, and I never have been.

GC All right, that we'll discuss at length. But what's interesting here is ...

IB When I was asked whether I wanted to be President of the British Academy, I said I was unsuitable, because it was an Academy devoted to scholarship, and nobody would say that I was a scholar. I said that in 1973.

GC Yes, but we'll come back to that.

IB I meant it!

GC I know, I mean you repeat it. It's not the first time you told me. But what's more interesting in this context is that you had a strong character, because it's very good when you are older and you form your opinions of life and yourself, and you decide 'I'm not going to waste my time on Greek grammar.'

IB No, no such decision.

GC But when you were a child.

IB there was no such decision.

GC Not decision, but reaction. I mean your natural reaction from the very time you were a child

IB Because I wasn't good at it, that's all, the only reason.

GC But you were able, Isaiah.

IB There was no decision.

GC But you were able, you could force yourself.

IB Yes, but superficially, in certain ways.

GC All right, but in school, you could.

IB The man who taught me Latin in Riga in 1919 [1920] for the few months when we were there was a man called Professor Kupfer. I was compared with Leonard Schapiro whom he liked, and said I was too superficial.

GC Yes, but ...

IB I would never have been a good pupil to a real German scholar. Never. In a German school, I would have done very badly. I'll tell you what I did; no, let me tell the truth.

GC [*laughter*]

IB I did not want to come too low in the examinations, because I was ashamed. I had no ambition, I didn't want to compete, I know thought I was better than so and so. I've never in my life, I am totally uncompetitive. Too uncompetitive in some ways. Because I don't have that motive to thrust me forward. But since I was ashamed of failing, which I permanently am, and I get worried about the possibility of failure, which is always there, I assumed I shall fail. I have never yet said to myself, 'No, I can do that easily, that I can do. I can do that very well.' Never. And that's not modesty, but lack of confidence. Something quite different, not such an estimable quality. Before examinations I used to cram, I used to work very hard. The last fortnight, or the last three weeks in Oxford Schools I worked tremendously actively. What I remembered then, I put into the papers. My memory was never very good in a scholarly sense, never. I only knew what I crammed up, what I learned up in those last weeks. That I used to pour out and then forget immediately. That was my method. It worked. Well, I wasn't too stupid to do that. But let me tell you that of steady scholarship, doing so much work a day, I was never systematic, and I could never do any work until the last moment. That in general is true. If am ordered to write an article or a review, or whatever it is, it's always in leaps and bounds. First, nothing at all, a lot of preparation, reading books, but rather casually and then agonized rush, complete 12 hours a day sort of stuff. I would dictate this in a kind of hysterical way, the last bit, 4 or 5 hours, which did the whole job in one. But I couldn't do this quiet, steady accumulation of a balanced and rational kind. That is my temperament.

GC Yes, I can see what you mean, and it matters a lot in Oxford to this day, and we'll come back to it once ... But in your childhood, your mother would have pressed you more, or your father would have pressed you more.

IB They never pressed me really.

GC But he did.

IB Whenever my report arrived.

GC Very interesting.

IB Which was not too good. I'd be told I really must try and do better. Full stop. And I wasn't told, 'Go and do your work. Don't waste your time. Go upstairs; look, you don't have any time, you won't do well, I really think you ought to go and do some work.' None of that. Ever.

GC And yet Hebrew you remember better than one could expect, because you studied it orally.

IB Anything that's got to do with childhood, one tends to remember.

GC And yet there were probably two or three decades that you didn't speak Hebrew.

IB No, I never spoke Hebrew.

GC When you came back to Israel you would speak from time to time a little bit Hebrew.

IB A little bit, yes.

GC And it always comes to you, the second day you are in Israel, you can speak Hebrew.

IB Not really.

GC Yes, all right, but you didn't, you never accomplished – how much Hebrew did you study? I mean, something.

IB Something comes back, but not – it's exactly the same thing with German, which I knew until the age of three. When I go to Germany, I can more or less speak. I can, ungrammatically, wrongly, but I can – enough words. But I don't speak it, I don't. In no serious sense. And I don't understand it, when it's spoken to me, I just don't. When I go to a party, and people speak Hebrew – no good.

GC Now the fact that you were a descendant of the Schneerson.

IB Yes.

GC Was it mentioned to you by your teachers, Jewish teachers?

IB Never.

GC 'You are a ..., you ought to be ..., how come you don't study ...?'

IB Never, no.

GC Is it because it is the Hasidim? They don't mind?

IB They didn't know. I didn't tell them, and I'd have paid no attention to it. It did not play a part in my life. I never felt I was a neo-Hasid.

GC Like me. I am also a descendant of a very important Sephardic Rabbi; I was not aware of it until years later.

IB I was aware of it, but it meant nothing. I didn't live in that world.

GC And it didn't mean anything to your parents either?

IB Probably more.

GC No, but from the point of view of you, Isaiah.

IB No.

GC That's very interesting.

IB 'You come from a distinguished family.' No.

GC 'You have to ...?'

IB Never. And they didn't feel it about themselves. They knew they were, there was no excessive pride, none.

GC How interesting. It's the same in my family. Now, but the Lubavitchers are very missionary, very efficient, they know every descendant of the Rabbi, and you became a distinguished man. Didn't they try to approach you?

IB Yes, of course, in London they did.

GC When?

IB Ten years ago. Not before.

GC Not before.

IB I don't know how long [ago] they found out that thing in London.

GC Their Intelligence Service is better than Mossad.

IB I occur in the book. *Beit Rabi* [*The House of the Rebbe*, by Hayim Meir Heilman (Berdychiv, 1902)] is the genealogy from Shneur Zalman onwards. In that I occur, so they wouldn't need to make deep research.

GC Exactly.

IB I am called Zuckerman Berlin. Correctly. I occur in the tree, and of course Shazar knew all about it and so on, and from London they – from time to time I used to get letters from them in London, asking me to deliver a lecture, to come and see them.

GC Unlike them not to try to bring you back to the camp, like they do with so many scientists.

IB No, this is hopeless.

GC It's unlike them not to send you matza shmura [watched matzo] before Pesach [Passover].

IB Hopeless. Somebody did once send me matza shmura.

GC [*laughter*]

IB It wasn't from London, though.

GC Israel. Maybe if you were in Israel.

IB It was in Israel.

GC There there is somebody.

IB There was somebody who pursued me. The was a Hasid, who was a relation, who was himself descended, whose name was, I think Ladi, because that is, I think the alternative [sur]name of Shneur Zalman.

GC Ladi. Ladi..., Ladyj.

IB There are two families. Ladyj [Liadi/Lyady] was the place they came from.

IB Of course. Shneur Zalman was from Ladyj.

IB Mi-Ladyj. Ha-Rav mi-Ladyj [The Rabbi from Lyady].

GC I never heard Ladyj here.

IB It's a Jerusalem family.

GC How interesting.

IB There are people in Jerusalem with that name. That's an alternative branch. Some are called Schneerson, and some are called Ladi.

GC And some are Twersky.

IB And they are all legitimately descended.

GC Yes.

IB You see? Ladier was an alternative name. And there was a man there who used to try and see me and so on, but he was a terrible bore, frightful nuisance and he used to come to the King David Hotel. Finally I got rid of him and sent Aline to talk to him. Finally got rid of him.

GC I see. It's rather incredible.

IB They never asked me for money.

GC It's interesting because with the Rabbi – they don't ask for money. Their money they get from other people. No, using your name.

IB It was useless.

GC It's interesting that the Rabbi didn't want to meet you.

IB Didn't express any wish.

GC Because he is a ...

IB Expressed no wish to me ever. He knows that I exist, obviously.

GC Obviously.

IB Because they do.

GC They know everyone.

IB He's been told it's no use, probably.

GC But that's very interesting.

IB Somebody must have said – and he was too proud, I'm sure, to do anything for – he didn't want to be snubbed. And he would have been.

GC He knows, yes.

IB I would not have gone to see him.

GC Yes, when there is a – he never takes risks.

IB For example, the Ambassador of Israel in London was colossally impressed by him. Went to see him and said he was a wonderful man. Repeated word for word his conversation with him to me.

GC The incumbent one.

IB The incumbent one.

GC Well, he's religious, he's in Manchester, and he's ...

IB No, exactly. Anyway, he's not a Hasid.

GC No, he's not.

IB At the same time as he went to see him he was terribly – he thought he was a genius, he said marvellous things to him, and the metaphors he used, he was overcome.

GC You know that in 1966 when I was in New York, I thought of going to see him, I had friends, members of Knesset, who ...

IB Out of curiosity?

GC I got a letter from Batya [GC's wife]: 'I shall never speak with you if you go to see him.'

IB Really, because of what they are doing?

GC Because of his missionary attitude. She hated his missionary – and she ...

IB You know what he said to Shazar? Shazar said, 'Why don't you come to Israel?' He invited him, when he was in new York, remember?

GC I remember.

IB Well, he didn't go and see him, because he was told not to. He didn't see him.

GC But then he went to see him. Shazar, yes, he created a scandal.

IB [*laughter*] That's what I thought. I was told that didn't happen. I was told he was telephoned ...

GC Golda told him not to.

IB Ben-Gurion.

GC And he couldn't resist it. It was Golda.

IB And he did go. Golda it was. He did go. I was told he only made a telephone [call] to him. I'm sure he went.

GC He couldn't resist it.

IB There was a scandal: I see.

GC And it created a rift.

IB Of course. 'The President should go and see ...'. It created a whole scene. 'Passt nicht [It's not appropriate].' Wrong. Anyway, what happened then was that he invited him to Israel, to which the Rabbi said, with a certain degree of prudence, 'Don't press me to come. I'll only do harm. From your point of view, it's very undesirable that I should come. You can imagine the kind of things people are saying. I'm far less dangerous to you here.'

GC 'When I'm here.'

IB True in a certain sense.

GC He's very shrewd.

IB Must be.

GC Very charismatic.

IB Must be.

GC Very educated. He has his two DPhils, you know.

IB Where, in the Sorbonne? Some degree in chemistry.

GC Engineering, in Paris. He studied in Paris, that's why I – but he's not the son of the previous Rabbi, but a nephew.

IB But a son-in-law.

GC But there is a problem of the ...

IB But he's a son-in-law, no? Married his daughter.

GC No, I think.

IB He may have married his daughter.

GC Either this, or a nephew. And now there is a problem of ...

IB He's related certainly to Schneerson. But ...

GC I think he's a nephew, I think so.

IB No, no, he's not the son.

GC He hasn't got a son, and the problem of the yerusha [inheritance] ...

IB Succession.

GC ... of the heir is like in the middle ages.

IB Gur-Arieh [Shemaryahu Gurary], there was. That was the Rebbe's brother-in-law, who was called Gur-Arieh.

GC He wanted somebody to succeed him, who married his niece, and he's a scientist in Weizmann, in Machon [Institute] Weizmann, and it's ...

IB Called what?

GC I can't remember.

IB Not Schneerson?

GC Not Schneerson. He married, he married a Schneer...

IB But he's not himself one at all.

GC No. But the Rabbi prefers him, but the young boy doesn't want to carry the burden.

IB But he's pious?

GC He is pious, but he is not going to accept it, and it is to the disappointment of the Rabbi, and the problem is still looming there on the court. All right.

IB Can't say that I'm deeply worried.

GC Last questions about relations with goyim when you were a child, either in England, or earlier.

IB At St Paul's I can tell you.

GC Did you have, when you were more grown-up, goyim girlfriends?

IB Where, at school?

GC In school, or in Oxford, later in life.

IB In Oxford, certainly. In school, none. To my knowledge. At least I can't remember. I don't think so. No, I had no girlfriends at all, either Jewish or otherwise.

GC Not – before Aline you didn't have any girlfriends?

IB Oh, yes.

GC [*laughter*]

IB That's a long way. But I thought you were talking about St Paul's.

GC Yes.

IB My friends at St Paul's were goyim, not Jews.

GC But boys.

IB Boys, yes. I remember now exactly who they were. My greatest friend was somebody called [Jack] Stephenson.¹ Now dead. And my family knew him and liked him very much and so on. He was one of hasidei ha-umot [righteous among the nations/righteous gentile] etc. And I had another friend at St Paul's, a goy, and they were all goyim. The only Jewish friends I had – well, I knew three of them, four.

GC Schalit was there.

IB No Schalit at St Paul's.

GC I thought.

IB There were no Schalits at St Paul's in my day.

GC Aha.

IB No. There was Sasha Goldberg, but he was not a friend. He was older. I knew him. But he wasn't – he was about three years older than me. Very nice man.

¹ John Vere Stephenson (1909–73), contemporary of IB at St Paul's School 1922–8, Jesus (Cambridge) classics 1928–32, civil servant, MOI.

GC Yes he was.

IB An exceptionally nice man, Alexander Goldberg.

GC Yes, I liked him.

IB And he was the son of these – eminent father, and so on.

GC Whose son?

IB There were two Goldbergs; they were brothers.

GC Ah, he was the son of the ...

IB The one who bought the site where the University stands.

GC Ah, really?

IB Mount Scopus.

GC I didn't know.

IB There were two Russian Zionists from ...

GC Yes, one was I. [Isaac/Yitzhak] L[eib] [1860–1935].

IB One was Yitzhak.

GC Yes.

IB And the other was somebody else [Boris], they were brothers. The brothers in Russia. Devoted Zionists.

GC And devoted, yes.

IB In 1905, 1906, those years, his ...

GC Yes, I know.

IB His son Goldberg, his brother, I can't remember which it was. But they were very educated, and they spoke Hebrew beautifully by – long before the war, the First World War. They were one of these early Zionist zealots, perfectly civilised people, two rich brothers, and one of them certainly bought the site, before 1914 [in 1908], the one on which the University stands.

GC Yes.

IB Then they immigrated to Palestine [*unclear*].

GC Yes. Planted a huge orchard.

IB That kind of thing

GC Yes, I mean the whole of Ramat Gan is filled with orchards.

IB Among the best Zionists there were.

GC Pardes Goldberg [Orchard Goldberg].

IB One of the best Zionists there were. There was nothing wrong with them at all. They were perfectly decent people.

GC Yes.

IB In addition to everything.

GC Yes. Like the good old Russian families.

IB Yes, exactly. Goldberg, yes.

GC And he was educated in England?

IB Sasha's mother was a rather a grand lady to meet. She could have been a titled figure. Very Russian. Not very Jewish. I knew him because he asked me to lunch, I went to St Paul's, he knew who I was, and so on. I knew him, but my friends were mostly gentiles. I had two, three Jewish friends. One half-friend. One was Halperin, I told you.

GC Yes.

IB Son of Yorek [George?].

GC Yes.

IB Who was only half-Jewish, in fact, because of Yorek's wife [Emily Lampert]. You heard the story, Shiela [?] told me, I think [it] is so marvellous. When he married his English wife, a German[?] lady, [from] the Zionist Society in Bobruisk, somewhere, sent a telegram to the central office in St Petersburg saying 'We hear that Galperin has married a goya, what is to be done?'

GC [*laughter*]

IB Anyway, he was one, and of course Ettinghausen [Walter Eytan] was the other.

GC And he went to St Paul's?

IB At exactly the same time as I, I am an exact contemporary. Him I naturally knew. We were always in the same form and so on. In those days he was very German, violently anti-Zionist.

GC In the St Paul's days.

IB His father was.

GC Yes.

IB His father was a — never mind. His father was *Times* correspondent in Munich before the First World War. Grandfather came from Frankfurt. It's as good a family as the Rothschilds.

GC From an Orthodox family, or from a Liberal ...

IB Not very.

GC Ah, not the typical Frankfurt, I see.

IB No, not at all. His father was already born in England, and he went to Oxford, the father. And he was – because of the family roots in Frankfurt, I suppose he went to Germany; he'd been sent. He was interned in Ruhleben during the First World War, as a British subject. Conceived a violent hatred to everything German. His wife was the daughter of a Rabbi in Heilbronn, of a very very German sort, and he divorced her because she was German. [*laughter*] I'm telling you. And married a goya, who was converted to Judaism. He became a Sephardi.

GC Ettinghausen?

IB Yes, the father. In order to get away from the Germans. [*unclear and coughing*]

GC How interesting.

IB Oh yes, he did, he went to the Lauderdale Road Sephardi [synagogue].

GC Yes, [Shem Tob] Gaguine [Rabbi at Lauderdale Road, Maida Vale].

IB Gaguine, and he married him to his goyish wife and he used to listen to gramophone records. He was a bookseller.

GC Yes.

IB They were rare, of rare books. Merck's [Maggs?] Brothers [*name unclear*], which was a great firm. His greatest friend was King Manuel of Portugal, who lived in England and bought books. And then he came to Oxford, during the war.

GC In Turl Street?

IB Not in [the] Turl, no. Broad Street.

GC It was in Broad Street.

IB Yes. He was a partner of – the sellers of the centre of – [Albi] Rosenthal was the other man.

GC Ah, he, yes. But I think that then they moved to Turl St for a while.

IB Maybe.

GC Near the barber.

IB Maybe. But anyway, the father lived in Oxford, then. But the father went to Queen's College Oxford, so did the son. Then, at that period he was pious, not super-pious, but – not terrifically, but he was still pious enough, because his mother was a Rabbi's daughter, and the father didn't live with them. He did to begin with, but by 1924 he must have left [*unclear phrase*]. He was one friend. He had an uncle who – it was his father's uncle, a jeweller in Paris, whom I still knew, who went to the first performance of Carmen. He gave me a description of it.

GC Fantastic.

IB He would supply jewellery to Princess Muras, in Paris. Typical German Jewish family in Paris, in Germany, of the cultivated kind. Bourgeoisie. Exactly the kind of family from which Offenbach or Halévy or all these French Jews sprang. Alsace, they lived, except they came before that.

GC Yes.

IB Now, that's one friend. And then the other was of course Marmorstein.

GC Emil Marmorstein?

IB Emil Marmorstein.

GC He was with you in St Paul's?

IB My exact contemporary.

GC How interesting. I never knew.

IB Certainly, he was.

GC He ought to be a very interesting character, he ...

IB If he is still alive [d. 1983], I don't know if he is, I suppose he is.

GC I don't know.

IB He's exactly my age.

GC I haven't read, I used to read some ...

IB He must be about seventy-eight. Now he's super-pious. Of course his father was.

GC He was Agudat Yisrael [Haredi Jewish political party].

IB More than that.

GC Even more?

IB Fanatical. His father was a very distinguished Hebrew scholar in Jews' College [London School of Jewish Studies]. In those days Jews' College was a seat of learning, which it no longer is. The head of it was a man called Buechler, who came from Budapest. Marmorstein also came from Budapest.

GC Yes.

IB And that was very solid learning, around 1900.

GC Yes.

IB There was a man called Duschinsky, whose son I also knew.

GC The Rabbi Duschinsky?

IB He was not the Rabbi.

GC Ah, but the ...

IB The family is – it's a Hungarian family.

GC Here, in London.

IB The father was a property developer or something.

GC Ah, no, but there was a Duschinsky.

IB It's a Hungarian Jewish family.

GC Ah, yes. There was also a Rabbi, yes.

IB And there was my contemporary, who is now called Duchin,² who later became a solicitor. These were the pious Jews of St Paul's. Then there were less pious Jews, whom I also knew, German Jews, of a kind of Bnei Brith [Sons of the Covenant: the most prominent worldwide philanthropic Jewish association] type. And there was a man called Benzinger, a fellow called Schwab, all kinds of friends, they were all German. There were no Russian Jews [Leonard Schapiro?]. There was Max Beloff after me.

GC Yes.

IB But that was four years later. Now, Marmorstein was in those days extremely promiscuous. Used to go to bed with the girls. He talked nothing but six. He was obsessed by six. He was amusing, he used to read the Hungarian writers of the nineteenth century. Jókai. Gallant stories about Hungarian officers, around 1840, 1850. Was extremely amusing. Immoral to a degree, in a schoolboy sense. Always dirty stories, somewhat homosexual, but not very. But mainly girls. Then he was a huge – great big huge man. Enormous.

² Edgar Duschinsky (1909–91), later Duchin; St Paul's School and BNC; became solicitor and amateur artist: bit.ly/e-duchin.

More or less a figure of anti-Zionism [?]. It didn't mean anything then.

GC Later, in those days [?].

IB During. Oh, you needn't tell me, but that I'll tell you; but he was always eccentric. Always. That's the point. Something irregular, there was. He was not at all like his father, but his great friend was Gaster, one of Gaster's sons, who was also a bogus Hebrew scholar, Theodore Gaster. Theodore Gaster was a faux scholar, in America afterwards. Was an extremely brilliant and very superficial – and then – and rather a crook, like his father. The Hakham [wise man] was also a ...

GC I know. Like many Hakhami.

IB not a very solid scholar, but we was a very interesting personality, of course, the old Haham Gaster, Moses. And his part in the history of Zionism was quite interesting. [*laughter*]

GC Oh yes.

IB But anyway he and Marmorstein then went to teach in an Agudah school – no, in an Alliance Israélite School.

GC Alliance Israélite in Baghdad.

IB In Baghdad. That's where it all began.

GC Yes.

IB That's when he became addicted to the real Jews of that – the real sort of thing, although he was not a Sephardi himself, and that's when he gradually developed a tremendous hatred of Zionism, and even a kind of anti-Semitism. And that's when the BBC – he was the Arabic expert, all those things.

GC Yes. He by the way wrote the ...

IB I never saw him again.

GC Ah, you never saw him ...

IB Not since ... He has a brother called Bruno who is a respectful Jew in Jews' College, who is a sort of Jewish bourgeois, and gives money to Jewish causes. I think he's a solicitor, or something like that. He's an ordinary respectable Hampstead Jewish bourgeois.

GC I'll tell you. I think that I'm not exaggerating in what I'm saying, that for years, or maybe to this day, he was the mentor of Elie Kedourie.

IB Really.

GC Now, I don't know whether ...

IB Wait a moment.

GC It can have been – he might have been his teacher in Baghdad, or it's his anti-nationalism, anti-Zionism, if you read Marmorstein's Kedourie.

IB I never thought of that. Of course.

GC Marmorstein's articles, you can see the context [?] of ...

IB Of course.

GC ... Kedourie. He admires him.

IB Of course.

GC To this day.

IB Of course. To this day. For what? For ...

GC For his learning. I mean, his impact on Elie's thought comes from Marmorstein.

IB He was never learned.

GC But ...

IB In our sense of the word, he was brought up in a learned atmosphere.

GC Yes.

IB He was brought up in a kind of learned, professorial atmosphere. That is correct.

GC And it could pave the way for a young man like Elie Kedourie to establish his anti-nationalism.

IB He knew what was what, in Jewish circles.

GC I learned from Marmorstein one thing, I must say. The first [?].

IB Where did you know him?

GC Well, I met him once in Burt's house. But I read his articles. He was writing in *International Affairs*, book reviews, and sometimes articles. In the 1950s. Late 1940s and 1950s.

IB What about? Middle East?

GC About the Middle East.

IB Were they good?

GC Quite interesting. But the article that I shall always remember is – his was the first article that really explained to me what the Haredim in Jerusalem were. He gave a whole historical survey.

IB He would know about that.

GC That was very clear and for the first time.

IB These are the real Jews.

GC But about all the splinters, and it was very interesting. And it is very interesting that the *International Affairs* published it, by the way. But I think that to this day it is the clearest description of the genesis of the Haredim.

IB There is *no* element of that when he was a schoolboy. He was not much good at school. I don't know what kind of – where did he go to after Oxford, I mean after ...?

GC Baghdad?

IB No. After school.

GC I don't know.

IB Did he go to University at all?

GC I don't know. Well, he went to Baghdad in the 1930s.

IB He would have been finished in 1928.

GC St Paul's? So you want to – I don't know, but one can see.

IB I'd love to know.

GC Yes.

IB Did he go to London University?

GC I don't know.

IB Or where did he go?

GC I don't know.

IB Because I lost sight of him then.

GC I see. If he went to be a teacher in Alliance, he ought to have a certain degree, either from a teachers' college, or ...

IB Something.

GC Or maybe Jewish studies.

IB More likely.

GC But why should his parents send him to St Paul's and not to a yeshiva, or ...

IB Oh, because that was common. So was Duschinsky. These pious Hungarian Jews knew what was what. They wanted a proper education. There was no question of sending him to a yeshiva, or to an even purely Jewish school. That didn't happen. People of a certain degree of education did not in the 1920s dream of sending their children to Jewish schools. That may have been done by people in the East End of London, but never by these middle-class Jews, whatever they were. I don't think his father was super-pious. Naturally, he was a teacher in Jews' College, he kept to the Jewish laws, but he was not a fanatic, his father.

GC He became a sort of Arab scholar. He knew Arabic well.

IB Well, did he know it before he went to ...

GC That I don't know.

IB ... Baghdad?

GC I don't know, but I can check and tell you.

IB His life was very interesting. I don't know. Then he was with the BBC of course.

GC Yes, in the BBC, in the overseas.

IB That I remember.

GC In the overseas [department]. And then I met him en passant: I don't know him, but I ...

IB Oh, and he grew a beard, didn't he?

GC And he was very fat.

IB Oh, yes.

GC And untidy.

IB Always.

GC And to this day Elie would remind in many ...

IB I believe you. This minute.

GC Yes, I know. [*laughter*]

IB Bright, good.

GC That's fine. So ...

IB Bein kakh u-vein kakh [Either way].

GC Bein kakh u-vein kakh.

IB That's quite amusing.

GC Yes. No, it was all right, yes.

IB Dr Duschinsky and Emil – Duschinsky and Marmorstein were the two pious Jews at St Paul's. They were contemporaries. One became a Comm... – a left-wing solicitor. And the other remained what – became what you would – but he was always regarded as an extreme eccentric. And his friends at St Paul's were not Jews.

GC But I started by asking you ...

IB He used to tell me scandalous stories about the sexual goings-on of Dr Gaster's – of Moses's daughters.

GC [*laughter*].

IB That was his speciality.

GC It is rather common in those circles.

IB Yes, exactly.

GC Suppressing ...

IB Exactly. But I mean the sort of sexual proclivities of pious Jews.