

The American Rabbinic Career
of Rabbi Gavriel Zev Margolis

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Introduction

Rabbi Gavriel Zev Margolis (1847-1935) is one of the more neglected figures in the study of American Orthodoxy in the early 1900's. Although his name appears occasionally in studies of the period, he is generally mentioned only briefly, and assigned a minor role in events of the time. A proper understanding of this period, however, requires an extensive study of his American career, because his opposition to Orthodox participation in the New York Kehillah played a major role in that organization's failure to unite New York Jewry under its leadership, and his career-long struggle with the Agudat Harabbonim hampered that organization's efforts to dominate Orthodox Jewish life.

Beyond the importance of Rabbi Margolis' career for understanding the events of the time, he also represents an extreme example of a familiar character type. A number of Eastern European rabbis who came to America at the turn of the century attempted to transplant European-style Judaism and Jewish communal organization to this country, with varying degrees of success. Rabbi Margolis had more reason to make such an attempt than most of his colleagues. Before coming to America, he had been a rabbinic leader in Russia for over thirty years, twenty-seven of them in the important city of Grodno. While at first he exercised strong control over the religious affairs of that community, by the 1890's his power had greatly diminished due to the influence of the maskilim, the Jewish Russian revolutionaries and other forces of change. By the time he left Grodno in 1907,

he felt he could no longer influence its youth, and that he would be able to accomplish more in Boston than in Grodno. His intention in coming to America was to re-create there the kind of community control which he had earlier exercised in Russia. In pursuing this goal, he was determined to resist the forces of change and acculturation then dominant in America. Still, he did make concessions to American conditions, compromising his stance on a number of issues especially in working with his rabbinic organization, the Knesset Harabbonim. His career, in this sense, attests to the overwhelming effect of American conditions on even the most conservative of rabbis, thus shedding further light on the American Jewish experience.

Chapter One

Rabbi Margolis' Background in Russia, 1847 - 1907

Rabbi Gavriel Zev Margolis was born in Vilna on 27 Cheshvan 1847.¹ His father, R. Yechiel Yitzchak, was the descendant of a distinguished family of rabbis which traced its ancestry back to the eighteenth century rabbi of Minsk, R. Yechiel Halperin, author of the historical work, Seder Ha-Dorot. Showing early signs of genius, Gavriel began to study at age nine, under R. Yehoshua of Kovno, the uncle of the Chofetz Chaim. At age thirteen, he entered the Yeshiva of R. Yakov Barit, known as R. Yankele Kovner, in Vilna. That yeshiva was an elite institution which accepted only students who showed great signs of promise for a future in the rabbinate. Usually, students were at least seventeen years old when they entered the yeshiva. Yet, the young Gavriel soon distinguished himself with his intellectual ability and diligence, as attested to in the semicha certificate he later received from R. Barit.²

R. Margolis, on his part, was very devoted to his teacher, R. Barit. In a volume which he published in 1912, he included an halachic discourse from R. Barit, with his own annotations.³ In his prefaratory remarks to the discourse, R. Margolis noted that his teacher had brought honor to the Jewish people through the respect he gained from non-Jewish political leaders.⁴ He was referring to R. Barit's very active participation in the political affairs of the Jews in Russia.⁵ From 1869 on, he was

always the representative speaker for the Vilna Jewish community to the Russian government, and he often defended the rights of that community in the face of restrictive government policies. Most notably, in 1871, he was part of a delegation which discussed an inquiry into the accusation of the apostate Jew, Jacob Bronfman, that the Jews constituted a state within a state. The proposal of Bronfman's Vilna commission included the closing of Jewish elementary schools and yeshivas, to be replaced by Russian schools, and governmental supervision of the selection of rabbis. Rabbi Barit, working together with the maskilim in the delegation, succeeded in having the entire project cancelled. The maskilim respected him for his broad learning, which included a knowledge of Russian, German, algebra and astronomy, and were, therefore, willing to cooperate with him.⁶ Rabbi Barit apparently served as a role model for Rabbi Margolis, whose knowledge of languages, political and military history, business affairs and science is apparent in his writings. During his years in America, Rabbi Margolis cultivated friendships with governmental officials,⁷ and influenced them to support Jewish interests, as Rabbi Barit had in Russia.

After studying in Rabbi Barit's yeshiva for three and a half years, R. Margolis entered the famed yeshiva of Volozhin. He was ordained there by the yeshiva's dean, R. Naphtali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv).⁸ Rabbi Berlin was active in the Hovevei Zion movement, promoting settlement of Eretz Yisroel,⁹ and R. Margolis, after entering the active rabbinate, also became

involved in that movement. Both rabbis wrote approbations to a volume published in 1889 by R. Yehuda Idel Tsziling, a relative of R. Margolis, entitled Yalkut Eretz Yisroel, a compilation of rabbinic statements in praise of the Holy Land, with explanatory notes by R. Tsziling. Rabbis Berlin and Margolis, in their approbations, both expressed their hope that the book would help strengthen the Jews' attachment to their land.¹⁰ The two rabbis also shared an interest in Biblical studies. Rabbi Berlin gave a daily class in Bible at his yeshiva, a rare phenomenon for that time, and later published a Biblical commentary, Ha'amek Davar, with a sub-commentary, Harchev Davar, based on these classes. Rabbi Margolis, too, published a Biblical commentary, Torat Gavriel, with a sub-commentary Nachal Gevim. The influence of Rabbi Berlin on R. Margolis is especially discernible in the holistic approach to Jewish religious studies which they shared. Rabbi Berlin was noted for the all-inclusive nature of his Jewish knowledge, including Bible, Talmud, Aggadah, Halacha, philosophy and kabbala. Rabbi Margolis, too, in his writings, exhibited knowledge of all branches of Jewish wisdom, including, most notably, a mastery of its homiletic and philosophic literature. Shortly before he left Volozhin in 1869, R. Margolis delivered a public lecture in the yeshiva. He later appended it to his commentary on the Passover Haggada, Agudat Ezov, noting with pride that he delivered the sermon in the presence of Rabbi Berlin.¹¹ Apparently, then, Rabbi Berlin exercised an important influence on R. Margolis' intellectual and spiritual development.

In 1866, R. Margolis married the daughter of R. Nachum Kaplan of Grodno. Rabbi Kaplan was recognized as a saintly figure who devoted tireless efforts to charity collecting as well as to teaching, free of charge, five classes of Talmud a day to different groups of students, varying widely in their range of knowledge.¹² His piety attracted the attention of the young Yisroel Meir HaCohen, later known as the Chofetz Chaim, who adopted him as his spiritual mentor, and sent him notes, asking him to pray for his spiritual development.¹³ R. Margolis, too, looked to Rabbi Kaplan as a role model, often referring to him in his writings.¹⁴

In 1869, after having been ordained by Rabbi Barit, R. Margolis moved to Grodno, where he taught Talmud and Shulchan Aruch, and also delivered very popular homilietic sermons. Many of these sermons were later printed in a volume entitled Beit Yitzchak, a collection of sermons by some of the most prominent European rabbis of the time.¹⁵ Later in 1869, R. Margolis was requested by R. Yehoshua Isaac of Slonim to come to Vilna to edit his work, Noam Yerushalayim, a commentary on the Palestinian Talmud. R. Margolis acceded to the request, and, after editing the volume, received ordination from both R. Yehoshua Isaac and R. Bezalel Ha-Cohen of Vilna, and then returned to his position in Grodno.¹⁶

In 1876, R. Margolis became rabbi of Dobrova, Mohliver Province. He served there until 1878, when he became rabbi of Yoshnovka, near Bialystok. In 1879, when R. Kaplan died, R.

Margolis was asked by the leaders of the Grodno community to succeed him. He accepted the call, and served in Grodno for the next twenty-seven years.

Although the position of chief rabbi of Grodno had been abolished after 1818, due to quarrels among different factions in the community,¹⁷ R. Margolis, or R. Velvele, as he was popularly known, functioned, de facto, in that capacity during most of his years in the city. All important religious matters pertaining to the community were presented to him.¹⁸ Besides being the major halachic authority in Grodno, he was also its "magid mesharim", or official preacher. He later incorporated many of the sermons he delivered in Grodno in his Biblical commentary Torat Gavriel, and other works. In his sermons, he illustrated his messages with examples from current affairs, military and political history, and other areas of popular interest. While in Grodno, he gained a reputation for successfully winning back to traditional Jewish observance many Jews who had strayed due to the influence of the haskala. In this respect, he carried on the work of his father-in-law, who had been active in such work.¹⁹

R. Margolis also continued his father-in-law's charitable work, as the community leaders had requested of him. In connection with this work, he came into contact with some of the great rabbinical leaders of the time, including the Chofetz Chaim and R. Isaac Elchanan Spektor. He was also very active in the Hovevei Zion movement, and influenced many of his distinguished rabbinic colleagues to become involved in it as well. R.

Margolis was a featured speaker at a Zionist conference held in Warsaw in 1898, which preceded that year's Second Zionist Congress in Basle, to which he was a delegate. However, developments within that movement eventually led him to withdraw his support and, ultimately, to become a strong opponent. In a series of articles published in the Berlin-based Hebrew journal, Hapeles, R. Margolis explained his initial involvement with the Hovevei Zion, and his later decision to leave the movement.²⁰

R. Margolis, in his series, related that when he first read Theodore Herzl's The Jewish State he felt that, since Herzl was not religious, he could not be successful in his attempt to realize the prophetic vision of the Jews' return to Zion, and, therefore, he kept his distance. However, as the Zionist idea spread, and attracted many fine people, some of whom entreated R. Margolis to support them, he agreed to attend a Hibbat Zion meeting held in Grodno at the home of the dayyan Rabbi Elyakim Shapiro. He continued to attend meetings at other locations, and, eventually, permitted some to be held in his own home. In the course of time, he wrote, the Zionist idea became rooted in his heart, in a limited kind of way. He felt that, at the very least, rabbinic participation in the movement would promote unity among the Jewish people. The rabbis would have an opportunity to influence their Zionist co-workers, so that they would not publicly violate Jewish law, for fear of losing rabbinic support. Moreover, he felt that, as a result of the unity created, the movement would send financial aid to persecuted Jews throughout

the world. He also felt that the Zionists' plan to create a bank to collect money to support the creation of a homeland, even if it would prove to be unsuccessful, still constituted a demonstration of the Jews' longing for their homeland, and would thus generate a divine response, granting mercy to the Jewish people. R. Margolis wrote that his attitude to the Hibbat Zion movement was shared by many of its members, including his close friend, R. Shmuel Mohliver.

In this spirit, wrote R. Margolis, he did a great deal of work for Hibbat Zion, and agreed to be a delegate to the Second Zionist Congress at Basle in August, 1898.²¹ However, a series of events that year caused him to re-consider his attitude to the entire movement. Two weeks before going to Basle in August, 1898, he happened to be in Pinsk. A group of Zionists there, hearing that he was to be a delegate to the Congress, asked him to deliver an address on the movement that Sabbath. To their surprise, instead of praising Zionism, he cautioned its proponents not to think that their movement would bring about the final redemption of the Jews. Rather, it would be through observance of the Sabbath that redemption would come. He also criticized members of the movement for their failure to observe Jewish law, in general. Many of those present were offended by his remarks, and sent him a letter of complaint. The man who delivered the letter, unnamed by R. Margolis in his 1903 article but identified by him many years later as Chaim Weizmann, told R. Margolis that, at the Congress in Basle, he would challenge him

to a duel! Others present told R. Margolis to ignore the man, explaining that he was very excitable, and invited him to deliver another speech the following day. R. Margolis consented, but he insisted on keeping the letter which Weizmann had handed him, in order to show it to his colleagues.²² He recorded the entire incident again in 1924, as part of a general attack on the Zionist movement, and a specific attack on Weizmann, whom he compared very unfavorably to Herzl.²³

After leaving Pinsk, R. Velvele went to Warsaw to participate in a general Zionist conference. Before that conference began, he attended a meeting of rabbis there, where he was shown a request, to be presented at the general conference, for the formation of a rabbinic board which would assure that there would be rabbinic supervision of any educational program promoted by the Zionist movement. The rabbis were dissatisfied with the schools which the Zionists had established, claiming that they were destructive of religion, and they wanted to prevent their increase. At the general conference, the delegates rejected the proposal to create a rabbinic board, and further rejected R. Margolis' suggestion that the spread of Jewish culture be dropped from the Zionist agenda altogether. Still, R. Margolis felt that an agreement could be reached in Basle. At the Congress in Basle, Dr. Moses Gaster assured R. Margolis that any cultural program which would be adopted would have to be approved by the rabbis, and so, content with this assurance, R. Margolis left Basle before the end of the Congress.²⁴ Dr.

Gaster, however, did not, in the end, give the rabbinic delegates an opportunity to present their proposal for overseeing any cultural program which would be pursued.²⁵ One of the delegates, Rabbi Eliyahu Akiva Rabinowitz of Poltova, feeling betrayed, presented the entire proceedings of these negotiations in a volume entitled Zion Be-Mishpat, which was very critical of the entire movement.²⁶ Rabbi Rabinowitz subsequently began to publish an anti-Zionist journal, Hapeles, as well as an anti-Zionist newspaper, Hamodia, which he used as vehicles to rally rabbinic opposition to the movement. R. Margolis, at first, continued his support of the general Zionist movement, believing Herzl's assurances that it would not do anything inimical to religious interests, and continuing to feel that rabbinical participation in the movement would positively influence its non-religious elements.²⁷ However, he became dismayed as he read the anti-religious statements made by Zionist leaders. He tried, for about a year, to help resolve the problem by having the cultural program abolished, but to no avail. Seeing that the gap between the religious and non-religious elements in the movement was continuing to grow, with no attempt to ease the situation, R. Margolis finally decided to withdraw his support from it. By 1903, when he wrote his series of essays in Hapeles, he was a strong opponent of the Zionist movement as it then existed. He did, however, still support efforts to settle Eretz Yisroel, as did Rabbi Rabinowitz. Moreover, he wrote that his quarrel was not with those people who genuinely, albeit mistakenly, felt that

positive results could be achieved through Zionism, but with those who knew that the movement had gone astray, and yet continued to participate in it solely for personal gain.²⁸ This last point is very important in understanding R. Margolis' cooperation with Zionist elements during his career in America, as we shall see.

The negative influence of anti-religious elements in the Zionist movement upon the Jewish community was, indeed, a great concern of R. Margolis'. This factor, together with those of the Bundists and the Territorialists, had contributed to the breakdown of rabbinic control in many Russian Jewish communities.²⁹ Under the kahal system in Russia, the rabbi supervised all of the religious institutions in the community, and was empowered to issue ordinances which introduced innovations or safeguards to religious practice. Thus, Jewish education, kashrut supervision, Sabbath observance and other vital areas of religious life were under the rabbi's control.³⁰ Although the institution of the kahal had been officially abolished by the Russian government in 1844, in an effort to expedite Jewish assimilation, it was difficult to enforce this law, and many communities, including Grodno, ignored it.³¹ There was a government-appointed, or crown-rabbi, in Grodno, but he wielded very little power or influence in the community. Thus, for many years, R. Margolis was a major force in the religious life of this important Jewish city.³²

By the 1890's, however, rabbinic influence in Russian Jewish

communities had greatly diminished. Shmaryahu Levin, who was the crown-rabbi of Grodno from 1896 to 1898, wrote in his memoirs that there were several rabbis in the city, none of whom was very influential. One of these rabbis, he wrote, was R. Margolis.³³ In a letter to Judah Magnes written shortly after R. Margolis came to New York in 1911, Levin denounced R. Margolis for his anti-Zionist stance, and also claimed that, while serving as rabbi in Grodno, R. Margolis had little influence on the community.³⁴ Interestingly, Levin also wrote, in his memoirs, that although Grodno was one of the oldest and proudest Jewish communities in Lithuania, still, after the fall of Jewish communal autonomy, power had passed out of the hands of the spiritual leaders into the hands of the rich. Moreover, while in Grodno, he witnessed the last stages of the struggle through which the aristocracy lost its power. This struggle, he wrote, was really one between Europeanism and Americanism, in the sense that America extolled the unlimited potential of the self-made man, in contrast to the European emphasis on the importance of heredity. This shift, he wrote, had reached a further stage in Vilna, but he had first encountered the character type in Grodno.³⁵

R. Margolis himself, upon arriving in America in 1907, said that the younger generation in Russia was abandoning traditional observance due to the influence of Zionism, Territorialism and the Bund. Grodno, however, he said, was not affected very much by the Bund, because it wasn't an industrial town. Zionism and

Territorialism, too, he said, were losing ground.³⁶ Still, R. Margolis later wrote that, after the 1905 revolution, he saw that he was losing his hold on the youth, which he termed "a revolutionary generation", and, therefore, he decided to leave Grodno for Boston.³⁷ From other writings of R. Margolis, as we will see, it seems that a major factor in the loss of the youth to Jewish observance was the change which had taken place in the Jewish educational system. These two factors, then, apparently expedited the breakdown of rabbinic influence in the Jewish community of Grodno.

Grodno, in addition to two Talmud Torahs, had a trade school, a government-organized school, and a modern cheder (cheder metukan), founded by Zionists.³⁸ It was probably in reaction to the government and Zionist schools that R. Margolis, together with the other rabbis of Grodno, affixed his signature to a manifesto, entitled "Darka Shel Torah", ("The Path of the Torah"), issued in 1902, which decried the then-current state of Jewish education. The document argued that the new system of education introduced in many schools emphasized the primacy of the Hebrew language and Jewish history and neglected other areas of Jewish study. Bible, it was claimed, was taught only in order to aid the study of language and history, and Talmudic studies were neglected altogether. Moreover, many of the teachers were themselves non-observant. The essay goes on to present a number of obligations incumbent upon the Jewish parent who wants his child to grow up in the spirit of Jewish tradition. They must

teach their children the Bible with its traditional commentaries based on rabbinic sources. At an early age, the child should be introduced to the study of the Talmud, depending upon his mental ability. In addition, the child should be trained to observe all the commandments of the Torah. Rabbis, too, were called upon to speak of these matters in their sermons, and urge their congregants to properly carry out the program outlined in the essay.³⁹

The state of Jewish education in Eastern Europe was further discussed by Rabbi Yakov Lifshitz in a series of articles in Hapeles.⁴⁰ In that series, he also wrote that the state of the Jewish religion, in general, was declining due to the influence of *haskala*. Even families which were observant, he wrote, were ashamed to display their religiosity publicly, and were apologetic about their observance of *halacha*. Rabbi Lifshitz called for the creation of cells of committed Jews, to be called "Machzikei Ha-Dat", for the purpose of strengthening the resolve of the observant to persevere in their commitment to traditional Judaism. R. Margolis, among many other prominent rabbinic figures, wrote to Rabbi Lifshitz, praising him for his articles and supporting his suggestion.⁴¹ At a rabbinic conference held in Cracow in 1903, R. Margolis called on the rabbis to ensure that only God-fearing people be engaged as teachers in their communities.⁴²

The Cracow conference followed a failed attempt, in 1902, to hold a rabbinic conference in Russia to discuss ways of dealing

with the recently intensified attacks on Jewish communities there. Many prominent rabbinic figures, including Rabbi Chaim Soloveichik of Brisk, R. Eliyahu Meizel of Lodz, and R. Raphael Shapiro of Volozhin were planning to attend the conference. R. Margolis played a major role in organizing the conference, together with Rabbi Rabinowitz of Poltova, and met with many of the rabbis who planned to participate. In R. Margolis' opinion, the Jewish Russian revolutionaries, with their anti-government activities, were largely responsible for the attacks on Jews, and he wished to deal with this issue at the conference. News of the conference and its nature apparently leaked, and R. Margolis soon received death threats from the revolutionaries. On the advice of Rabbi Meizel and R. Chaim Ozer Grozinski of Vilna, the conference was cancelled due to the danger posed by the revolutionaries.⁴³

In 1903, the Cracow conference was arranged by Rabbi Eliyahu Chazan of Egypt for the purpose of exploring means of strengthening religious observance, and to solve some of the problems facing the religious community.⁴⁴ R. Margolis came to the conference as the representative of the aging Rabbi Meizel of Lodz. On the second day of the conference, before the regular order of business began, R. Margolis introduced a proposal that the rabbis declare that the Jewish Russian revolutionaries are not part of the Jewish people. He argued that the revolutionaries were rebelling both against God and against the government, and endangering the Jewish population of Russia. By

adopting the proposed resolution, the rabbis would remove this threat to Russian Jewry, since the revolutionaries would be considered as private individuals and not as Jews. The proposal was seconded by the Poltover Rav, but aroused a very heated debate among the rabbis, some of whom thought that it was still possible to influence the revolutionaries to return to their Jewish heritage. The rabbis ultimately rejected the proposal. Instead, they issued a statement strongly condemning the actions of the Jewish revolutionaries, because, by their activities, they were transgressing the Talmudic mandate to follow the law of the local government ("dina de-malchuta dina").⁴⁵

The increasing influence of the Jewish revolutionaries and the consequent change that occurred among Russian Jewish youth, as well as the sharp increase in the incidence of pogroms and a consequent fear that Russian Jewry was headed toward catastrophe, led R. Margolis to accept an invitation to become Chief Rabbi of Boston.⁴⁶ The invitation came from the United Hebrew Congregations of Boston, which was composed of six local synagogues, which had been united by Rabbi Moshe Zevulun (Ramaz) Margolis, who had come to Boston in 1889 to head Congregation Shomre Beth Abraham.⁴⁷ When Ramaz left Boston for New York to become rabbi of Congregation Kehillath Jeshurun, Rav Velvele was invited to replace him. Rav Velvele later wrote that, at the time, he felt that his extensive experience in Russia dealing with Jewish communal matters, within his own community as well as with wider issues affecting many communities, would enable him to

deal with the large Jewish community of Boston.⁴⁸ In Torat Gavriel, he likened Yakov leaving his father's house, in flight from his brother Esau, for that of Lavan, to a European Jew forced by economic circumstances to leave Europe for America, always hoping to return to Europe.⁴⁹ This characterization seems to reflect Rav Velvele's self-image. Because of worsening conditions in Russia, he felt compelled to leave for America. Unlike his model European Jew, he had little hope of returning to Russia. Instead, he was determined to transplant Russian-style Judaism to America. His American rabbinic career, first in Boston and then in New York, would constitute an attempt to recreate in this country the kind of communal control that he had once exercised in Grodno. Having experienced the loss of this control, he was now determined to resist, in America, those forces which would prevent him from re-creating it. He would soon learn, however, that the condition of Jewish life in America did not easily lend itself to the kind of leadership which he hoped to exercise.

Chapter Two

Rabbi Margolis' Years in Boston, 1907 - 1911

Rav Velvele arrived in New York on February 5, 1907, accompanied by his wife and two children. His arrival was reported on in a front-page article in the Morgen Journal, which described him as being one of the great Jewish scholars of the time, as well as a worldly individual who was able to deal with contemporary problems, and whose leadership should prove to be very beneficial to the Boston Jewish community.¹ He stayed in New York for a short time to meet with members of its Jewish community, and, on February 7, moved to Boston. The reaction of the Boston press to his arrival was not as enthusiastic as had been that in New York. The Jewish Advocate, published in Boston, in fact, ignored the event, and its Yiddish counterpart reportedly had some words of criticism for the city's new rabbinical leader, as did the New York-based weekly, the American Hebrew.² The general tenor of the criticism was that R. Margolis represented the Old World type of rabbi who appealed to immigrants who wished to maintain the kind of Judaism they had practiced in Europe. Although there did exist such an element among Boston Jewry, and it needed to be served, it was more important for the community to bring in a scholar with more modern tendencies who could appeal to a much wider clientele.³

A more substantial criticism of R. Margolis began to emerge after he had been in the city for a few months. One of the

duties required of him by his rabbinic contract was to establish a system of kashrut in the city. To that end, shortly after arriving he made a preliminary inspection of its kashrut conditions, and found them to be extremely deficient. The practice of displaying "kosher meat" signs in the windows of butcher shops was particularly problematic to him. Often, these signs were printed by the butchers themselves, and did not reflect an acceptable level of kashrut. Rav Velvele decided to institute a new system of kashrut regulation, bringing in his own inspectors, upgrading the standard of kashrut and issuing certificates, instead of standardized signs, to indicate that a particular butcher shop conformed to his standards. These certificates were to be renewed periodically upon inspection by kashrut supervisors.⁴ Rav Velvele was to meet with strong opposition in connection with this proposed system.

At first, Rav Velvele wished to impose his system upon all the meat establishments in the city. He was, however, opposed by many local rabbis, chief among them Rabbi Yakov Friederman, head of the Agudat Ha-kehilot, who had been in Boston since 1896. Rabbi Friederman insisted that the current system of kashrut control was adequate, and refused to yield to Rav Velvele's authority.⁵ A bitter feud ensued between the two rabbis. The Jewish Advocate viewed the dispute as a struggle for political control rather than for proper kashrut standards, and felt that it threatened to alienate those Jews in Boston who wished to keep kosher. In attempting to achieve control over kashrut in the

entire city, R. Margolis was in effect claiming to have the authority of Chief Rabbi of Boston, a position which they denied he held. In a subsequent article, it was acknowledged that R. Margolis, having been invited to the city by several Orthodox congregations, could rightfully claim to be Chief Rabbi. However, he had not been appointed as Chief Rabbi of Massachusetts, and, yet, was apparently also claiming that position, as well. How else, it was argued, could one explain the meeting he had with the governor of the state in May, three months after coming to Boston?⁶ If R. Margolis wished to attain such a position, continued the Advocate reporter, he should do so gradually, through his own considerable credentials, rather than through the artificial machinations of a few of his admirers, who, the newspaper claimed, were responsible for arranging the meeting with the governor.⁷

Rav Velvele, on his part, felt that the rabbinic leaders in Boston were of a very low caliber, most of them not being proficient in the basic laws of kashrut, and thus incompetent to effectively control its administration. He attributed this condition to the failure of the community to offer an adequate salary which would attract qualified rabbis. Those rabbis who did come to the city, for the most part, had left Europe because of the persecutions occurring there, and served as rabbis for want of any other means of earning a livelihood. Rav Velvele claimed that he was the only rabbi who had been specifically invited to come from Europe to serve in that capacity. The other

rabbis in the city compromised on kashrut standards in order to earn an income from certifying establishments whose level of kashrut observance was substandard. In Europe, wrote Rav Velvele, this kind of situation was avoided because the Jewish community paid the rabbi a salary, and he supervised kashrut as part of his duties, without additional charge.⁸ This was, in fact, Rav Velvele's personal policy of kashrut supervision throughout his career in America, and his bone of contention with his opponents, whom he invariably accused of compromising kashrut standards for monetary gain.

Besides his clash with Rabbi Friederman, Rav Velvele also crossed swords, while in Boston, with Rabbi Shalom Elchanan Jaffe, rabbi of the Beth Ha-Midrash Ha-Gadol on New York's Lower East Side, and a leader of the Agudat Harabonim, a national rabbinic organization which had been founded in 1902. Rabbi Jaffe came to Boston in 1907 to help form a beit din which opposed Rav Velvele on a question of kashrut. Rav Velvele made a vague reference to the case in a letter he wrote at the time to Rabbi Simon Glazer.⁹ He supplied the details in his work Charuzei Margoliot.¹⁰ In essence, Rav Velvele had declared the kashrut standards of a certain food establishment unacceptable, and was overruled by the beit din. Shortly afterward, he declared a certain shochet unqualified for the job. R. Jaffe then came to Boston and, together with the beit din, re-instated the shochet in his position. Rav Velvele was bitter over this incident for years to come, and he was convinced from that time

on that R. Jaffe was a charlatan. The two rabbinical personalities continued to clash for many years. R. Jaffe symbolized, to Rav Velvele, the inferior level of the leadership of the Agudat Harabbonim. He later wrote that he had rejected an offer by R. Jaffe, made to him when he first came to Boston, to become the president of that organization, because he did not respect its members. Moreover, he claimed that he kept the Agudat Harabbonim out of New England, urging rabbis there not to join.¹¹

The Advocate's claim that Rav Velvele was attempting to become the Chief Rabbi of Massachusetts was not without foundation. His influence extended well beyond Boston. Rabbis from other cities in Massachusetts, and, indeed, from throughout New England, sent halachic inquiries to him.¹² In the introduction to the first volume of Torat Gavriel, he refers to himself as the Chief Rabbi of Boston and its environs. Moreover, he was invited, in 1910, by the Jewish communities of Toronto and Rochester, N.Y., to help set up standards for local boards of kashrut.¹³ It was, in fact, this wide-spread demand for his halachic expertise which played an important role in his decision to move to New York City in 1911, in order to serve a larger constituency than he was able to in Boston.¹⁴

Rav Velvele acceded to the requests of the Toronto and Rochester communities, and he assisted both communities in the establishment of kashrut standards. He later wrote that in Toronto he was able to unite the various factions in the

community, correct the abuses of the various rabbis there, and set up an improved system of kashrut control. However, shortly after he left the city, the improvements he instituted were abandoned, and the old, chaotic order was restored, due to the instigation of the former leaders of the community.¹⁵

Rav Velvele was more successful in Rochester. The Jewish community there, in 1910, under the direction of Rabbi Shlomo Sadowsky and with the approval of eight local congregations, created a Vaad Hakashrut, to oversee all matters of kashrut in the city.¹⁶ Rabbi Sadowsky, who often consulted with Rav Velvele on halachic questions,¹⁷ invited him to come to Rochester to participate in the founding of the Vaad. Rav Velvele came in December, 1910, studied the rules of the Vaad, and approved of them.¹⁸ Later, in 1913, when complications with the Vaad developed, he returned to Rochester to help enforce its rules.¹⁹ At that time, he wrote a letter about the case, explaining why his involvement in it was justified, even though his rabbinic position was in New York City. He wrote that, during his years in Boston, he was consulted on halachic matters by rabbis from other cities in Massachusetts, and was very dismayed by their ignorance. He felt that he was wasting his abilities by confining himself to advising such an inferior group. Therefore, when he received an invitation to serve as a rabbi in New York City, he readily accepted it, because, he felt, by serving in the country's Jewish center, he would thereby be the halachic authority of America. For this reason, he concluded, it was

certainly appropriate for him to decide the halacha for the Rochester community.²⁰ Rav Velvele's sights, then, went far beyond Boston, so that the Advocate's accusations were not at all outlandish.

Rav Velvele's major effort during his years in Boston, namely, his attempt to control kashrut in the city, was unsuccessful. There was, however, a soon-forgotten accomplishment which he could claim during his years there. In May, 1909, while eulogizing Rabbi Aaron Hillel Sirk, a local Boston rabbi who Rav Velvele greatly respected for his scholarship, Rav Velvele noted that it was a disgrace to the Jewish community that such a great rabbi should die in a non-Jewish hospital. He then suggested that the Jewish community build its own hospital, to assure that Jewish patients be treated in accordance with the halacha. His proposal brought an immediate response, and three hundred dollars were collected following the eulogy.²¹ However, the Advocate, although commending Rav Velvele for having his heart in the right place, wrote that it was totally unrealistic financially and should be abandoned.²² The Boston community, however, apparently felt otherwise, and, soon, a group of ladies set up a fund to establish a Jewish hospital.²³ In its Rosh Hashanah edition, the Advocate, in listing the major events of the community in the past year, noted that in May Rav Velvele had proposed the creation of a Jewish hospital.²⁴ However, in subsequent reportage on the subject, his name was never mentioned, and, by

October, 1916, when the Beth Israel hospital opened in the city, Rav Velvele's role in its conception had been totally forgotten.²⁵

Because of the frustrations he had suffered while in Boston, Rav Velvele decided, in 1911, to leave the city and accept what, to him, was a more attractive position in New York City. The offer came from the Adath Israel, or United Hebrew Community, of the Lower East Side. The Adath was established in 1901 as a burial society whose purpose was to provide affordable burials as well as death benefits, to all Jews in New York, regardless of their financial means or place of origin. The society hoped to unite the various landsmanschaften societies in the city whose restrictive nature had often led to friction, with each society excluding from membership people who did not come from the appropriate area of Europe.²⁶ As described in its minute book, the Adath hoped to re-create in New York the kind of community organization that had existed in Europe.²⁷ The Adath soon expanded its activities, setting up a free loan society, a sick fund and a synagogue. In 1903, the Adath attempted to centralize supervision of the kosher butcher shops in the city. Butcher shops which placed themselves under the Adath's supervision would receive certificates attesting to that effect. No payment was demanded for such supervision, as the Adath financed it from funds the society already had available. The plan, however, was opposed by Rabbis Yakov Widerwitz and Hillel Klein, who controlled supervision of the large abattoirs in New York. The

rabbis questioned the reliability of the Adath's supervision, and also accused the society of charging the butchers forty cents a week for its services, despite its claim that the service was free of charge. The Adath counter-charged that these rabbis were not providing adequate kashrut supervision, and that they were motivated by monetary gain. Because of the opposition it met, the Adath's plan was not successful. Although by November 1903 one hundred butchers had placed themselves under the Adath's supervision, by May, 1907, only seventy-one remained. Although the society did continue to function in this area, its attempt to centralize kashrut supervision had failed.²⁸

In a further attempt to unite New York Jewry, the Adath, in March, 1911, at a meeting of one of its committees, decided to bring a great European rabbi to the city in order to bring order into the chaotic state of affairs then existing in matters of traditional religious observance. As recorded in the Adath's minute book, the rabbi to be brought would serve as the Rav Hakollel, or Chief Rabbi of the city.²⁹ In July of that year, the Adath placed an ad in the Yiddish press, inviting all local synagogues to send delegates to a special meeting at which they would discuss which rabbi should be selected to bring to New York to lead its Jewry.³⁰ At the meeting, many objected to the idea of reviving the position of Chief Rabbi, because of the disastrous results of the attempt by R. Jacob Joseph to serve in that capacity. Others pointed out that the new rabbi brought to the city would meet with resistance if he attempted to be Chief

Rabbi, because Rabbi Shalom Elchanan Jaffe already claimed that position.³¹ In response to this opposition, the Adath, apparently, ceased to refer to the prospective rabbi as the city's next Chief Rabbi. However, it was widely suspected that the Adath's plan was part of an attempt to create an Orthodox Kehillah, in opposition to the one founded by Judah Magnes in New York City in 1909. Magnes' organization, which attempted to bring all matters of Jewish concern in the city under the control of one centralized body, was widely opposed in Orthodox circles, because its leadership was Reform. Magnes, among others, felt that the Adath was attempting to destroy his organization by bringing in a spiritual leader to oversee religious affairs in the city.³² There can be little doubt that the Adath did, in fact, wish to supplant the Orthodox Vaad Harabbonim which the Kehillah had organized. The tenor of the ad printed in July, 1911, pointed in this direction, and it was widely perceived in this way.³³

Despite the objections raised against the Adath's plan, its directors sent an invitation to R. Margolis to come from Boston and fill the position they wished to create. On August 13, 1911, Rav Velvele sent the Adath his letter of acceptance, and the Adath, in turn, sent him his rabbinical contract.³⁴ This development was greeted with great enthusiasm by the Morgen Journal, which began to carry front-page articles on the topic. Dr. Magnes, among others, suspected that this support stemmed from the anti-Kehillah stance of the newspaper's publisher and

managing editor, Jacob Saphirstein.³⁵ The newspaper constantly published articles against the Kehillah, claiming it was anti-Orthodox and should not be involved in religious affairs.³⁶ Magnes felt that the newspaper, like Adath Israel, hoped that Rav Velvele would lead the battle against the Kehillah. Magnes' anger with the Morgen Journal, as well as the other Yiddish papers, led him to encourage the founding of a new Yiddish daily, Der Tag, which began publishing in November, 1914.³⁷ Ironically, the fact that Der Tag published on the Sabbath, unlike the Morgen Journal and the Tageblatt, generated a great deal of outrage in the Orthodox community, and led to the decision of several members of the Vaad Harabbonim--originally the Kehillah's rabbinic arm--to formally sever their connection with the Kehillah, in protest of Magnes' involvement with the newspaper.³⁸

When the Boston Jewish community heard of Rav Velvele's decision to leave the city, it went to great lengths to persuade him to stay. An emergency meeting was held, at which all of the Orthodox synagogues in the city joined to declare Rav Velvele as Chief Rabbi of Boston. In addition, a committee was formed to raise \$10,000 to assure his salary for the next five years, \$6,000 of which was raised at that meeting alone. Rav Velvele, however, insisted that he had to honor the agreement he had made with Adath Israel.

On September 13, 1911, the evening before Rav Velvele left for New York, a farewell gathering was held at the Baldwin Place synagogue, where he served. At the gathering, a last-minute

attempt was made to convince Rav Velvele to stay. Mr. Nathan Pinanski, president of the Adath Jeshurun synagogue in Boston, accused the directors of Adath Israel of bringing Rav Velvele to New York in order to combat Magnes' Kehillah. In his farewell address, Rav Velvele said that the politics existent within the religious community did not permit him to fulfill his function of Chief Rabbi and, so, the city had no need for his services. His position at the Adath Israel, he said, would reflect the name of the society, which meant "community of Israel", of which all Jews are members. He would, therefore, be the rabbi of all Jews who sought his halachic guidance.³⁹ These remarks are similar to those he would make in his 1913 letter in connection with the Rochester controversy, in which he viewed himself, in effect, as the Chief Rabbi of America. In this sense, he resembled Rabbi Yakov Widerwitz, who had come to New York in 1893 from Moscow, whose letterhead did, indeed, read "Chief Rabbi of America".⁴⁰ The Morgen Journal, in an editorial, compared Rav Velvele to Rabbi Widerwitz, in the sense that Rabbi Widerwitz served as a rabbi for the masses. In Europe, wrote the editorialist, the kehillah provided for the needy of the city. In America, a poor man had to go to his synagogue or its rabbi for help. People who could not afford to pay the membership dues required to belong to a particular synagogue were often left indigent. Rabbi Widerwitz, however, served everyone, whether or not they were affiliated with a synagogue. In the same manner, it was hoped, Rav Velvele would, in filling the position created by the Adath

Israel. The editorial went on to say the Adath had done well to choose Rav Velvele, rather than to bring over a rabbi from Europe, because Rav Velvele's years in Boston had acquainted him with American conditions, and he was the greatest rabbi then in America.⁴¹

During Rav Velvele's years in Boston, he had been very active in promoting Jewish education, both on the elementary level and on the adult level. He initiated a number of study groups in various synagogues and pledged, before leaving the city, that he would maintain contact with it to encourage the continuation of these programs.⁴² He did, indeed, return to Boston for two weeks in November, 1911, to help celebrate the completion of the Talmud in one of these study groups. During his time there, he spoke in a number of synagogues, and linked the study group with one he was founding in the Adath Israel.⁴³ In addition to strengthening Jewish education in Boston, then, Rav Velvele, by these efforts, maintained a constituency in the city. This was, apparently, in keeping with his self-perception of being the rabbi of all Jews in America. On September 14, 1911, he left Boston for New York, to begin the major phase of his career in the American rabbinate.

Chapter Three

Rabbi Margolis' Years in New York, 1911 - 1935

A. Challenging the Kehillah

Rav Margolis arrived in New York City on September 14, 1911. In the introduction to his work Charuzei Margoliot, published in 1912, he described his enthusiasm over his new position with Adath Israel, discussing the goals of the society and the scope of its activities. The society planned, he wrote, to oversee the Jewish schools in the city, to assure that they would be run according to religious tradition, to strengthen Sabbath observance, and to bring order into kashrut supervision. Moreover, wrote Rav Velvele, the Adath's directors hoped that, as the society grew in numbers, it would be able to hire more qualified rabbis to serve as kashrut supervisors, and to set up rabbinic courts throughout the city to serve its entire Jewish population.¹ The hope of the Adath Israel, as described by Rav Velvele, seemed very ambitious, and certainly seemed to indicate that its ultimate goal was to establish a Kehillah-like organization, presumably to coordinate those aspects of the Jewish community which it felt should not be in the hands of the existing New York Kehillah.

Judah Magnes' Kehillah was the object of much criticism by the Orthodox community of New York. The Kehillah was organized in 1909 in reaction to a report by Police Commissioner Theodore

A. Bingham to the effect that a majority of juvenile crime in the city was committed by Jews. Although the Jewish community strongly challenged and protested this allegation, saying that it was a wild exaggeration, and Bingham himself later apologized for it, it did alert the community to the problem of crime among its youth. In an effort to galvanize the resources of the community to deal with this and other problems facing it, Magnes, rabbi of the reform Temple Emmanu-El, called for the creation of a city-wide organization which would centralize the handling of Jewish affairs, and thus deal with them more efficiently.² Wishing to include Orthodox Jewry and its concerns in the Kehillah, Magnes decided to create a Vaad Harabbonim, or Board of Rabbis within the Kehillah to deal with religious matters, especially kashrut supervision. A number of Agudat Harabbonim leaders, including R.S.E. Jaffe and Ramaz Margolies, had agreed to join. However, members of the Vaad were often dissatisfied with Kehillah policies, especially in regard to Jewish education, and intermittently threatened to leave the organization. Some voices in the community felt that Orthodox rabbis should not be part of an organization controlled by Reform rabbis such as Magnes, and that the Kehillah should not be involved in religious matters. This view was shared by the Morgen Journal and Rav Velvele.³

Soon after coming to New York, Rav Velvele began to speak out against the Kehillah. In February, 1912, an interview with him was featured in the premiere issue of the monthly journal Der Yiddishe Wechter.⁴ The journal had been founded by Rabbi Dr.

Samuel Rabinowitz of Williamsburg. Rabbi Rabinowitz had originally participated in the Kehillah, which had adopted a system of kashrut supervision which he had instituted in Brooklyn. He founded a Kashrut Committee, consisting of twenty-five laymen, to issue signs to butchers who were under the Committee's supervision.⁵ The Kehillah's Committee on Religious Organization approved of the plan, but decided that, in order to implement it for the entire city, it would be necessary to have all the rabbis in the city cooperate. To this end, the Kehillah created the Vaad Harabbonim in early 1911. For a variety of reasons, mostly financial, the program was not initiated until November, 1912. The delay was partly due to the dissatisfaction of many of the rabbis in the Vaad with the Kehillah's Board of Education, which, they claimed, was trying to destroy the traditional Talmud Torah system through introducing a standardized curriculum which de-emphasized Talmudic study and utilized modern methodologies which the rabbis considered to be inappropriate. These rabbis refused to cooperate in the area of kashrut if their demands in the field of education were not met. During a stormy session of the Kehillah in November, 1911, Rabbi Rabinowitz accused the Board of Education's director, Dr. Samson Benderly, of being a former missionary, walked out of the meeting, and urged his colleagues to join him. None of them did, but Rabbi Rabinowitz subsequently resigned from the Kehillah, and founded his journal, which served as an anti-Kehillah mouthpiece.⁶

In his interview with the Wechter, Rav Velvele said that although Jewish unity is important and even necessary in worldly and political issues, still, a Kehillah which includes Reform and liberal elements should have nothing to do with religious matters such as kashrut and Jewish education. Rav Velvele also related that the secretary of the Kehillah's Board of Rabbis, Rabbi Glick, had met with him and asked him to join, but he had refused, because he felt that a city such as New York had no need for such a board. If anyone had a question of religious practice, one rabbi could answer the question as well as could one hundred. Commenting on the Kehillah's Bureau of Education, he said that its new system of Jewish education posed a threat to traditional Judaism, because Jewish education must be based on traditional Jewish law. In regard to the state of kashrut in the city, Rav Velvele said that the entire system, from beginning to end, was in bad order, and that, consequently, the inadvertent eating of non-kosher meat was very widespread. He was then in the process of collecting the facts. When, eventually, he would publish them, he said, they would shock New York Jewry. In conclusion, he said that it was the uptown (German) Jews, meaning Dr. Magnes and his colleagues, who were responsible for the lowly state of Judaism in the city.

Alongside R. Velvele's interview, the Wechter printed an interview with R. S. E. Jaffe. While R. Jaffe shared R. Velvele's view of the Bureau of Education, he was a little more optimistic about the kashrut situation. The slaughter-houses

which were under rabbinic supervision, he said, weren't bad, although they could use improvement. In the retail butcher shops, the situation was worse, with sixty percent of them selling treifa meat. In the downtown chicken markets, all of the shochtim were reliable, while in the uptown markets, improvements were being introduced. Two years later, in a major controversy with R. Velvele, R. Jaffe was to give the same assessment of the chicken markets as he did in the Wechter interview.⁷

Rav Velvele's opinion of the Kehillah, as presented in his interview, paralleled that of Rabbi Rabinowitz. In an essay in the same issue, he wrote that Orthodox Jews had agreed to participate in the Kehillah, even though it was controlled by Reform elements which were destroying traditional Judaism, because they felt that those rich Jews, who had important societal connections, would be able to combat anti-Semitism. However, the Kehillah was not fulfilling its role in this area. Jews were not being defended against attacks by street gangs, or against Jewish anti-Semites who published articles in English-language journals criticizing traditional Judaism, or against the tyrannical practices at the Ellis Island Immigration Center. The Kehillah, he claimed, took no part in the recent discussion in Albany regarding an anti-missionary bill, and was totally uninvolved in charitable activity. Instead, the Kehillah intervened in matters in which it should not be involved, namely, kashrut and Jewish education. Although there were Orthodox elements in the Kehillah, the leadership was Reform, and the

Orthodox had little or no influence. The Orthodox community could only recognize the Kehillah if it restricted its activities to matters which did not involve religion, in conformity to the original purpose of its founding.⁷

The first issue of the Wechter also included a plan for an Orthodox organization to strengthen religious observance. Included in its program was the creation of a European-type yeshiva, which would also teach its students how to deliver speeches in English, a central kashrut organization, an employment bureau which would find jobs for Sabbath-observing Jews, to improve the financial situation of local rabbis, cantors and other religious functionaries, etc. It was proposed that a one dollar membership fee should be charged to support the organization's activities. Rabbi Rabinowitz felt that the publication of his journal was actually the first step in the creation of such an organization.⁸ In the same issue, R. Rabinowitz praised the Adath Israel for its work on behalf of the community.⁹ In a later issue, the Wechter asked why the Adath and R. Velvele had not yet taken steps to improve kashrut conditions, the Jewish educational system, and other problem areas in Jewish life in the city.¹⁰ Rabbi Rabinowitz was apparently goading R. Velvele on to form the kind of organization which he had outlined in the opening issue of the Wechter. If that was his intention, his efforts were not wasted, as events later in that year would prove.

On June 19, 1912, a meeting was held at the Machzike Talmud

Torah building on the Lower East Side, with Rabbi Rabinowitz serving as the chairman, and Rav Velvele as the honorary chairman. The meeting was a protest against the Bureau of Jewish Education. Talmud Torah heads were called on to have nothing to do with the Bureau, and parents were asked not to send their children to Bureau-run schools and not to support them financially.¹¹ The American Hebrew reported that R. Velvele had placed a cherem on the Bureau. That journal argued that such a move was counter-productive, and that the major forces behind it were teachers who were not qualified, by Bureau standards, to be licensed, and faced the loss of their jobs if the Bureau's system were to be adopted city-wide. Of R. Velvele's involvement in this boycott, the Hebrew wrote, "The leading spirit of the movement is only recently come to this city and is possibly unaware of the interested motives at the root of the opposition to the Bureau of Education. He will not increase any prestige he may possess by acting thus hastily and inadvisedly."¹²

The Morgen Journal also published, in 1912, a number of articles critical of the Bureau, and of the Kehillah in general.¹³ Before Yom Kippur of that year, the newspaper reported that the Kehillah had complained to the Commissioner of Health about the practice of kapparot, claiming that thousands of chickens were slaughtered openly in the streets as part of the custom, violating health laws and posing a public health hazard. In reaction to this complaint, the Board of Health placed restrictions on the practice of the ritual that year. Instead of

the usual practice of going to butcher shops and slaughtering the chickens there, the custom could now be performed only at slaughter-houses or at eight specially-designated areas in the city. R. Velvele called on all observant Jews to refrain from practicing the custom altogether that year. He felt that because of the crowded conditions which would exist in the eight areas, it would not be possible to slaughter the chickens properly. He also told a reporter from the Morgen Journal that the Kehillah should not have intervened in this issue, because it was a matter of religion, which was not its concern. As he saw it, the Kehillah was devoted to enabling Jews to rest on American holidays and work on Jewish holidays!¹⁴

The culmination of this opposition to the Kehillah came on November 24, 1912, when Rav Velvele founded the Agudat Ha-Yehudim Ha-Ortodoksim, the Federation of Orthodox Jews. The organization followed the guidelines outlined in the Wechter by Rabbi Rabinowitz, who was, in fact, a featured speaker at the Federation's first meeting, held at the Kalavier shul on Pike Street. The Yiddish name of the organization, the Ortodoks Forband, was the same name which had been given the proposed organization in the Wechter article, and members were asked to contribute one dollar per year to help fund the organization, as R. Rabinowitz had suggested in his article. Rabbi Rabinowitz's appeals for action, apparently, had let to results.

The first meeting of the Federation was reportedly attended by two thousand people, who listened enthusiastically to the

various speakers, including the chairman, Moshe Stahl, a businessman from Boro Park who was Rav Velvele's brother-in-law, and Rav Velvele himself, who was the main speaker. Moshe Stahl, in his speech, criticized New York Jewry for allowing religious matters in the city to be run by inappropriate leaders who knew little about Judaism. Rabbi Rabinowitz, too, criticized the rich Jewish leaders who were not dedicated to Jewish tradition. This theme was also taken up by Rav Velvele in his speech. The target of all these speeches was the Kehillah. Rav Velvele referred specifically to the undermining of the Jewish educational system by these leaders. He went on to say that the Federation would combat all those forces which strove to bury traditional Judaism. Through united action, he said, the community could be strengthened. Anyone who contributed one dollar could become a member of the Federation. From among the members, one hundred of the finest laymen would be chosen to run the Federation, and they would be assisted by an executive committee. The major purpose of the organization, Rav Velvele said, would be to recreate in America the kind of unified community organization which had existed in Europe.¹⁵

At a second meeting of the Federation, held at the Eldridge Street Synagogue on December 1, 1912, Rav Velvele said that it was especially important to strengthen Judaism in America, because religious observance was never particularly strong there. He said that the Jewish community should take an example from the structure of the United States. If each state would act alone as

a separate government, each one would not be developed very well. Only through union did the states become strong. The Jews, too, would strengthen themselves if they combined all their various talents in order to assure the traditional nature of the community. Another speaker, Rabbi Abraham Gelenter of the Sinaier shul, in an apparent reference to the Kehillah, criticized Jews who sought to be liberal. To trample on the holy institutions of the Jewish people, he said, is not an example of liberalism.¹⁶

The founding of the Federation was enthusiastically welcomed and reported on by the Morgen Journal. Besides giving extensive, front-page treatment to the meetings of the organization, the newspaper also editorialized about it, and soon ran a series of articles discussing it.¹⁷ The Kehillah, according to the Morgen Journal, was frightened of the Federation, and was attempting to destroy it. In one instance, it was alleged, a rabbi who was active in the Federation was offered a bribe to cease his activities. If the Kehillah persisted in such actions, warned the Morgen Journal, it would publish the name of the rabbi as well as a letter he had received from the Kehillah attempting to bribe him. The newspaper praised Rav Velvele for his leadership role in the Federation, and wrote that his purpose was not to fight anyone, nor to attract anyone away from Reform, but rather, to unite the traditional community. However, it wrote, the Federation would strongly oppose any attempts by Reform leaders to undermine Jewish institutions. Orthodox rabbis who cooperated

with the Kehillah were also sharply criticized for having, in effect, appointed Dr. Magnes to be their Chief Rabbi!¹⁸

The founding of Rav Velvele's Federation roughly coincided with the beginning of the Kehillah's system of kashrut supervision, overseen by its Vaad Harabbonim. In December, 1912, about a month after the system began to be implemented, Isaac Allen, the Kehillah's lawyer, suggested the formation of a Federation of Synagogues, which, independent of the Kehillah, would handle Jewish religious affairs in the city, and reduce the possibility of having inter-congregational tensions interfere with the functioning of the Vaad.¹⁹ On December 15, 1912, the Kehillah held a meeting at the Oheb Zedek shul, calling for the formation of such a federation. Among the speakers were R. S. E. Jaffe and Ramaz Margolies. The Morgen Journal reported that barely one hundred people attended the meeting, and that it aroused little interest in the community. At the meeting, Isaac Allen raised the issue of the newly formed Federation of Orthodox Jews. He asked why it was being ignored at the meeting, seeing that it had such a wide following in the Orthodox community, which indicated that the Kehillah was not universally accepted as representing the community. He argued that the Kehillah had been organized as a reaction to Commissioner Bingham's report, and so should have been only a political and philanthropic organization. Now that it had become involved in kashrut, education and other religious matters, it was meeting with strong opposition from the Orthodox element in the city. To ignore this opposition, he

said, would not make it disappear. Therefore, he proposed that the Kehillah meet the chairman of the Federation to discuss their differences. Allen's proposal, however, was not adopted.²⁰

The Federation of Orthodox Jews continued to hold meetings in various synagogues into January, 1913,²¹ but does not seem to have existed much longer than that. In an essay he wrote in 1924, Rav Velvele presented a brief history of the Federation, and explained its demise. He wrote that four hundred members signed up, from whom two hundred twenty-five dollars were collected. With this money, Rav Velvele had to finance a journal and pamphlets published by the Federation, and so, very little was left to support the activities of its rabbis in strengthening halachic observance, and so, it eventually ceased to exist. The remaining money was used by Rav Velvele to pay a number of local rabbis to supervise some butcher shops.²²

A closer look at events of the time, however, seems to reveal that the loss of reputation, as well as the mental anguish which Rav Velvele suffered as a result of certain events in Rochester, were major factors in the demise of his Federation. As we have seen, the Kehillah was strongly opposed to the Federation, and reportedly used quite un-orthodox methods in combating it. In February, 1913, an opportunity arose to totally discredit Rav Velvele's standing in the community, and it was quickly seized upon by some rabbis belonging to the Kehillah. The incident was related to the Rochester Vaad Hakashrut, which Rav Velvele had helped establish in 1910.²³

The Rochester Vaad was, as we have noted, created in 1910 to efficiently organize all matters of Kashrut in the city. Its major innovation was that shochtim were to be appointed by the Vaad, rather than by the butchers, as had been the case in the past. Under the new system, if any shochet slaughtered an animal without having been approved by the Vaad, the meat would be considered non-kosher. Another rule was that meat dealers pay the Vaad a fee for the shochtim, for Kashrut supervision and other services involved in Kashrut. The shochtim and supervisors would be paid from the monies collected through the Fund, rather than being paid directly by the butchers, thus eliminating an obvious opportunity for abuse of Kashrut laws. The Vaad, as we have seen, was organized by Rabbi Sadowsky, and approved by eight local congregations.

Rabbi Sadowsky invited Rav Velvele to come to Rochester to examine the details of the Vaad. He came in December, 1910, studied the rules, approved of them. In an addendum to the rules, he wrote that any shochet or butcher who violated the rules, even with the help of a rabbi, would thereby commit a serious transgression, as a result of which his meat would be considered non-kosher, and he will no longer be trusted to sell meat.

The Vaad ran smoothly for about two years, but, in early 1913, a group of butchers, the Lapidés brothers, who were unhappy with the Vaad's rules, imported their own rabbi, Rabbi Shlomo Levin, recently arrived from Russia, to lead a small synagogue

they owned, and act as the supervising rabbi for their butcher shops. These butchers thereby bypassed the laws of the Vaad. They were opposed by twelve shoctim in the city, who claimed that they were sustaining a financial loss as a result of these butcher's activities. Opposition was also voiced by the rabbinical leaders of the Vaad, who felt that kashrut was being compromised because Rabbi Levin as well as the shoctim he supervised were subservient to the Lapides brothers. To mediate the quarrel, the community invited Rabbi Avraham A. Yudelevitch, who had replaced Rav Velvele as the rabbi of the Baldwin Place Synagogue in Boston, to come to Rochester to offer an independent opinion. Although at first Rabbi Yudelevitch was inclined to decide against the Lapides brothers, after further consideration he supported them. The community then invited Rav Velvele to come to Rochester to investigate the matter. He declared that the Lapides brothers had acted in defiance of the Vaad Hakashrut, whose rules, having been accepted by the entire Rochester community, constituted a public vow, which could not be rescinded. Moreover, he ruled, the shoctim employed by the Lapides brothers were engaged in ruinous competition, which constituted a prohibition of rabbinic law. The Lapides brothers then brought in Rabbis Jacob Eskolsky and Menachem Guzik from New York City to make their own investigation.²⁴ Their decision was dramatically announced in the Lapides' synagogue one Sabbath in February, 1913. The two rabbis, together with Rabbi Levin, issued a decree of cherem, or excommunication, against all those

who declared the Lapidès' meat to be non-kosher, namely, Rav Velvele and Rabbi Sadowsky. A satirical account of the proceedings at the synagogue appeared on the front page of the Tageblatt. Appended to the article was an editor's note, deploring the whole affair and berating both sides for acting out of self-interest, rather than the wider interest of the Jewish community, and thereby alienating some Jews from kashrut observance.²⁴

Rav Velvele was understandably incensed by the action taken against him by Rabbis Eskolsky, Guzik and Levin, as well as by the decision against him by Rabbi Yudelevitch and the article in the Tageblatt. He was especially angered with R. Yudelevitch, who, he said, fanned the flames of controversy by supporting the Lapidès brothers. Rav Velvele also sharply criticized the Tageblatt for its cynical article on the affair, and prepared a circular to be sent to that newspaper, explaining what really happened in Rochester. He warned that if the newspaper did not print his account as a page-one story, as had been the original article, he would take it to court for libel.²⁵ The Tageblatt, however, did not print the text of the circular. Instead, it printed, on March 6, on page seven of the newspaper, a letter from Rabbi Sadowsky, objecting to the earlier article, and presenting his version of the facts. It is unclear if Rav Velvele ever sued the Tageblatt for libel, but he did have a court trial with the newspaper two years later.²⁶

In a fascinating series of letters to Rabbi Sadowsky, Rav

Velvele discussed his reaction to the cherem issued against him and the article about it in the Tageblatt, and gave his opinion of the various rabbis involved in the affair. Interestingly, he wrote very warmly of Ramaz Margolies, whom he had asked to come to Rochester together with Rabbi Hillel Klein to further investigate the case. In fact, Rav Velvele, a few weeks earlier, had spent a few days in Hartford, Connecticut, together with Ramaz, inspecting the kashrut situation there.²⁷ This warm relationship, however, did not continue much longer, as we will see. In one of his letters on the Rochester controversy, Rav Velvele directed Rabbi Sadowsky to mention, in the proposed circular, Magnes' Kehillah and its attempt to certify butcher shops throughout New York City with standardized signs. This may indicate a suspicion on Rav Velvele's part that the Kehillah was behind the actions taken against him in Rochester. Rabbis Eskolsky and Guzik were, in fact, prominent members of the Kehillah's Vaad Harabbonim. It may well be, then, that the cherem issued by them against Rav Velvele was part of an attempt by the Kehillah to discredit him and thereby render ineffective his Federation of Orthodox Jews. In a correspondence with Magnes, beginning in January, 1913, Dr. M. J. Bernis, head of the Rochester kehillah, related the attempt of the Lapidés brothers to break up the Vaad Hakashrut, and mentioned a report that the brothers were attempting to bring R. Jaffe to Rochester to decide the case. Bernis, in his letter, asked Magnes to prevent the trip. Magnes replied that he had spoken to R. Jaffe, and was

told by him that he would only go to Rochester if asked by both parties, and only for positive purposes.²⁸ It is perhaps for this reason that R. Eskolsky went instead of R. Jaffe. Magnes, apparently, was not interested in sending a delegation to Rochester. The delegation was sent, rather, by the Vaad Harabbonim, which certainly had an interest in destroying Rav Velvele's reputation. In fact, in a letter written to Rabbi Sadowsky, on February 28, 1913, Raphael Goldberg, a shochet who was a guest at Rav Velvele's residence in New York, wrote of the damage done to Rav Velvele's reputation by the action of the rabbis in Rochester, who, he said, were led by "the known troubler of Israel, the head of the Vaad Harabbonim."²⁹ The demise of Rav Velvele's Federation, then, may have been due to causes other than the mere shortage of funds.

B. Confronting the Shochtim and the Agudat Harabbonim

After the demise of the Federation, a number of Rav Velvele's rabbinic colleagues suggested that, with the left-over funds, he should organize a few rabbis to supervise kashrut in butcher shops in his neighborhood on the Lower East Side. Rav Velvele agreed, and, with the remaining funds, together with an occasional payment of a penny or two per head of chicken slaughtered, Rav Velvele supported the supervising activities of various rabbis for about two years until 1915, when he assumed the position of chief kashrut supervisor at Nagel Pack Company in Hoboken, New Jersey.³⁰

Rav Velvele's organization for kashrut supervision in his neighborhood was helped along by an important development in 1913. In July of that year, a number of shochtim decided to join the Union of Live Poultry Workers. This move was denounced by the Agudat Harabbonim that summer,³¹ as well as by the Morgen Journal. An editorial in that newspaper argued that the shochtim must follow Jewish law, not the law of the unions. If there would be a clash between the demands of the halacha and the demands of the union, the halacha would have to be followed, and this would place the union members in a dilemma.³² A few days after this editorial appeared, several shochtim published a notice in the newspaper, stating that by joining the union they did not intend to bypass the Shulchan Aruch, but, rather, to strengthen their observance of it. To that end, they invited Rav

Velvele, Ramaz and Rabbi Klein to inspect them in order to verify their fitness for their jobs.³³ Rav Velvele, soon afterward, issued a notice that he was willing to accept the invitation of the shochtim.³⁴ Later that year, another notice appeared, listing the butcher shops which Rav Velvele had agreed to supervise, in connection with the shochtim he had inspected.³⁵ Apparently, then, these were the shops he was referring to in the second volume of Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, in discussing the kashrut organization he formed using the funds left over from the Federation. What is important here is that Rav Velvele, in effect, acquiesced to the shochtim joining the union, a move which would soon take on great significance.

In the winter of 1913-14, the Union of Poultry Workers decided to declare a strike. The Jewish Daily Forward, curious as to the cause of the strike, decided to make an investigation of the working conditions existent in the local chicken markets. The investigation revealed that the shochtim and other workers in the markets were putting in fourteen or fifteen hours of work a day. Moreover, the newspaper reported that kashrut standards were extremely low, with sick, and sometimes dead, chickens being slaughtered and then passed off as being kosher.³⁶ When Rav Velvele learned of this situation, he decided to make his own investigation, and, so, called for a meeting of sixteen rabbis at the Adath Israel, to hear testimony on the matter. He found that conditions were even worse than had been reported in the Forward. For example, he learned that shochtim who refused to follow their

bosses' orders to slaughter dead chickens were fired and replaced by non-Jewish workers. Rav Velvele then issued a notice, together with the other rabbis who were at the meeting, to the effect that, until improvements were made, chickens coming from the markets in question could not be considered kosher. The entire drama was played out on the pages of the Forward, to which Rav Velvele granted an interview to discuss the matter.³⁷

Rav Velvele's decision to grant an interview to the Forward and publicize his findings in that newspaper, which was not especially known for its fondness towards traditional Judaism, came, according to the Forward, after the religious newspapers in the city refused to cover the story.³⁸ In fact, shortly after the Forward reported on Rav Velvele's investigation and his committee's decision about the markets, the Agudat Harabbonim's leaders, including R. Jaffe, Ramaz and Rabbi Klein, published a notice in the Tageblatt and Morgen Journal, saying that the downtown chicken markets were reliable, and that the uptown markets needed only some minor improvements.³⁹ Interestingly, this statement echoed remarks made by R. Jaffe in his interview with the Wechter the previous year.⁴⁰ In reaction to the notice, Rav Velvele sent a letter to the Forward, denouncing its claims, and declaring that R. Jaffe's actions in this matter were more harmful than those of the missionaries. This letter, together with an article about the entire issue, appeared on the front page of the Forward, as had the newspaper's previous article about the meeting Rav Velvele held at the Adath Israel.⁴¹ In an

editorial printed shortly after the original story broke, the Forward remarked that although, by policy, the newspaper did not care if people ate kosher or not, still, if Jews were paying hard-earned money to get kosher meat, they should get what they paid for. The only way for religious Jews to protect their interests, concluded the editorial, was through socialism and the unions.⁴² Rav Velvele, too, declared at his meeting that the workers should utilize the unions, and the shochtim should work with the rabbis, so that, together, they would rid the current system of its abuses..⁴³

Rav Velvele's continued recourse to the anti-religious Forward, on the one hand, and the insistence of the Vaad Harabbonim that the chicken markets were reliable, on the other hand, led both factions to hold special meetings on the matter on January 28, 1914. At the meeting called by Rav Velvele, held at the Pike Street synagogue, Rabbis Alter Shaul Pfeffer and Moshe Rosen reported that Rav Velvele's investigation revealed that the bosses forced the shochtim to slaughter at such rapid speed that 25 to 40 percent of the chickens which came from these markets were not kosher. These charges were made by the shochtim in the presence of the market bosses, who were unable to deny the allegations. Another speaker expressed the opinion that the only way to assure the kashrut of the chicken markets was to appoint a full-time supervisor to be there. It was also pointed out that R. Jaffe, who now claimed that the markets were reliable, had earlier said that improvements were needed. Since no

improvements had been made, it was asked, how could he now say that the markets were reliable? Rav Velvele, in his speech, said that the shochtim should be freed from the control of the bosses. Supervision of the shochtim and the markets should be in the hands of religious laymen, who would work closely with the supervising rabbis. Such a system would prevent the phenomenon of Italian workers taking the place of shochtim from occurring. In the meantime, he said, the markets were still unreliable. He hoped, however, to make improvements within a week, after which he would try to make improvements in the meat markets, as well.⁴⁴

The Vaad Harabbonim held its January 28th meeting in the Beth Medrash Hagadol synagogue, whose spiritual head was Rabbi Jaffe. At the meeting, leaders of the Vaad reiterated their belief that the chicken markets were reliable. The major speakers were Rabbis Jaffe and Hillel Klein. The chairman of the meeting, Mr. S. Robinson, in a short speech, attacked Rav Velvele, saying that, only a few weeks earlier, he had published a notice that the shochtim in the chicken markets were reliable. The markets, Rav Velvele had written, thus had a "chezkat kashrut", a presumption of being kosher, and therefore did not require supervision. How, then, asked Robinson, could he now claim that the markets are not reliable? Rav Velvele, however, on his part, had subsequently published a disclaimer, saying that the notice had been issued before his recent investigation of the situation in the markets.

Rabbi Klein, in his remarks at the meeting, said that he did

not doubt Rav Velvele's good intentions, but, still, he should not have used the Forward, an enemy of the Jewish religion, as the forum for his views on kashrut in the city. Any association with the Forward, which sought to bury all of the foundations of the Jewish religion, could bring no good. Moreover, Rav Velvele was casting aspersion on the fine, trustworthy shochtim in the city, whose slaughtering was without a doubt kosher. The only potential problem, said Rabbi Klein, was that of mixing up non-kosher and kosher-slaughtered chickens on the one day of the week on which non-kosher slaughtering was permitted. However, that, too, was capable of being controlled. Butchers who were truly religious could come to the market and have the shochtim slaughter in their presence. Alternatively, the shochtim could put kosher-slaughtered chickens into a separate sack. Jews interested in kashrut would buy only from butchers who had rabbinical certification. The major problem, he said, was those butchers who used unauthorized "kosher meat" signs to fool the public.

Rabbi Jaffe spoke in a much stronger tone than did Rabbi Klein. He accused Rav Velvele of having ulterior motives in banning the chicken markets, and also said that the investigation Rav Velvele had made was invalid, because those who testified were interested parties, and, therefore, unreliable. He also said that the public perception that the kashrut system in America was in disorder was incorrect. The shochtim in New York, he said, were better than those in the Ukraine, and their

slaughtering in New York was more orderly than in Vilna, where they slaughtered at a faster pace than in New York. He concluded by saying that those shochtim who wish to join the poultry workers and enter their union, which is under the supervision of the Forward, thereby lose their "chezkat kashrut", and the animals they slaughtered would be considered non-kosher.⁴⁵

The agitation against Rav Velvele reached its peak on February 6, 1914, when a notice, entitled "A Torah Scholar Who Turned Bad", issued by Rabbis Jaffe, Bernard Levinthal, and David Ginzberg, all identifying themselves as officials in the Agudat Harabbonim, appeared in the Tageblatt. The notice began by mentioning the declaration made at the convention of the Agudat Harabbonim in July, 1913, opposing the participation of shochtim in a worker's union, because it compromised kashrut standards and would lead to chaos. Now, however, the notice continued, Rabbi Margolis has come out against the position of the Agudat Harabbonim, and declared forbidden anything slaughtered by shochtim who did not join the labor union together with the poultry workers. Moreover, his declaration was printed, along with abusive statements against several great rabbis, in a newspaper which attempts to destroy the Jewish religion in all areas. Therefore, he was being served a warning to desist from these actions. Until such time as he did, his halachic decisions cannot be considered authoritative.⁴⁶

The Vaad Hakashrut organized by Rav Velvele with the funds left over from his Federation, then, had a much more complicated

history than was indicated by Rav Velvele in his 1924 essay. Because Rav Velvele was opposed by the Agudat Harabbonim in his attempt to improve kashrut standards in the chicken markets, his efforts met with little success. Shochtim were obviously more willing to place themselves under the more lenient standards of the Agudat Harabbonim than under Rav Velvele.⁴⁷ Moreover, the negative publicity he received in connection with his investigation of the chicken markets, as well as the Rochester affair, did not enhance his standing in the community. His Vaad controlled very few poultry establishments, and lasted for only about two years. In 1915, when Rav Velvele was appointed as chief kashrut inspector of Nagel Packing Company in Hoboken, New Jersey, his Vaad Hakashrut on the Lower East Side became defunct. In Hoboken, Rav Velvele's son, R. Menashe, a scholar in his own right, supervised the daily functioning of operations, while Rav Velvele visited weekly, and served as the halachic consultant.

Rav Velvele's experience with New York's shochtim in 1914 helped determine his policy towards them in subsequent years. His investigation in January, 1914, revealed that many of the shochtim were aware of the abuses going on in the markets, but would not do anything about the situation because they feared for their jobs.⁴⁸ When the Agudat Harabbonim declared its approval of conditions in the markets, most shochtim, as mentioned, placed themselves under the supervision of the approving rabbis. When, in future years, shochtim declared strikes to increase their wages, Rav Velvele opposed them. He felt that the shochtim were

motivated by self-interest, and not by a desire for improvement of kashrut standards, which, they claimed, would come as a result of better working conditions. Had they truly been interested in improving kashrut standards, they would not have placed themselves under the supervision of the Agudat Harabbonim.⁴⁷

Rav Velvele's negative view of the Agudat Harabbonim was greatly reinforced by his clash with them in 1914. He would later write that from the time he first came to America, he had suspected the organization of being interested primarily in political power and monetary gain,⁴⁹ and his experience with them in the matter of the shochtim certainly supported his suspicion. The events of 1914 also convinced him that the notion of a union was not a Jewish concept. Although at first he supported the efforts of the shochtim who joined the union, after witnessing the abuses which it engendered, he rejected it. Interestingly, the Agudat Harabbonim changed in the opposite direction. Although at first it was strongly opposed to the participation of the shochtim in a union, it later softened its position.⁵⁰ Rav Velvele, however, as mentioned, turned against the concept, and would later criticize the Agudat Harabbonim for choosing the name "Agudah", which meant union, and indicated that it was, in fact, a profit-seeking organization!⁵¹ It is significant, however, that Rav Velvele was initially prepared to accept the institution of the union as a vehicle to improve kashrut conditions, and only rejected it when it proved to be counter-productive. This willingness indicates that, although he was determined to resist

the forces of change which he felt would erode traditional Judaism, he was ready to utilize modern devices to promote Jewish interests. In the case of the unions, this is all the more significant, because, in Russia, striking unions had generated a great number of government-promoted anti-Semitic attacks, and had, in general, contributed to the breakdown of the Jewish community.⁵² Rav Velvele's support of the union, however, as we have seen, did not last very long.

The Kehillah's Vaad Harabbonim, meanwhile, became increasingly dissatisfied with its parent organization. Particularly in the area of Jewish education, but in other matters as well, the rabbis felt that their demands were being ignored. Consequently, in April, 1914, at the fifth annual convention of the Kehillah, the Vaad declared itself to be an independent organization, and changed its name from the Vaad Harabbonim of the Kehillah to the Vaad Harabbonim of New York.⁵³ Still, the Kehillah maintained a connection with the Vaad, by appointing a special committee on the affairs of the Vaad. Rabbi Jacob Kohn of the Kehillah opposed the creation of this committee, because, he felt, other elements in the community, namely Conservative and Reform rabbis, could not be ignored. Rather, the Kehillah should appoint a committee on religious affairs, in which all groups would be represented. This motion, although supported by Louis Marshall, was strongly opposed by the orthodox element. Rabbi Glick, secretary of the Vaad, said that if the Kehillah wanted to be recognized by the Orthodox

community, it would have to turn to the Vaad, whether or not it was technically part of the Kehillah.⁵⁴

In May, 1914, a group of about eighty rabbis, mostly from the Agudat Harabbonim and the Vaad Harabbonim, met in New York at a conference to discuss some vital problems facing the Jewish community. Chief among these problems was the perceived threat posed by the recently organized United Synagogue of America, as well as by the Jewish Theological Seminary. Another major issue was the activities of the Bureau of Jewish Education, and the improvement of the Talmud Torah schools. At the conference, it was proposed that the two rabbinic organizations join forces in dealing with these problems.⁵⁵

The rabbis charged that J.T.S. was misleading observant Jews into thinking that it was a traditional Orthodox institution, whose graduates were qualified to be rabbinic leaders. They also complained that the United Synagogue included houses of worship which could not qualify as being Orthodox, and that the Jewish public had to be made aware of this. A long debate ensued, with the various rabbis offering their varied definitions of what constitutes an Orthodox synagogue. Ramaz Margolies declared that a synagogue which does not follow the laws of the Shulchan Aruch cannot be considered Orthodox. Specifically, he said, the sale of synagogue tickets on the Sabbath, failure to follow the proper times for prayer, and the mixed seating of men and women were all halachic violations which would disqualify a synagogue from being Orthodox.⁵⁶ In discussing Jewish education, Rabbi S. E. Jaffe

charged that the principal of one of the Bureau's Talmud Torah's had been a missionary in Europe. A resolution declared that the Bureau was not under competent rabbinical supervision. Rabbi Israel Rosenberg, a leader of the Agudat Harabbonim, encouraged the strengthening of the Talmud Torahs, and especially urged an increase in the amount of time spent on the study of Talmud in these schools.⁵⁷

At the first session of the conference, on May 19, Rabbi Jacob Eskolsky proposed that a special committee be appointed to personally invite Rav G. Z. Margolis to the conference. The rabbis rejected the proposal, saying they had other things to discuss.⁵⁸ Rav Velvele, who had decided not to attend the conference because of the participation of certain rabbis there, was prompted by his friend, Jacob Saphirstein, to send a letter to the conference,⁵⁹ explaining his position on the problems being considered there. The letter was circulated at the third session of the conference, and reprinted by Saphirstein in the Morgen Journal.

Rav Velvele, in his letter, explained his position on the rabbis' campaign against "reform" elements in Judaism. Throughout the letter, he failed to distinguish between the radical practices of the Reform movement, such as switching the Sabbath to Sunday, and the less drastic changes advocated by graduates of the J.T.S. Rav Velvele included them all in the generic term "reform". He wrote that the conference's campaign against "reformers" was useless and futile. The best approach,

he felt, was simply to ignore the "reformers", who, in any case, would pay no attention to the complaints of the rabbis. As far as the threat posed to traditional Jewry by the less radical "reformers", he wrote, sincerely observant Jews would not be misled by them. It was only because certain Orthodox rabbis had attempted to cooperate with reform elements and thereby given them credibility, he continued, that any threat existed. Rav Velvele was apparently referring, in these remarks, to the Vaad Harabbonim's connection with the Kehilah, which had recently been severed.

The major message which Rav Velvele sent the conference was his hope that it would not follow the pattern of other such gatherings held in America. Rabbinic conventions in America, he wrote, accomplish nothing besides gaining publicity for their participants. Empty resolutions are passed, but no action is taken on them. If the rabbis at the convention are truly interested in improving the condition of traditional Jewish life in America, they should commit themselves to working on a number of major areas which were widely neglected. Among them, Rav Velvele mentioned the area of Sabbath observance. He suggested that, rather than attempting to force people to observe the Sabbath, aid should be offered to enable those who truly wish to observe it to do so. The "reformers", however, who replace the Sabbath with Sunday, don't deserve to be challenged. Jewish education also needed to be strengthened and properly oriented, without deviation from Jewish tradition. Also, factories which

produce invalid tefillin and mezuzot should be shut down, and improvements were necessary in the areas of marriage, divorce, conversion, mikvaot and kashrut. Finally, steps must be taken to assure that rabbis receive adequate salaries.

After listing the areas of Jewish life which required improvement, Rav Velvele wrote that if the rabbis at the conference would follow his advice, he could set up, in no more than three months, an effective method of kashrut supervision which would also generate sufficient funds for the participating rabbis to earn a respectable income, thereby bolstering the image of the rabbinate.⁶⁰

Although Rav Velvele's letter circulated among the rabbis at the conference and, reportedly, aroused great interest, his proposals were not formally discussed. The assembled rabbis passed a resolution to publish a strong protest against the United Synagogue, the Jewish Theological Seminary and their financial supporters. Beyond that resolution, however, nothing was decided at the conference.⁶¹

Although Rav Velvele's proposal to form a central system for kashrut supervision was not adopted by the rabbis at the 1914 conference, a year later the Kehillah attempted to form such a system, and sought Rav Velvele's cooperation. This attempt was made in connection with a new law which had been passed in Albany. In April, 1915, the New York State legislature added to section 435 of the Penal Law, entitled "False Labels and Misrepresentations in the Sale of Food Products," a new

subdivision, "4," which dealt with kosher products. The new law, chapter 235 of the "Law of 1915," read, "A person who with intent to defraud, sells or exposes for sale any meat or meat preparation and falsely represents the same to be kosher or as having been prepared under and of a product or products sanctioned by the orthodox Hebrew requirements, or falsely represents any food product or the contents of any package or container to be so constituted and prepared, by having or permitting to be inscribed thereon the word "kosher" in any language, is guilty of a misdemeanor."⁶² This new law, known popularly as the "Kosher Bill," was greeted with much enthusiasm in the Jewish community. Rav Velvele, as well, welcomed the law, and, speaking to the Albany Jewish community shortly after the law's passage, encouraged his audience to support its enforcement.⁶³ How to enforce the law, however, was not a simple matter. The government agencies which enforced the general cases of fraud had no experience in the area of kashrut, and, so, other means had to be found. At the convention of the Kehillah in 1915, Dr. Magnes suggested that a committee of one hundred laymen be appointed to organize a Federation of Orthodox Congregations, which would aid law enforcement officials in implementing the new bill.⁶⁴

The Committee of One Hundred Laymen, headed by Nathan Lamport, decided to organize a beit din, consisting of five of the most prominent rabbis in the city, to decide on matters of kashrut. Among those invited to serve on this beit din was Rav

Velvele.⁶⁵ It is unclear whether he ever agreed to serve on the beit din, but, by March, 1916, he definitely had no connection with it. At that time, Rav Velvele was chosen by the Federation of Retail Butchers Association of Greater New York, which included ten local organizations, stemming from all five boroughs of New York, to serve as its Chief Rabbi.⁶⁶ Shortly afterward, he organized a new Vaad Hakashrut to regulate the operations of those butchers under his supervision. The rabbis who joined Rav Velvele in the Vaad included several who had worked with him in the Federation of Orthodox Jews and the Vaad Hakashrut he set up after the Federation's demise. Among these rabbis was Rabbi Alter Shaul Pfeffer, rabbi of the Maromrosher synagogue and a prominent halachic authority, who was to author a multi-volume work of responsa entitled Avnei Zikaron.⁶⁷ Other prominent rabbis in the city, too, were apparently more interested in protecting their kashrut enclaves than assisting the Kehillah in its enforcement efforts. Ramaz Margolies, for example, announced the formation of his Uptown Vaad Hakashrut on the same day on which Rav Velvele announced the formation of his Vaad.⁶⁸ This lack of cooperation with the Kehillah prevented the success of its projected program for enforcement of the Kosher Bill. There is no evidence that the Federation of Orthodox Synagogues was ever formed, and the plan for kashrut supervision definitely did not materialize. The Kehillah never again attempted such an all-inclusive, city-wide program for kashrut regulation.⁶⁹

The background for the formation of the Federation of Retail

Butchers, and Rav Velvele's appointment as its Chief Rabbi, was a shochtim strike which had been called earlier in 1916. The shochtim demanded a half-penny surcharge for each chicken slaughtered, in place of the weekly wages, which had been their previous form of income.⁷⁰ Actually, a similar scenario had played itself out in New York several years earlier, in the abattoirs supervised by Rabbi Hillel Klein. After the death of Rabbi Jacob Joseph, the shochtim under Rabbi Klein's supervision began to be paid a certain amount per head slaughtered, instead of weekly wages. Rabbi Jacob Widerwitz, however, did not permit this system of payment in the abattoir which he supervised, because of the inevitable abuses which it would lead to. Shochtim, in order to earn more money, would slaughter at a quicker pace, and would attempt to pass off as kosher improperly slaughtered animals.⁷¹ Rav Velvele had similar objections to the surcharge system. Moreover, he objected to the hardship which the Jewish community was subjected to by the unavailability of chickens during the strike.⁷² On March 13, 1916, less than a week after the strike had been settled, the Federation of Jewish Retail Butchers chose Rav Velvele as its Chief Rabbi. Rav Velvele accepted, on the condition that he would be permitted to immediately organize a Vaad Hakashrut which would implement an efficient system of supervision. The Vaad Hakashrut would consist of representatives of the Adath Israel, the Federation of Jewish Butchers, and prominent laymen and rabbis, with Rav Velvele at its head.⁷³

Shortly after accepting his position as Chief Rabbi of the Federation, Rav Velvele published a notice, inviting shoctim to be examined by him as to their qualifications and warned that if any shoctim in the city went on strike, they would be replaced by shoctim approved by him.⁷⁴ At the same time, Rabbi Jacob Eskolsky, in the name of the Vaad Harabbonim, printed a notice in the Yiddish press warning shoctim not to usurp anyone else's position.⁷⁵ On March 22, 1916, the union of chicken shoctim announced that it would continue to demand payment through "shechitah gelt", i.e., payment per head slaughtered, despite Rav Velvele's objection to the system, and that they were supported in their position by all the rabbis of greater New York.⁷⁶ That same day, Rav Velvele formed his Vaad Hakashrut. Among the rules adopted by the Vaad was that whenever shoctim had a grievance, they should settle it through negotiation with the Vaad and the Federation, rather than through a strike.⁷⁷

On March 24, 1916, R. S. E. Jaffe issued a statement that the shoctim in downtown Manhattan had been examined by a group of prominent rabbis, including Rabbis A. Alperstein and Jacob Eskolsky, and had been found to be proficient in their trade, contrary to Rav Velvele's claim that they were incompetent.⁷⁸ On March 26, the shoctim union placed an ad in the Yiddish press, thanking R. Jaffe for his support, and, again, criticizing Rav Velvele for his stance and for the disrespect he showed for the city's rabbis.⁷⁹ R. Velvele then published a statement justifying his actions. He said that he had founded his Vaad

Hakashrut because the "commissioner" had asked the Federation of Butchers why, since they had a Chief Rabbi, he wasn't doing anything about those butchers who were selling non-kosher meat as kosher? Controlling this situation, said Rav Velvele, would be the purpose of his Vaad. He also discussed, in brief, the Committee of One Hundred Laymen. At its last meeting, he claimed, the Committee had issued a list of 54 points to be followed in organizing kashrut in the city. Not a single rabbi had been invited to the meeting, and Rav Velvele saw this as a positive development. The Committee, he said, recognized that laymen could not have a say in halachic matters, and only wanted to light the way for the rabbis, to help them in their work. Hopefully, wrote Rav Velvele, the rabbis in the city would establish a system of kashrut which would serve as an example for the rest of the country.⁸⁰

Rav Velvele's quarrel with the shoctim came to a head shortly before Passover of 1916. At that time, the Union of Poultry Slaughterers, claiming that the butchers had not fulfilled their agreement to pay them through shechitah gelt, and declaring that the wages they received were not sufficient for them to provide adequately for their families' holiday needs, called a strike.⁸¹ As expected, Rav Velvele opposed the strike. He said that the shoctim were acting against the halacha which required shoctim to slaughter on demand before the onset of a holiday. Moreover, to strike at such a time placed a hardship on the community, which would not have chickens for their holiday

meals. To avoid this eventuality, Rav Velvele said that he would replace every striking shochet with a new one, who would be given a one-year contract.⁸²

Rav Velvele's anti-strike position met with sharp opposition from shochtim as well as a number of prominent rabbis. Rabbi Yakov Yitzchak Estersohn, leader of the Chochmat Adam synagogue on the Lower East Side, was perhaps Rav Velvele's strongest critic. He wrote that Rav Velvele knowingly misinterpreted the Talmudic statement upon which he had based his ruling. The halacha, explained R. Estersohn, refers to the finalization of an act of acquisition that had been initiated before the onset of the holiday, and in no way required a shochet to slaughter on demand during the holiday, as Rav Velvele had claimed. By willfully misrepresenting the halacha, wrote R. Estersohn, Rav Velvele had committed a grave transgression which, according to the Mishnah, incurred the penalty of loss one's portion in the World to Come.⁸³ In a letter to the editor of the Morgen Journal, R. Estersohn was criticized for saying such things about a rabbi as great as Rav Velvele, and was urged to ask Rav Velvele for forgiveness.⁸⁴ R. Estersohn, in his reply, reiterated his view, and wrote that it was Rav Velvele who should ask forgiveness of the Torah for his wayward actions!⁸⁵ For several weeks, the Morgen Journal continued to print letters to the editor on the issue, some in support of Rav Velvele, and some opposed to him. One writer sent a list of all the controversies Rav Velvele had generated since his arrival in New York in 1911,

and claimed that Rav Velvele was always opposed to attempts to improve the state of religious observance in the city.⁸⁶ On the other hand, R. Alter Shaul Pfeffer, who had been involved with Rav Velvele's projects since the founding of the Federation of Orthodox Jews, wrote a lengthy letter in support of him, explaining that he had suspected the shochtim's motives ever since the events in 1914, when the shochtim sided with the rabbis of the Agudat Harabbonim.⁸⁷

On April 12, 1916, a group of striking shochtim held a meeting of protest against Rav Velvele, and appointed a committee to go to his house to demand justice. Some members of the committee brought their wives and children along, to dramatize their claim that because of the low wages they received, their families would go hungry during the holiday. Rav Velvele, however, refused to speak to the committee, and, when they became unruly, he called a policeman to have them removed from his home.⁸⁸ The next day the Federation of Jewish Butchers published a notice in the Yiddish press, mentioning a market which would be open for business despite the strike, and giving the name of the shochet who would be working there under Rav Velvele's supervision. The Federation asked the public to support Rav Velvele and patronize those establishments which were under his supervision.⁸⁹ Because the shochtim union was not yet very strong, Rav Velvele's opposition to its strike led to its failure.

In an effort to strengthen their position, more shochtim

began to join the union, which was aligned with the Union of Live Poultry Workers. At a convention of the Agudat Harabbonim in May, 1916, Rabbi Bernard Levinthal denounced this development, in line with the policy which that organization had adopted in July, 1913, opposing the entrance of shochtim into the union. By joining the union, said R. Levinthal, the shochtim were cheapening the profession, treating it as any secular trade. Rabbi Jaffe, however, defended the shochtim, saying that although joining the union was not the ideal thing to do, still, it was understandable in light of Rav Velvele's opposition to them. Rav Velvele, he said, was a raging fire, and the union was the only protection available for the shochtim. The Agudat Harabbonim, at the convention, decided to express its sorrow over the economic plight of the shochtim, but noted, as well, that it would attempt to develop a system of kashrut control which would be more in conformity to Jewish law than the one currently in operation.⁹⁰

By 1918, most of the chicken shochtim had joined the union.⁹¹ The Kehillah itself no longer attempted to sponsor independently, a plan to regulate kosher poultry because of its involvement, in 1916, in an attempt to gain a monopoly over the kosher poultry business. Its representative, Dr. Abelson, was indicted by the Grand Jury for his part in the conspiracy, and although he was exonerated soon afterward, the Kehillah suffered great embarrassment over the matter, and decided not to become involved in matters outside its jurisdiction.⁹² There was, however, an attempt, based on a plan originally suggested by the

Kehillah, to regulate kosher poultry in the city. All shechitah fees would be paid into a central fund from which the shochtim and the supervisors would be paid. Butchers were to pay into the fund two cents per head of poultry slaughtered in wholesale houses, and three cents per head slaughtered in retail stores.⁹³ The plan was organized by the Vaad Harabbonim together with the shochtim union, and was also supported by the Agudat Harabbonim U'Matifim, or Association of Rabbis and Preachers, headed by Rabbi Abraham Aaron Yudelevitch, with whom Rav Velvele had crossed swords in 1913 over the Rochester affair.⁹⁴

The plan for charging a surcharge on shechitah was drawn up in May, 1918.⁹⁵ On June 19, the shochtim union, with the support of the two above-mentioned rabbinic organizations, declared a strike to assure that the butchers would pay the surcharge. Any chicken slaughtered after 8:00 a.m. that day was to be considered non-kosher.⁹⁶ Rav Velvele, in the meantime, had already, earlier in June, examined a number of shochtim and, working with the Federation of Jewish Retail Butchers and the United Bronx Butchers Live Poultry Cooperation, Inc., agreed to supervise a number of chicken markets in the Bronx which did not demand the two-cent surcharge.⁹⁷ These markets continued to operate after the strike was called. Advertisements by these butchers declared that they were waging a war against Korobka, the tax which the Russian government used to charge for shechitah.⁹⁸ On June 21, Rav Velvele placed an ad in the Yiddish press, listing markets under his supervision, with the word "kosher," written in bold

letters above the list.⁹⁹ On July 1, the Vaad Harabbonim placed an ad declaring that the markets operating in the Bronx were not under its supervision, and that the rabbi who declared them to be kosher was violating the Torah's rule of following the majority rule, and thereby displaying wanton disregard for the principles of Jewish law.¹⁰⁰ The shoctim, on their part, used a different tactic. On the evening of July 7, scores of them gathered outside the building of the Adath Israel on East Broadway where Rav Velvele lived, to protest his actions. Rav Velvele barricaded the doors with chairs and hid under the furniture, but a few of the shoctim managed to break in. All of the windows in the building were broken, as well as some of the furniture, and Rav Velvele's son, Menashe, and the sexton the Adath Israel, Gershon Gordon, received light wounds. The commotion was heard a few blocks away, and police and an ambulance were called, but, by the time they arrived, the incident had ended. Thereafter, Rav Velvele received police protection.¹⁰¹

On July 9, 1918, the Agudat Harabbonim, at its mid-year convention, called on Rav Velvele to remove his certification from the Bronx markets. Many of the shoctim working there, claimed the rabbis, were incompetent and some were even Sabbath-violators, so that the chickens slaughtered by them were considered non-kosher. The organization issued an ultimatum to Rav Velvele, to end his supervision of the markets by July 10, but he ignored it.¹⁰² He was then given another day to comply, but, again, he refused to remove his supervision. As a result,

on July 11, the Agudat Harabbonim issued a statement, saying that because Rav Velvele had set up his own shochtim, many of whom were incompetent, and because he encroached upon the livelihood of established shochtim and testified against them in non-Jewish courts, the organization had decided that any animals slaughtered under his supervision were to be considered non-kosher; any shochet who works under him will be banned from the profession indefinitely; and that the Adath Israel must remove Rav Velvele from his position as their rabbi because of his irresponsible actions. If the Adath Israel would not comply with this demand, continued the statement, then the Agudat Harabbonim would advise all Jews that they should not belong to the society.¹⁰³ The statement was published in the form of an halachic decision, and was signed by Rabbi Israel Isaacson, the Agudat Harabbonim's secretary, in the name of the organization's members, and was published in the Yiddish press.¹⁰⁴

Reaction to the statement of the Agudat Harabbonim came very quickly. Rav Velvele's old nemesis, Rabbi Y. Estersohn, signed a statement in the name of his synagogue, Chochmat Adam, agreeing with the Agudat Harabbonim's decision and calling on its members to either withdraw their membership in the Adath Israel, or be ejected from membership in the Chochmat Adam synagogue.¹⁰⁵ Rav Velvele, on his part, continued to supervise the Bronx markets, and published a statement that he took responsibility for the shechitah done there. If someone wished to eat from the shechitah of those who attacked him in his home, that was their

business. Moreover, he wrote, a number of rabbis whose names were included in the Agudat Harabbonim's decision told him that this was done without their knowledge.¹⁰⁶ The Adath Israel's directors decided to support Rav Velvele, but some members wrote up a petition opposing him, and calling for an end to the religious disgrace that was resulting from his actions.¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, the Yiddish newspaper Der Groiser Kundes (The Big Stick), a satirical weekly, had claimed in 1911, when Rav Velvele first came to New York, that he had been brought there by the Adath against the wishes of its members, through the influence of Jacob Saphirstein of the Morgen Journal. The members, at that time, according to the Kundes, perceived the Adath's move as part of an attempt to undermine the Kehillah's Vaad Harabbonim.¹⁰⁸

Public opinion, in general, seems to have been overwhelmingly against Rav Velvele, if the Yiddish press of the time can be used as a gauge. In news reports, editorials and letters to the editor, the shoctim's cause was defended.¹⁰⁹ In the interest of free speech, the Yiddish daily Der Tag, although opposed to Rav Velvele, published, on July 25, 1918, an article by Rav Velvele, defending his position. He wrote that the butchers in the Bronx markets had first consulted the unions before hiring Rav Velvele's shoctim, but had been told that the shoctim in the union refused to work under Rav Velvele's supervision even if they would be paid the surcharge which they had been demanding. The butchers were told by the shoctim union that they could hire whomever they wanted to work in the Bronx

markets. In answer to the charge that he was defying the enactments of the city's rabbis, Rav Velvele argued that the rabbis who issued the enactments, declaring the chickens slaughtered during the strike to be non-kosher, were really self-appointed rabbis, not chosen by the laymen of the Jewish community, as had been the tradition in all Jewish communities in Europe. Under this system, the community-appointed rabbi would then appoint the shoctim, deciding whether a particular shochet was or was not qualified for the job. Without appointment by the community's leaders, however, the rabbinate was up for grabs, and anyone could hang up a sign and declare himself to be the rabbi or to be a qualified shochet. If such a rabbi would invalidate a shochet, the shochet could declare himself to be a rabbi, and invalidate the other rabbi! When such a system existed--and, Rav Velvele claimed, it did, indeed, exist in New York--no rabbi or group of rabbis could accuse others of encroaching on their territory or of defying them. Rav Velvele also accused the rabbis of the Agudat Harabbonim who supported the strike of being motivated by self-interest, standing to gain from the two-cent surcharge being demanded. Although these rabbis claimed that they were interested in helping the shoctim and their families, it was ultimately the butchers and the rabbis who would receive the money, not the shoctim. Rav Velvele admitted that his rabbinic opponents were a majority, but, since they were not really qualified to be rabbis, their opinion was not binding. He ended his article by asking whether the striking shoctim were

justified in physically attacking him, thereby necessitating him to have police protection every evening, and whether the community should adopt a plan proposed by shochtim of such character, when a more effective plan to assure the shochtim a respectable livelihood was available.¹¹⁰

In the August 6, 1918 issue of Der Tag, replies to R. Velvele from Rabbis Jaffe and Estersohn were printed. R. Jaffe questioned R. Velvele's competence as an halachic decisor by quoting a ruling in the Shulchan Aruch that members of a particular trade are permitted to place stipulations on the workers in that trade, and, if they are not followed, can confiscate their property. This ruling, argued R. Jaffe, paralleled the situation of the shochtim strike. The shochtim demanded a two cent surcharge, and forbade any shochet to slaughter if that stipulation was not met. It was therefore permissible to declare animals slaughtered during the strike non-kosher, this constituting confiscation of property. The fact that Rav Velvele challenged this ruling demonstrated that he was ignorant of a law derived from a clear Talmudic passage and recorded in the Shulchan Aruch. R. Jaffe also claimed that the markets supervised by Rav Velvele were new ones, and, therefore, by appointing his own shochtim to work there he was encroaching on the rights of the striking shochtim. Moreover, the rabbis of the Agudat Harabbonim who were involved in the Vaad Harabbonim and supported the strike also led congregations, which consisted of laymen, so that they were chosen as rabbis by laymen, and

probably by more than had been Rav Velvele, whose synagogue was very small. Most importantly, argued R. Jaffe, the rabbis supporting the strike had the signatures of the presidents of 175 supporting them. As far as Rav Velvele's claim that the rabbis were being paid for their supervision, R. Jaffe admitted that he was correct, but argued that the impoverished rabbis had a right to be paid for their services. He ended with a message to the laymen of the community, telling them that the rabbis would try to keep them informed of developments in the area of kashrut, that the enemy would be defeated and peace would prevail.

The other respondent to Rav Velvele, Rabbi Estersohn, had written to Dr. Magnes in 1915, advising him on how to successfully run the Kehillah. His major suggestion at that time had been for the Kehillah to impose a yearly tax on the members of the Jewish community to pay for shechitah expenses. These funds, by his calculations, would amount to ten thousand dollars a week. This money would support not only shechitah, but Jewish education as well, and, thus, the two major problems facing the Jewish community would be solved. Kashrut supervision, he proposed, should be in the hands of a group of rabbis chosen by all the rabbis and reverends in the city, together with some prominent laymen. R. Estersohn wrote to Magnes shortly after the passage of the 1915 Kosher Bill. While many rabbis had been enthusiastic about the bill, R. Estersohn was disturbed by it, because of the prospect of violations. He feared that, when taken to court, the violators would claim that they were

qualified to rule on kashrut, and had, in fact, not violated those laws. Without a city-wide system of choosing qualified kashrut supervisors, he felt, the bill would leave kashrut in the same chaotic state it had always been in, and perhaps even worse.^{110a} In short, R. Estersohn's fears were similar to those of R. Velvele. Still, he supported the 1918 strike, and sharply attacked Rav Velvele in his article in Der Tag. Like R. Jaffe, R. Estersohn wrote that, although R. Velvele claimed that he was the only knowledgeable rabbi in the city, his scholarly credentials were actually very deficient. As proof, he mentioned the poor quality of R. Velvele's Torat Gavriel, which he had the effrontery to print alongside the text of the Torah and Rashi's commentary! In answer to Rav Velvele's statement that the striking shochtim had refused to place themselves under Rav Velvele's supervision, even if they would receive the surcharge, R. Estersohn said that the shochtim resented Rav Velvele because, some years before, he had inspected the chicken shochtim and then taken out an ad in the Yiddish press, complaining about their ignorance of the laws of shechitah. In reality, however, wrote R. Estersohn, he would be willing to test the shochtim's knowledge of those laws against Rav Velvele's! To Rav Velvele's argument that the whole issue was simply one of money, namely, whether the butchers or the market-men should pay for the shechitah, R. Estersohn replied that, traditionally, the butcher paid the fee, in downtown Manhattan, Boro Park, and even in the Bronx. Moreover, he wrote, it was a disgrace that a rabbi should

side with the butchers against the shochtim. R. Estersohn ended his article by inviting the Jewish public, its merchants and scholars, to decide who was right in the controversy between the shochtim and their rabbinical supporters, on the one hand, and Rav Velvele, who had brought controversy to the city from the time he came there, on the other.¹¹¹

R. Velvele responded to the letters of Rabbis Jaffe and Estersohn in a lengthy essay included in the second volume of Charuzei Margoliot, which he published in 1919 with the financial assistance of the Adath Israel.¹¹² In the essay, he attacked the Agudat Harabbonim, and especially its president, Rabbi Jaffe, whom he likened to a certain destructive demon mentioned in the Talmud.¹¹³ In response to R. Jaffe's questioning of his rabbinic competence, Rav Velvele wrote that the halacha mentioned by R. Jaffe had no relevance to the current situation. The halacha only permitted shochtim to destroy the skin of an animal slaughtered by a shochet in the city on a day not assigned to him. It did not, however, entitle them to declare forbidden the meat of the animal, if it was properly slaughtered.¹¹⁴ Rav Velvele went on to show that R. Jaffe had misread the entire Talmudic discussion on the matter, and thereby demonstrated that it was he who was incompetent.¹¹⁵ Rav Velvele also printed letters of praise he had received from R. Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk and the Chofetz Chaim, to prove that his scholarship was recognized by the great rabbinic authorities of the time.¹¹⁶ As far as the argument that the rabbinic supporters of the shochtim

constituted a majority, and, therefore, their halachic decision was binding, Rav Velvele wrote that the principle of majority rule had no application in this case, because the conflicting parties did not present their arguments in each other's presence. Moreover, the rabbis of the Vaad Harabbonim were incompetent, and, therefore, their opinion had no halachic validity in the first place.¹¹⁷

Rav Velvele, in his essay, again accused the Vaad Harabbonim and Agudat Harabbonim, in general, and R. Jaffe, in particular, of being motivated by monetary gain.¹¹⁸ He accused Isaac Travis, an oilman from Oklahoma who helped support the shoctim in their strike, of a different ulterior motive. Before the strike, Travis had promised to contribute \$30,000 to help support the shoctim union if the need would arise due to a lack of demand for poultry. He also contributed funds during the second stage of the strike to help the striking shoctim support their families. In all, he contributed over \$50,000. Rav Velvele had been present at negotiations to form the union, and, in August, to end the strike. He wrote that, while travelling in a car with Travis to one of these meetings, Travis admitted to him that his real motive in getting involved with the union was not the improvement of kashrut standards, but, rather, to raise money in order to build a seminary, which would be headed by his son-in-law, Dr. Bernard Revel.¹¹⁹ Travis was referring to RIETS, which had merged, in 1915, with Yeshiva Etz Chaim, and moved to a new location on Montgomery Street. At that time, accounts of the

merger related that RIETS stood for Orthodox Judaism and Americanism, and that it would offer courses in general education and the English language, so that the rabbis it produced would be able to appeal to the youth of America.¹²⁰ Travis was envisioning an expanded program which, he told Rav Velvele, would be similar to that in the Jewish Theological Seminary.¹²¹ Interestingly, Rav Velvele himself had been a speaker at the opening ceremonies at the new location in 1915,¹²² and, therefore, apparently, did not object to RIETS' goal of preparing its students for the American rabbinate. He himself, later in his essay in Charuzei Margoliot, included English language instruction as part of the curriculum for Talmud Torahs in America,¹²³ and had been one of the signatories on a letter appealing for funds for Yeshiva Rabbi Jacob Joseph, which, according to the letter, provided its students with sufficient secular training to qualify for admission to college.¹²⁴ Rav Velvele himself, as we have noted, displayed in his writings, a detailed knowledge of military and political history and a very keen awareness of current events. His specific objections to Travis' envisioned program, as he would later write in 1924, were the study of philosophy, which he had written elsewhere, can undermine religion, and of Bible criticism.¹²⁵ In his 1919 essay, he noted that Travis admitted to him that *haskala* would be taught at the new seminary.¹²⁶ Rav Velvele felt that such a program, besides its intrinsic problems of subject matter, would also sharply reduce the amount of time that students preparing for the rabbinate would devote to the

study of Talmud and halacha. In this respect, he likened the projected seminary to the Vilna Rabbinical seminary, which had been imposed upon the Jews by the Russian government for the purpose of changing the nature of the rabbinate. Students of that seminary received a very deficient Talmudic education and emerged as halachic incompetents.¹²⁷ Rav Velvele suspected that the change in curriculum in RIETS would lead to similar results.¹²⁸ Writing in 1924, Rav Velvele commented that the projected move of RIETS from the Lower East Side to an uptown location was an attempt to hide its activities from the Jewish community. By deviating from the traditional curriculum of the European yeshivot, he wrote, the school forfeited its right to bear the name of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan.¹²⁹ Although he did not write so explicitly, Rav Velvele's criticism, in his 1924 essay, appears to have been directed at the projected Yeshiva College. In a memorandum written in 1925, he criticized the Agudat Harabbonim for its continued support of RIETS, and referred to the institution as a semicha factory.¹³⁰ This criticism of RIETS actually echoed his general criticism of the members of the Agudat Harabbonim in his 1919 essay. These rabbis, he wrote, and especially R. Jaffe had never engaged in an in-depth study of the Shulchan Aruch, and were thus not qualified to render halachic decisions for the Jewish community.¹³¹

Rav Velvele noted, in his essay, that when he first came to Boston, R. Jaffe offered him the presidency of the Agudat Harabbonim, but he declined, because of the deficient scholarship

of the rabbis in the organization, and because he believed that they were motivated by financial and political gain. Rav Velvele also claimed that when the directors of Adath Israel invited him to come to New York, the leaders of the Agudat Harabbonim tried to persuade them to withdraw their offer, apparently in an attempt to maintain their political power in the Jewish community.¹³² The very name Agudah, meaning union, was repulsive to Rav Velvele, because it belonged to the business world, not the rabbinic world. Workers in the same trade, wrote Rav Velvele, join together in a union in order to protect their financial interests. When rabbis join together to work for the community, however, they should call their organization an asifah, or assembly. The Agudat Harabbonim's use of the term union indicated, to Rav Velvele, that the organization was basically a business cooperative, more interested in political and financial control of the Orthodox community than in effecting any real improvement in Jewish life and halachic observance.¹³³ It will be recalled that Rav Velvele himself used the term Agudah as the name for the organization he started in 1912, and that he initially supported the participation of shochtim in the unions. Experience, however, taught him that the unions were primarily interested in money, not in principles, and he therefore withdrew his support from them, and distanced himself from them even to the extent of opposing the use of the term. One of his major objections to the unions, as pointed out in his 1919 essay, was its use of the tactic of the strike. In his opposition to the

shochtim strikes of 1916, he had argued that such action imposes a hardship on the Jewish community. In his 1919 essay, his opposition was more a matter of principle. The image of Jews publicly demonstrating and provoking police response was perceived by him as being detrimental to their interests.¹³⁴ Such activity may have evoked for him the activities of the Jewish Russian revolutionaries, who had caused so much damage to the Jewish community there, and who were partly responsible for his emigration from Russia to America.¹³⁵ As we have noted above, Rav Velvele originally supported the participation of shochtim in the union, but after the events of early 1914, he changed his position.

Rav Velvele went on, in his essay, to call on the religious laymen of New York to follow the pattern of European Jewish communities in ordering the religious affairs of the city. Pious, scholarly laymen, he wrote, should select competent rabbis who would, together with these laymen, select shochtim and supervise them without receiving any remuneration for this service. Under such a system the laymen could feel assured that the meat they bought was kosher. Under the system then current, however, the market men controlled the shochtim, many of whom were unqualified to begin with, as Rav Velvele learned during the strike that year. Moreover, many of the shochtim were not Sabbath-observers, and did not keep kashrut. R. Velvele further wrote that just as the recent war, which had lasted for years and caused great suffering, was now over, and in Versailles a peace

treaty was being prepared to bring order to the world, so, too, now that the shochtim strike was over, order should be brought into kashrut supervision. Therefore, one hundred prominent laymen should be chosen, and they, in turn, should select rabbis, and, together, they should appoint qualified shochtim. Thereby, kashrut standards would be improved, and New York would serve as an example for other American cities.

Rav Velvele then went on to propose the formation of an Assembly of Rabbis to deal with problems currently facing the Jewish community, and suggested a number of improvements in Jewish life for his readers to consider. Among other things, he called for: the establishment and support of more Talmud Torah schools which would teach Bible, Mishnah and Talmud, as well as those secular subjects required by law; the prohibition of speeches under the wedding canopy; the prohibition of conferring the title "Rabbi" on a reformer; the announcement in the synagogue that it is prohibited to eat bread baked by a Jew on the Sabbath, or on the last day of Passover; a prohibition for shochtim to join a union, and, if they did join, the meat they slaughtered would be considered non-kosher. Rav Velvele requested that rabbis who read his essay and agreed with his suggestions should write to him and indicate their agreement, so that he could re-print the list of improvements with their names appended to it.¹³⁶ It is likely that this request for support was not un-related to his call for the creation of an Assembly of Rabbis. Three of the areas dealt with in his list--kashrut,

Sabbath observance and Jewish education--were, in fact, the major issues discussed at the first major convention of the organization which he soon founded,¹³⁷ and which constituted the culmination of all his efforts to organize Jewish life in America--the Knesset Harabbonim, the Assembly of Hebrew Orthodox Rabbis of America and Canada, Inc. The essay in Charuzei Margoliot, then, seems to have been a preliminary step in the creation of this organization. Incensed by the Agudat Harabbonim's attempt, in July, 1918, to disbar him from the rabbinate, Rav Velvele now proceeded to create his own rabbinic organization to challenge their authority and introduce what he felt would be a truly effective plan to solve the problems in the Jewish community which the Agudat Harabbonim had dealt with so ineffectively, and in some cases totally ignored.

Rav Velvele's decision to create a rabbinic organization can be seen as an accommodation to the conditions of American Jewish life. In his 1919 essay, he wrote that the concept of a union of rabbis was an American innovation, unheard of in Europe. A rabbi, he felt should be able to stand on his own credentials, without the backing of other rabbis.¹³⁸ It will be recalled that, in his interview with the Yiddishe Wechter in February, 1912, he had voiced a similar opinion in connection with the Vaad Harabbonim of the Kehillah. If anyone had an halachic problem, he said, he could ask any of the hundreds of rabbis in the city. Why, then, he asked, should there be any need for a Vaad Harabbonim?¹³⁹ In the 1919 essay, he explained what he felt had

been the reason for the creation of the Agudat Harabbonim in 1902. He noted that the organization was founded in 1902 on the day after R. Jacob Joseph was buried. The rabbis decided that they wanted to prevent the importation from Europe of another great rabbinic scholar to serve in a leadership role in America, which, they felt, would constitute an intrusion on their territory. Therefore, they formed the Agudat Harabbonim in order to consolidate and protect their political power within the Jewish community.¹⁴⁰ Their choice of the name "Agudah", meaning union, indicated to Rav Velvele that what they had in mind was a business operation, rather than an organization for the strengthening of halachic observance. The members, however, were unlearned and unqualified to be Jewish leaders. By banding together, wrote Rav Velvele, they were not improving their credentials, because "one hundred times zero still equals zero!"¹⁴¹ Their attempt to disbar him from the rabbinate was an admission that, until then, he was a rabbi. They, however, claimed Rav Velvele, were never rabbis!¹⁴² They had not spent long years studying under the Torah giants in Europe, as he had, and most of them had not served as rabbis in Europe, as he had. R. Jaffe, who had served as rabbi in the Latvian town of Zoimel, had left that town in disgrace.¹⁴³ Moreover, these rabbis helped install their landsleit who had come to America in rabbinic positions for which they too, were unqualified.¹⁴⁴ Such a union of rabbis, wrote Rav Velvele, could only serve to the detriment of the Jewish community. Given the existence of the Agudat

Harabbonim, however, Rav Velvele apparently felt that he needed to create a counter-organization to undo the harm caused by that organization, and deal with the problems in Jewish life that needed to be solved. The name he eventually chose for his organization, the Knesset Harabbonim, had the same meaning as the name he proposed in the essay, Asifat Horabbonim, namely, Assembly of Rabbis. In contrast to a union, which took in members rather indiscriminately, an assembly only accepted as a member people who were invited. Thus, wrote Rav Velvele, he would avoid the situation existing in the Agudat Harabbonim, which was merely a collection of many unlearned rabbis seeking political control and financial gain. His organization would consist of rabbinic scholars who were genuinely concerned with the strengthening of traditional Judaism in America, rather than of rabbinic charlatans motivated by self-interest.¹⁴⁵

C. The Kneset Harabbonim

The Kneset Harabbonim Ha-Ortodoksim d'America V'Kanada, Inc. was incorporated on January 21, 1920.¹⁴⁶ There are indications, however, that it began functioning at an earlier date. For example, when members of the organization met in New York in 1932, the event was referred to, in news reports, as the Kneset's fifteenth annual convention, which would date the first one back to 1918. The 1918 and 1919 "conventions", if they did, in fact, occur, may have been nothing more than meetings of several rabbis with R. Velvle to discuss the proposals he was to present in his 1919 essay. The decision to become an incorporated organization--a step which had not been taken by the Agudat Harabbonim¹⁴⁷--probably came from Rabbi Simon (Yeshaya) Glazer, who was to play a major role in the workings of the Kneset Harabbonim.

Simon Glazer was born on January 21, 1876, in Erzwilken, Lithuania.¹⁴⁸ After an extensive rabbinic education in various Lithuanian yeshivot, he was ordained at age eighteen. He served as a rabbi for a short time in Tapia, near Koenigsberg, and then in Berlin. Rabbi Glazer then moved to Palestine for a short time in 1896, and, later that year, moved to America. In New York, he met the Yiddish newspaper editor, Kasriel Sarasohn, who advised him to study English and various secular subjects, because America needed rabbinic scholars who were also secularly trained. Taking Sarasohn's advice, for the next four years Rabbi Glazer

spent his winters immersed in secular studies, and his summers serving as a cantor and Hebrew teacher in several American cities. He took his first full-time pulpit in Des Moines, Iowa in 1902, and subsequently served in a number of other communities until 1907, when he moved to Montreal, where he served as head of the United Synagogues until 1918. In Montreal, he had partial success in his attempt to centralize the organization of the Orthodox Jewish community.

In 1920, after serving for two years in Seattle, Rabbi Glazer moved to Kansas City, where he headed eight Orthodox synagogues which had recently federated to form the United Synagogues. In Kansas City, he successfully centralized, under the auspices of the United Synagogues, many areas of Jewish life, including education, kashrut supervision and philanthropy. He attributed his success to his decision to place the synagogue in the center of his kehillah organization. The synagogue, he argued, was the only institution capable of representing the entire spectrum of the Jewish community. The focus in other cities, where attempts at forming a kehillah had failed, was on kashrut, or on other less essential factors in Jewish life. The kehillah, Rabbi Glazer felt, must begin its work in the religious, with the synagogue and related programs of Jewish education. If a good educational system would be set up, then a proper attitude to kashrut would be nurtured and effective controls could be established. Another major factor in his success in Kansas City was the fact that he had obtained both

city and state charters for the United Synagogues, something which he had not done in Montreal. Having legal status, the United Synagogues of Kansas City was very effective in implementing its programs.¹⁴⁹ Rabbi Glazer remained in the city until 1923, when he moved to New York City to lead Harlem's Beth Medrash Hagadol.

It is unclear when and how Rabbi Glazer became acquainted with R. Margolis, but their relationship went back to at least 1907, the year in which R. Margolis came to America. The two rabbis corresponded on various halachic issues, and on Jewish life in America, in general.¹⁵⁰ From the correspondence it is clear that Rav Velvele respected Rabbi Glazer as a Torah scholar, frequently relying upon him to execute divorce documents. Rav Velvele would later also have recourse to Rabbi Glazer's political acumen in running the Knesset Harabbonim. From his earliest years as a rabbi in America, Rabbi Glazer was in frequent contact with political leaders, senators and congressmen, mostly in connection with persecuted Jewish communities overseas, newly-arrived Jewish immigrants to America, and events in Palestine.¹⁵¹ It was very likely Rabbi Glazer who advised Rav Velvele to obtain a charter for the Knesset Harabbonim. In the ensuing years, he would often consult with government officials on matters involving that organization.

Rabbi Glazer's political acumen was recognized by the Agudat Harabbonim. It is, therefore, not totally surprising that some rabbis from the organization tried to prevent Rabbi Glazer from

moving to New York in 1923 to become a synagogue rabbi in Harlem,¹⁵² by spreading rumors about the degree of his piety. Rabbi Glazer had been haunted by such charges throughout his rabbinic career in America. Having mastered the English language soon after coming to this country, he was able to appeal to a wide range of people. He became an outspoken proponent of the use of English in sermons, and criticized Eastern European rabbis who did not learn this skill. These rabbis were resentful of his campaign, and tried to discredit him.¹⁵³ Questions were raised about his piety and the extent of his Talmudic scholarship, which he had described at length in an autobiographical introduction to his translation of the Rambam's Mishneh Torah, published in 1927. In that introduction, Rabbi Glazer made a cryptic reference to the accusations made against him.¹⁵⁴ J. D. Eisenstein, in a review of the translation, repeatedly, and often unfairly, criticizes the work, both for its supposed lack of scholarship and its poor English usage.¹⁵⁵ Eisenstein's attitude to Glazer seems to reflect that of establishment Eastern European Orthodoxy in New York, of which he was a part. Glazer's political expertise and facility with the English language, which he put at the disposal of the Knesset Harabbonim, were seen as a threat by the Agudat Harabbonim, which consequently tried to discredit him.

The attempt to keep Rabbi Glazer out of New York, and to generally discredit him, gives credence to Rav Margolis' claim that the Agudat Harabbonim attempted to prevent his own move to New York by trying to persuade the Adath Israel's vice-president,

Mr. Yechiel Dalinski, to choose a rabbi from the Agudat Harabbonim to lead them, rather than R. Margolis.¹⁵⁶ Apparently, the Agudat Harabbonim wished to control Orthodox Jewish life in America, in general, and in New York, in particular, and viewed independent voices, especially those with the abilities of R. Velvele and R. Glazer as threats to their leadership. This attitude was especially pronounced during the era of Prohibition, when the Agudat Harabbonim continually attempted to discredit the Knesset Harabbonim for its role in the handling of sacramental wine, and often claimed that the organization was created solely for the purpose of obtaining wine permits.¹⁵⁷ This accusation was patently false, as a study of Rav Velvele's career and career-long struggle with the Agudat Harabbonim has shown. The factor of Prohibition did, however, definitely add to the membership of the Knesset Harabbonim, and helped make it a formidable challenge to the Agudat Harabbonim's attempted monopoly over Orthodox Jewish life.

The issue of sacramental wine permits followed in the wake of the eighteenth amendment, which went into effect on January 16, 1920.¹⁵⁸ That amendment made illegal the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors. The enforcement of this amendment was provided by the National Prohibition Act, or the Volstead Act. Because of the first amendment right of freedom of religion, allowances were made for the use of wine for sacramental purposes. Section six of the Act, which provided for the allowances, read, in part: "Nothing in this title shall be

held to apply to the manufacture, sale, transportation, importation, possession, or distribution of wine for sacramental purposes or like religious rites.... No person to whom a permit may be issued to manufacture, transport, import or sell wine for sacramental purposes or like religious rites shall sell, barter, exchange, or furnish any such to any person not a rabbi, minister of the gospel, priest, or any officer duly authorized for the purpose by any church or congregation, nor to any such except upon an application duly subscribed by him, which application...shall be filed and preserved by the seller. The head of any conference or diocese or other ecclesiastical jurisdiction may designate any rabbi, minister, or priest to supervise the manufacture of wine to be used for the purposes and rites in this section mentioned, and the purpose so designated may, in the discretion of the Commissioner, be granted a permit to supervise such manufacture." Permits were to be issued by the Bureau of Internal Revenue, part of the Treasury Department, which had been empowered to enforce the Volstead Act. Abuse of these permits was a problem which would soon plague the Jewish community.

In early 1920, a wine permit was issued to the Agudat Harabbonim. This was the only Orthodox group, at first, which received such a permit. The demands which that organization made of individual rabbis to, in turn, receive permits from them were very severe, as noted in letters which R. Velvele received. Some rabbis felt that they were being penalized for not belonging to

the organization.¹⁵⁹ In one particular contract between the head of the Agudat Harabbonim, Ramaz Margolies, and a wine manufacturing concern, Ramaz demanded, as a fee for supervising the wine, 25% of the cost per gallon of wine manufactured, an exorbitant amount.¹⁶⁰ Apparently, the Agudat Harabbonim was exploiting its authorization to grant permits for huge monetary gain, and many rabbis, in need of permits in order to provide wine for their congregations' need, were, in addition to the wine manufacturers themselves, also being exploited. Faced by this situation, many of them turned to Rav Velvele for assistance. R. Velvele was able, in January, 1920, to receive a charter for the Kneset Harabbonim, and finally, in November of that year, the organization was added, by the Treasury Department, to the list of those Jewish groups authorized to grant wine permits.¹⁶¹ Through granting this privilege, Rav Velvele was able to attract members to his organization who may otherwise have aligned with the Agudat Harabbonim. The organization itself, however, was conceived by Rav Velvele independent of the Prohibition factor, as proposed by him in his essay in Charuzei Margoliot.

Beyond the benefit of gaining members for the Kneset Harabbonim through obtaining the right to grant permits, there was, as in the case of the Agudat Harabbonim, a financial consideration, as well. In a letter to Rav Velvele, written in December, 1920, R. Glazer asked for details about the cost of kosher wine, and offered to travel to San Francisco to set up kashrut supervision for the wine business there. From the

letter, it appears that the Knesset Harabbonim had a hand in the business.¹⁶² In a letter written to Rav Velvele on August 8, 1921, by R. Yosef Mein Levin of Cincinnati, who was a prominent member of the Knesset Harabbonim, and who himself operated a kosher wine business out of Cincinnati, it seems that Rabbi Levin's source for wine was R. Velvele's son, Menashe.¹⁶³ In fact, shortly after the Knesset Harabbonim was approved by the Treasury Department to grant permits, notices were issued announcing this development for the information of "all rabbis and wine dealers who make wine for religious purposes". These rabbis were invited to apply for permits to Rav Velvele at his office on 203 East Broadway from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.¹⁶⁴

Not all members of the Knesset Harabbonim, however, joined in order to obtain wine permits. In fact, one member, the famed R. Zvi Hirsch Grodzinski of Omaha, Nebraska, author of many important halachic works, wrote to Rav Velvele in December, 1920, that he should not issue permits to anyone from Omaha, because local wine dealers were abusing the permits and doing illegal business with both Jews and Christians. Several Jews, he wrote, had, in fact, been convicted for these abuses, and the local press wrote that Jews falsely claimed that they needed wine for sacramental purposes, but their only interest was financial gain through illegal wine dealings. R. Grodzinski himself refused to issue permits for this reason, and urged Rav Velvele to similarly refuse anyone from Omaha asking him for a permit.¹⁶⁵ Whatever Rav Velvele's policy was in regard to applicants from Omaha, he did,

in general, grant permits, and as a result, his organization became involved in a number of sacramental wine scandals, one of them the worst to occur during the entire era of Prohibition, namely, the Menorah Wine scandal. It was in connection with this scandal that Ramaz Margolies told a government agent that the Knesset Harabbonim was a bogus organization, created only in order to dispense wine permits, and that it was abusing this privilege.

The Menorah Wine case began in the fall of 1920, when a Jewish olive oil merchant, Nathan Musher, owner of the Continental Distributing Company, arranged to purchase and import from Spain 750,000 gallons of Malaga wine, which had a 24% alcoholic content, double that of ordinary wine.¹⁶⁶ He then appointed Aaron Silverstone of Washington, D.C., whose father, Rabbi Gedaliah Silverstone, was the author of many scholarly works and a member of the Knesset Harabbonim, to grant rabbinic certification for the wine. Musher next attempted to receive wine permits from Ramaz Margolies. When he refused, Musher went to Rav Velvele, who did grant the permits.¹⁶⁷ Ramaz then sent out a notice to the executive committee of the Agudat Harabbonim, informing them that after having investigated the matter of Menorah, or Continental, wine, he could find no way to grant kosher status to that wine.¹⁶⁸ A similar notice also appeared in Der Tag on February 27, 1921. To counter this notice, the Menorah Wine Company issued interviews with Rav Velvele, as well as his erstwhile enemies, Rabbis A. A. Yudelevitch and S. E.

Jaffe, to testify to the kashrut of the wine. These interviews appeared in Der Tag, the Morgen Journal and the Tageblatt.¹⁶⁹ R. Jaffe claimed that Ramaz's opposition to the kashrut of the wine was the result of appeals he had received from wine dealers who feared the competition of Menorah Wine. Moreover, he said, the Agudat Harabbonim wanted to hold a monopoly on wine permits. Rav Velvele, in his remarks, said that the major factor in granting kashrut certification is the character of the owner. Since Mr. Musher was an upstanding Orthodox Jew, whom he knew personally, he could be relied upon to market a kosher product.

Although 250,000 gallons of Menorah wine had been seized by Prohibition officers in March, 1921, at the Menorah Wine Company on the Lower East Side, because it was being sold to anyone wishing to buy it, with or without permits, still, the wine was eventually returned. The New York Times reported that influence was used in Washington to halt the prosecution of the wine distributors and permit them to market the wine for the Passover holiday season.¹⁷⁰ Rav Velvele's granddaughter, Mrs. Joy Adamson of Boston, related in an interview that her grandfather met with the President in the White House in 1921 to discuss the wine issue.¹⁷¹ (Interestingly, a photograph exists showing Rav Velvele together with President Coolidge, in 1926).¹⁷²

An article in The New York Times discussing the Menorah wine scandal, which originally appeared in the Providence Journal, portrayed Rav Velvele in a particularly bad light. Most of the information on Rav Velvele and the Knesset Harabbonim in that

article came from Ramaz Margolies. He told the reporter for the Providence Journal, as well as Prohibition enforcer Izzy Einstein, that Rav Velvele's organization had given permits for the wine, and that Rav Velvele had been chosen by Musher because his last name was the same as Ramaz's. Ramaz also said that the Kneset Harabbonim was a fake organization, created by the Menorah Wine Co. in order to endorse and promote sales of its product. The Agudat Harabbonim claimed, according to the Providence Journal, that hardly a man on the list of members submitted by the Kneset Harabbonim to the Prohibition Commissioner in Washington was a real rabbi. Rav Velvele himself was described as a Hebrew teacher recently arrived from Boston! The article further reported that Rav Velvele's agreement to deal with Menorah Wine and his certification of his organization's rabbis had led to a split with the Agudat Harabbonim that would take years to heal.¹⁷³

Ramaz's assertions about Rav Velvele and the Kneset Harabbonim were willful distortions, which served the purpose of portraying the Agudat Harabbonim as the sole legitimate spokesman of the Orthodox community, and Rav Velvele and his organization as frauds out for monetary gain.¹⁷⁴ As we have shown, the Kneset Harabbonim was founded by Rav Velvele as an outgrowth of a long-standing quarrel with the Agudat Harabbonim, and especially the events of July, 1918. His ability to attract a large number of rabbis to join the Kneset Harabbonim can, however, be attributed, in part, to the conditions of the Volstead Act, along

with the organizing talents of Rabbi Glazer.

The Knesset Harabbonim held its first major convention on February 22-24, 1921, in New York's Broadway Central Hotel. Proceedings of the sessions at the convention were published in the Yiddish press at the time, and later, in 1922, re-printed, with additional material, mostly consisting of letters sent to the organization by its members, and speeches made at the convention, in a pamphlet entitled *Sefer Knesset Harabbonim Ha-Ortodoksim*. The pamphlet was edited by the secretary of the Knesset Harabbonim, Rabbi Yitzchak Leib Epstein, together with Rav Velvele.¹⁷⁵ The organization claimed, in 1921, to have 135 members. In the pamphlet, forty-three members are named, together with the city of residence for thirty-six of them. Many of these rabbis were from Boston and other New England cities, with whom Rav Velvele maintained contact for many years after leaving Boston in 1911. Rav Velvele had, in fact, returned to Boston for two weeks in November, 1911, to set up a Talmud-study group in tandem with one at the Adath Israel in New York. A number of the New England rabbis sent halachic inquiries to Rav Velvele in New York. Rabbis from these states now became members of the Knesset Harabbonim. Thirteen of the rabbis mentioned in the pamphlet lived in New York or Brooklyn. Those who weren't from the Lower East Side or the Bronx may have had dealings with Rav Velvele in connection with the Adath Israel, which had branches in Harlem and Brownsville.¹⁷⁶ Many of the rabbis listed were great scholars in their own right, among them being Rabbi

Benjamin Fleischer of Flatbush and Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg of Montreal. The fact that men of such stature placed themselves under Rav Velvele's authority indicates the high regard in which they held him, and belies Ramaz's characterization of him as a Hebrew teacher, and of his organization as being a fake.

A complete list of the members of the Kneset Harabbonim was sent by Rav Velvele in 1925 to Lincoln Andrews, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury.¹⁷⁷ Ninety-three names and addresses are listed, and another fifteen appear but are crossed out. Thirty-seven of the rabbis listed are from New York City and four are from other cities in New York State, five from Chicago, eight from Pennsylvania, ten from New England, three from Baltimore, three from Connecticut, four from Ohio, six from New Jersey, three from Canada, two from St. Louis, two from Houston, two from Denver, and one each from San Francisco, New Orleans and St. Paul, Minnesota. Most of the cross-outs are from New York City. The large representation from New York may have led to the creation, in 1924, of the Mercaz Harabbonim of Greater New York, a branch organization of the Kneset Harabbonim which was headed by Rabbi Glazer. From documents of the organization still extant, it seems that the Mercaz Harabbonim dealt with purely local matters, especially kashrut supervision,¹⁷⁸ while the Kneset Harabbonim handled more national matters. For example, Rabbi Joseph M. Levin of Cincinnati, an officer of the Kneset Harabbonim, was summoned a number of times to the beit din of the Agudat Harabbonim. In one case, the Manischewitz Matzoh Company

accused him of engaging in ruinous competition through his connection with Simon and Weil Matzohs, which undercut Manischewitz's prices. Rabbi Levin refused to submit to the Agudat Harabbonim's beit din, and wrote to Rav Velvele, who advised him to tell the Agudat Harabbonim that, since he was a member of the Kneset Harabbonim, he wanted to be judged by their beit din.¹⁷⁹ In Montreal, Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg was the target of a smear campaign in the local Yiddish newspaper, the Canadian Eagle, in connection with a kashrut controversy in which he was involved.¹⁸⁰ Rav Velvele wrote to Rabbi Rosenberg, offering to send some members of the Kneset Harabbonim to Montreal to speak on his behalf. He also suggested that members of the Agudat Harabbonim were behind the smear campaign, and Rabbi Rosenberg would do well to examine the material in Torat Gavriel attacking the Agudat Harabbonim, and use it in his defense.¹⁸¹

At its 1921 convention, the Kneset Harabbonim discussed its goals and policies, and adopted a number of resolutions expressing its official position on a number of important issues. The three main areas discussed at the convention were those of Sabbath observance, Jewish education and kashrut. Other matters of immediate importance were also discussed, among them that of impending restrictions on immigration to the United States. At the time the convention was held, the Johnson-Dillingham Bill, which was to limit immigration to the United States during any given year to three per cent of the number of foreign-born of each nationality present in the country as of 1910, had been

passed by both houses of Congress and was awaiting approval by President Wilson to become law. These new restrictions would place a special hardship on East European Jews who were fleeing persecution and for whom immigration could be a matter of life or death. Mass protest meetings were held by many Jewish organizations,¹⁸² and the Morgen Journal initiated a campaign to send telegrams to Wilson, urging him to veto the bill.¹⁸³ Under the guidance of Rabbi Glazer,¹⁸⁴ delegates to the Knesset Harabbonim convention sent telegrams to the president, the governor and mayor of New York, and other officials, asking that no anti-immigration legislation be enacted. The rabbis wrote of their concern for the families of immigrants whose loved ones would be prevented from joining them if the bill became law. They also pointed to the contributions of American immigrants to "every field of American progress", and the consequent unfairness of the bill. The telegram ended with the remark that the pain which such legislation would cause would make it difficult to do Americanization work.¹⁸⁵ This reference to Americanization was echoed in a press release issued after the 1924 convention of the Knesset Harabbonim. After reporting on the activities and resolutions of the convention, it was noted that all of the rabbis there were "one hundred percent American".¹⁸⁶ At the 1921 convention, mention was made of George Washington, whose birthday occurred during the convention.¹⁸⁷ These references to Americanism and patriotism were most likely the work of Rabbi Glazer, who, as a person who worked closely with senators,

congressmen and governors, was sensitive to the importance of emphasizing these matters.

The Johnson-Dillingham bill was pocket-vetoed by Wilson, but was brought up again in the next session of Congress, again passed by both houses, and signed into law by President Harding on May 29, 1921. In the Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, Rabbi Epstein wrote that the delay in passage of the bill had enabled thousands of immigrants to enter the country, and that this accomplishment alone justified the entire convention of the organization.¹⁸⁸ It was, of course, naive to think that it was solely the Knesset's efforts which had led Wilson to pocket-veto the bill. As mentioned, there was wide-scale opposition to it, and, in any case, Wilson was consistently liberal in his approach to immigration, and would probably not have signed the bill into law under any circumstances.¹⁸⁹ The efforts of the Knesset Harabbonim here do demonstrate, however, its willingness and ability to approach government officials in matters affecting the Jewish community. It was Rabbi Glazer who provided leadership in this area. His contribution to the running of the organization was crucial, and it is therefore not surprising to find that concessions were made to him in the official presentation of the Knesset Harabbonim's policy, even though Rav Velvele himself may not have personally agreed with some of them.

Concessions to Rabbi Glazer's positions are evident in some of the resolutions passed at the 1921 convention. Ten resolutions were adopted, and, in two of them, there were major

divergences between the version originally proposed and the form actually adopted. The version appearing in the Yiddish newspapers, and, later, reprinted in the Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, was that of the proposed resolutions.¹⁹⁰ The resolutions as they were passed appeared in the Kansas City Jewish Chronicle.¹⁹¹ The resolutions which were changed dealt with Jewish education and support for the upbuilding of Palestine. The sixth resolution, as passed, was, "To strengthen Jewish education in every city throughout the United States and Canada and extend every effort to have all the public funds collected for the cause of Jewish education expended on Sunday schools, Talmud Torahs and Yeshivas." In the proposed version of the resolution, Sunday schools weren't mentioned. The Kansas City Jewish Chronicle reported that the convention's support of Sunday schools constituted a major change in the policy of the Knesset Harabbonim, and was brought about through the efforts of Rabbis Glazer and David Jurman, the latter of Waterbury, Connecticut.¹⁹² The other major change was in the fifth resolution. As passed, it read, "To assist the British High Commissioner and Zionist authorities in Palestine, particularly in redeeming the soil for the people of Israel, but at the same time to leave rabbis of Palestine, in whom we express our full confidence, the work of establishing Judaism and culture, (and not to pressure them to adopt any imported Judaism) from America." The proposed version reads, "To help the government in Palestine which is working to establish a new community," with no

mention of the British High Commissioner or, more significantly, the Zionist authorities.

In connection with both of the changed resolutions, it seems that the proposed version met with Rav Velvele's approval, while the adopted version did not. Rav Velvele's repeated insistence on traditional, quality Jewish education would certainly preclude the advocacy of the Sunday school. In fact, during Rav Velvele's tenure in Boston, the Baldwin Place synagogue, where he served, did have a Sunday school,¹⁹³ and it may have been his experience with this school which accounted for his later opposition to the entire institution of Sunday schools. Rabbi Glazer, on the other hand, did advocate support of Sunday schools, perhaps as an accommodation to American conditions, with many parents being unwilling to have their children pursue Jewish studies during the rest of the week, when they concentrated on Americanizing and acculturating through the public schools. In deference to Rabbi Glazer, then, the Knesset Harabbonim promoted the institution of the Sunday school. However, in press releases issued in New York, and in the Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, which Rav Velvele helped edit, the proposed version of the resolution, which omitted reference to the Sunday schools, was published.

The change in the resolution on Palestine was also very likely a concession to Rabbi Glazer, an ardent Zionist, as well as to other Zionists in the organization, such as Rabbi J. M. Levin of Cincinnati.¹⁹⁴ Rabbi Glazer was to play a large part in the passage by both houses of Congress, in 1922, of a resolution

recognizing the Balfour Declaration, and also in President Harding's signing of the resolution later that year.¹⁹⁵ Although Rav Velvele himself was a very strong opponent of political Zionism, as was expressed in his articles in Hapeles in 1903, and later re-iterated in a series of articles in 1924,¹⁹⁶ he accepted the passage of the pro-Zionist resolution by the Knesset. Realizing his need for Rabbi Glazer's talents in running the Knesset Harabbonim, Rav Velvele allowed the democratic process to take its course, as he had in the case of the resolution on Jewish education. Here again, however, in the publicity under Rav Velvele's control, reference to the "Zionist authorities" was omitted, to conform with Rav Velvele's position.

Seen in its broader context, Rav Velvele's willingness to allow the democratic process to function in determining the official policy of the Knesset Harabbonim can be seen as a concession to American conditions. As we have seen, he was, in essence, opposed to the notion of a union of rabbis. A rabbi, he felt, should work independently, and express his view of the Torah as he saw it. He created the Knesset Harabbonim because, given the circumstances of the existence of the Agudat Harabbonim, he would be unable to accomplish any major goals within Jewish life without having a similar organization. Once he created his organization, in order for it to run effectively, he had to make concessions on occasion, and let the democratic process take its course, even if the results were not in keeping with his own preferences. Thus, he acquiesced to the efforts of

Rabbi Glazer to gain approval from the Knesset Harabbonim at large for his proposals on Sunday schools and Palestine.

It is noteworthy that the Knesset Harabbonim's official stance on Zionism changed during its 1923 convention, when the organization announced its alignment with the Agudat Israel World Organization and its program for Palestine. At that convention, Rabbi Glazer, infuriated with Chaim Weizmann's failure to acknowledge his role in the passage of the 1922 resolution, denounced the secular character of the Jewish settlement in Tel Aviv. A subsequent speaker proceeded to denounce the Keren Hayesod, the financial arm of the World Zionist Organization, for promoting colonization by anti-religious elements, and proposed that the Knesset Harabbonim announce its support for Agudat Israel exclusively, a suggestion which was adopted.¹⁹⁷ Rav Velvele, no longer constrained by Rabbi Glazer's position, proceeded to publish, in 1924, in Volume 2 of Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, a series of articles very critical of the Keren Hayesod, Chaim Weizmann, R. Mein Bar-Ilan, and the Zionist movement in general.²⁰¹ It is, however, puzzling that, at the 1925 convention of the Knesset Harabbonim, the delegates sent a message of greeting to the Zionist Congress in Vienna.¹⁹⁸ A closer look at the proceedings of that convention, however, will help solve the puzzle.

One of the resolutions passed at the 1925 convention of the Knesset Harabbonim was an expression of opposition to the Crimea proposal, advocated by the Joint Distribution Committee as well

as by the Agudat Harabbonim. The plan called for Jewish colonization in Soviet Russia. Rav Velvele was very strongly opposed to the proposal, calling it a Bolshevik plan which constituted a great danger to the Jewish people.¹⁹⁹ He was particularly outraged by the Agudat Harabbonim's support of the plan, to the extent that he wrote in a memorandum, in 1925, that, although he had often considered making peace with the Agudat Harabbonim, he finally decided against it because of its support of the Crimea proposal.²⁰⁰ Zionist leaders such as Stephen S. Wise, however, were opposed to the proposal, because it diverted funds and efforts away from the colonization of Palestine.²⁰¹ Viewed in this context, the Knesset Harabbonim's message of greeting to the Zionist Congress that year is understandable, even though it had officially endorsed, in 1923,²⁰² and, again, in 1924, the Palestine program of the Agudath Israel World Organization. The Knesset Harabbonim, indeed, supported immigration to Palestine, as did Rav Velvele, as we will see further on. They rejected the principle of political Zionism, and the anti-religious nature of its colonization work. The alternative of supporting the Crimean proposal was, apparently, so abhorrent that they were willing to join forces with political Zionist in opposing it.

As Rav Velvele grew older, he became less active in the Knesset Harabbonim. At a meeting of the organization held in 1927, his son, R. Menashe, complained that members were using his father's name without authorization, and that his father had told

him that he really did not wish to remain as president of the organization,²⁰³ a position which he had held since its inception. Still, he continued to attend the annual conventions, and sometimes took part in its deliberations.

A major controversy between the Knesset Harabbonim and the Agudat Harabbonim, in which Rav Velvele played a part, broke out in 1928. The issue was that of granting kosher certification to establishments which produced both kosher and non-kosher foods. It had been a long-standing policy of the Agudat Harabbonim not to grant certification in such cases, because the owner of the establishment, by selling non-kosher products was acting in violation of the halacha, and therefore, could not be trusted. In May, 1928, the Agudat Harabbonim suspended the membership of Rabbi Jacob Eskolsky, ostensibly for refusing to remove his certification from a delicatessen meat plant, the Palestine Kosher Vorst Factory, which produced both kosher and non-kosher foods.²⁰⁴ Other voices, however, attributed a different motivation to the Agudat Harabbonim's suspension of R. Eskolsky's membership. In 1926, he had helped found a new rabbinic organization, the Degel Harabbanim, because he felt that the Agudat Harabbonim was not accomplishing anything beyond passing resolutions at its conventions.²⁰⁵ The organization's journal, Degel Yisroel, claimed that the Agudat Harabbonim's real motivation in expelling Rabbi Eskolsky was his continued membership and participation in the Degel Harabbanim.²⁰⁶ In June, 1928, the Knesset Harabbonim and Degel Harabbanim held a joint

convention in Mount Freedom, New Jersey. In a session held on June 18, presided over by Rav Velvele, a study by a committee of rabbis, including Rav Velvele, and Rabbis A. A. Yudelevitch, Raphael Barishansky, Israel Moshowitz and Jacob Mendelssohn, permitting the granting of kosher certification to kosher/non-kosher establishments, was read. The rabbis argued that if strict regulations were observed in completely separating the kosher department from the non-kosher, a qualified rabbi had the right to issue a certification for the products manufactured in the kosher department. The decision of those rabbis, together with a complete account of the convention, was published in Degel Yisroel.²⁰⁷

The lenient decision of Rav Velvele was, actually, atypical, as he usually called for stricter Kashrut standards. Perhaps for this reason, questions were raised about its authenticity. In the July, 1928 edition of Hapardes, the journal of the Agudat Harabbonim, the editor, Rabbi Shmuel Pardes, of Chicago, wrote that remarks attributed to Rav Velvele at the convention could not be accepted as being authentic, since he was too old and weak to be active in rabbinic affairs. It was well known, he continued, that people had been using Rav Velvele's name for their own purposes for years.²⁰⁸ While this latter claim did have some truth to it, as Rav Velvele's son, R. Menashe, himself indicated at a 1927 meeting of the Knesset Harabbonim,²⁰⁹ the claim that Rav Velvele did not approve of certification of kosher/non-kosher establishments is quite untenable. Rav Velvele

was at the convention, as a photograph taken there demonstrates,²¹⁰ and he did preside over the session which dealt with the certification issue. Although he was, at the time, in his eighties, and not as active as he once had been he was still involved with the business of the rabbinate. The current rabbi of the Adath Israel, Rabbi Nachum Goldberg, whose father, Rabbi Avraham Kalman Goldberg, became Rav Velvele's assistant in 1928, recalls that Rav Velvele, at that time, could regularly be seen going into the beit din room in the Adath Israel building.²¹¹ As late as July, 1931, Rav Velvele's picture appeared in a New York newspaper together with other rabbis of the Knesset Harabbonim at the organization's annual convention. He did not, however, appear in a picture of the rabbis at the organization's convention, in August, 1932, and this absence may lend credence to a claim made by Hapardes about a document issued that year in Rav Velvele's name.²¹²

In early 1932, an article appeared in a rabbinical journal, purportedly written by Rav Velvele.²¹³ The article accused three prominent members of the Agudat Harabbonim, Rabbi Eliezer Silver, Rabbi Joseph Konvitz and Rabbi Israel Rosenberg, of illegally taking over the supervision of abattoirs in, respectively, Boston, Newark and Hoboken. Rabbi Rosenberg, claimed Rav Velvele, had taken over the supervision of Nagel Pack Co. in Hoboken, a position which belonged to Rav Velvele's son, R. Menashe, with R. Velvele serving as his consultant. Rabbis Silver and Konvitz were immediately placed in cherem, read the

article, while R. Rosenberg was being given thirty days to remove his supervision before meeting with the same fate. The article ended with a note from Rav Velvele, saying that the article had been written by his son under his direction, because he himself was too weak to write it himself. However, he was attaching his signature to the article, to indicate that he approved of its contents. Appended to the article was a note from the Knesset Harabbonim, saying that it had met to discuss the article and agreed with it, and therefore placed the three rabbis in cherem until they repent their actions.

Hapardes, in this instance, too, claimed that Rav Velvele had not written the article. To prove this claim, the journal published a notice from the directors of the Adath Israel, saying that Rav Velvele was so ill that he could not even sign his own name.²¹⁴ In its next issue, the journal printed an article explaining the circumstances of Rabbi Rosenberg's assumption of the position of kashrut supervisor at Nagel Pack. The article claimed that Rabbi Rosenberg was, at first, reluctant to accept the offer made to him by the company, not wanting to take the position away from Rav Velvele and his son. He only agreed to take the job after he was assured that the company would continue to pay Rav Velvele his wages. Although, Rav Velvele was no longer healthy enough to continue in his duties as halachic overseer of the abattoir, the company wanted to provide for him in his old age.²¹⁵

It is difficult to determine whether or not Rav Velvele

actually wrote the letter in question. Photographic evidence, as mentioned, places him at the July, 1931 Knesset convention, but not that of August, 1932. It is possible that his health deteriorated so quickly within a six month period, i.e., from the July convention to the February letter, that he was then unable to sign his name, considering his advanced age. If so, this would mean that R. Menashe forged the entire document, perhaps rationalizing such action by assuming that his father would have written such a letter had he been able to. The alternatives are either that the directors of the Adath Israel were not being truthful in their statement, or that their statement was really forged by the editor of Hapardes. There is insufficient evidence to support any of the alternatives, and, so, the question remains unanswered.

Rav Margolis retained the title of president of the Knesset Harabbonim until his death on September 8, 1935. The organization continued to exist for many years, with R. Menashe playing a leading role until his death, in 1954.²¹⁶ After his father's death, however, the organization was considerably weakened and exercised little influence on Jewish life.²¹⁷

Despite Rav Velvele's career-long struggle with the Agudat Harabbonim, there were occasions when he was willing to cooperate with the organization. For example, in 1923, the Kehillah arranged a conference, in its office, of leading Orthodox rabbis to discuss the creation of a central organization to supervise kashrut in the city. At the meeting, it was decided that a

Committee of Rabbis would be appointed and authorized to speak to the Jewish public on matters of kashrut. The committee included Rabbis S. E. Jaffe, Hillel Klein, David de Sola Pool, Bernard Drachman, Ramaz, Rav Velvele, and a few others. Rav Velvele agreed, on principle, to serve on a Kashrut committee, but submitted his own list of rabbis, who he felt fully represented the various factions in the New York Jewish community, and were the only ones who should be on the committee. His list included Rabbis A. Yudelevitch, M. Ch. Rabinowitz, H. Klein, S. E. Jaffe, B. Gotha, A. S. Pfeffer, Lando, R. M. Hyamson, Ramaz, and himself.²¹⁸ It is unclear why Rav Velvele would agree to work with the Kehillah and the leaders of the Agudat Harabbonim. Perhaps the fact that the Kehillah was, at that time, extremely weak, and on the path to dissolution,²¹⁹ so that the committee could work independently, influenced his decision. Still, he was uncomfortable with the arrangement, and wrote later, in 1924, that it was a futile effort.²²⁰ Later that year, however, he agreed to cooperate in a joint Vaad Hakashrut which would include the Agudat Harabbonim, the Vaad Harabbonim, and the Knesset Harabbonim, under the leadership of the Vaad Harabbonim. The rabbinic delegation of Rabbis Abraham Isaac Kook, Abraham Kahana Shapiro and Moshe Mordechai Epstein, which was in America at that time, under the sponsorship of the Central Relief Committee, to raise money for Torah institutions in Palestine and Europe, greeted this show of rabbinic unity with great enthusiasm.²²¹ Other voices, however, knowing how difficult cooperation among

these organizations had been in the past, were skeptical,²²² and there is no indication that the plan ever succeeded.

Another instance in which Rav Velvele agreed to cooperate with Agudat Harabbonim leaders involved philanthropic activity. In a lengthy essay included in the second volume of Sefer Kneset Harabbonim, Rav Velvele relates the events surrounding the misappropriation of funds, in 1922-23, from Kolliel America, an organization which collected funds for former Americans living in Palestine. Due to mismanagement by its president, Rabbi Benjamin B. Gotha, the offices of Kolliel America on Essex Street had been taken over by the Beuman brothers, unscrupulous people out for personal gain. A democratic election was held to elect a new group of officials, and Rav Velvele was chosen as president to replace R. Gotha. Among the other officials elected at the time were Rabbis Joseph Konvitz, Isaac Segal and M. Z. Margolies, all prominent members of the Agudat Harabbonim, as well as Dr. Pinchas Churgin of Yeshivah's Teacher's Institute. A rival organization was then set up on Clinton Street by the Beuman brothers, who claimed the right to leadership of Kolliel America. This organization, the United Orthodox Synagogue, ignored protests by the Agudat Harabbonim, and, in 1923, published an ad in the Yiddish press, calling on the Jewish community to donate money for Kolliel America through its office. R. Velvele ended the essay with an appeal to help restructure Kolliel America, so that only people with proper credentials would be allowed to collect funds for it.²²³

Rav Velvele, then, served as president of Kollel America, although several members of the Agudat Harabbonim were on its Board of Directors. At the 1924 convention of the Knesset Harabbonim, a resolution was passed, calling on the Agudat Harabbonim to accept two members of the Knesset Harabbonim to work for Ezrat Torah, a fund for Torah scholars founded by the Agudat Harabbonim in 1915.²²⁴ Rav Velvele's policy in regard to charity, as he explained in the beginning of his essay on Kollel America, was that it is irrelevant whether a rabbi or a layman runs the charitable organization. The important factor is that the job be done efficiently, so that the needy will be provided for.²²⁵ As mentioned earlier, Rav Velvele took over his father-in-law's extensive charitable activity in Grodno when he became a rabbi in the city. In America, too, he was very active in this area. Aside from his work for Kollel America and other charitable institutions, he also helped establish, in New York, the Hebrew Kindergarten and Infant's Home and the House of Old Israel, both on the Lower East Side.²²⁶

In a supplement to Volume Five of Torat Gavriel, Rav Velvele discussed the history of Kollel America, and his participation, in 1922, in a halachic litigation regarding the distribution of funds for Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. In that essay, he stressed the importance of settling Palestine. He wrote that, although many Russians began coming to America after 1903, they realized that religious conditions there were far from optimal, and, therefore, decided to move to Palestine. Kollel America was

created through the efforts of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Diskin and other leaders of the old Jewish community to assure that Americans in Palestine would receive adequate funding. The halachic controversy which arose in 1922 was in regard to determining what portion of funds contributed in America to the general fund for Jews in Palestine should be channeled to Kollel America. Rav Velvele was not satisfied with the compromise decision reached in 1922, but wrote that he would continue to work for Kollel America and try to improve the situation.²²⁷

Rav Velvele, then, was quite dedicated to promoting Jewish settlement in Palestine, despite his opposition to the general Zionist movement. He aligned himself with the old community of Jerusalem, led by Rabbis Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and Yitzchak Yerucham Diskin. These two rabbis, in fact, wrote a letter to the Knesset Harabbonim before its 1921 convention, asking the organization to help their community financially. The letter mentioned the irreligious settlers in Palestine and the influence they were able to wield because of their secure financial position, while the old community suffered from poverty and consequently had little influence.²²⁸ The Knesset Harabbonim, at its 1921 convention, did pass a resolution to assist the old community.²²⁹ In 1925, Rav Velvele became president of the Jerusalem Orphans Home Relief, the New York branch of a fund for a Jerusalem orphanage of which R. Sonnenfeld was president.²³⁰ In 1928, during the joint convention of the Knesset Harabbonim and the Degel Harabbonim, the Knesset received cabled greetings from

R. Sonnenfeld.²³¹ R. Sonnenfeld's connection with the Knesset Harabbonim is understandable in light of the fact that the Agudat Harabbonim supported the Zionist movement. In 1917, it held a special session to celebrate the passage of the Balfour Declaration by the British Parliament,²³² and, in 1924, helped coordinate the visit to America of the rabbinic delegation headed by Rav Kook. During that visit, the Agudat Harabbonim constantly emphasized Rav Kook's position of Chief Rabbi of Palestine.²³³ Rav Sonnenfeld, on the other hand, refused to recognize the validity of that position.²³⁴ The position of Rav Velvele was certainly more palatable to Rav Sonnenfeld than that of the Agudat Harabbonim, and, so, he turned to the Knesset Harabbonim to assist his community.

The Knesset Harabbonim did, in fact, exert great efforts to help the developing Jewish community in Palestine. Rabbi Glazer, especially, was concerned that a viable economy develop there, so that the community would not be totally dependent upon charity from overseas. To that end, he attempted, in 1927, to pass legislation that would remove the tariff on matzoh shipped to America from Palestine so that the matzohs would be competitive with the American product. Predictably, the Knesset Harabbonim was opposed by American matzoh manufacturers. Here, again, Rabbi Glazer tried to use his political influence to change the policy of the Department of Agriculture,²³⁵ once more bringing into relief the Knesset Harabbonim's ability to adapt to the workings of American politics.

Despite the political talents of Rabbi Glazer and the immense scholarship of Rabbi Margolis, the Knesset Harabbonim was never able to attain a major leadership position in the Orthodox community. The Agudat Harabbonim had preceded it by eighteen years, and maintained its ascendancy among the old-style rabbinate in America. The Knesset's ambivalent attitude toward Zionism and Palestine also diminished its attraction at a time when most Orthodox rabbis in America supported Zionist efforts. Although there were always a number of great rabbis in leadership positions in the Knesset Harabbonim, some of whom joined because they disagreed with the Agudat Harabbonim's policies,²³⁶ the vast majority of old-style Orthodox rabbis continued to affiliate with the Agudat Harabbonim, and the Knesset Harabbonim eventually faded from the scene.

On the positive side, one can say that the Knesset Harabbonim did, as mentioned, provide a base for rabbis who could not go along with the policies of the Agudat Harabbonim, and also demonstrated the importance of using the avenue of governmental intervention in promoting Orthodox Jewish interests. In general, however, the organization, by further dividing an already weak rabbinate, helped perpetuate the chaotic state of Orthodoxy in America at that time.²³⁷ The constant quarrelling among the various rabbinic organizations lowered the prestige of the rabbinate in the community, and rendered its efforts to strengthen traditional observance ineffective. This state of affairs was often decried in the Orthodox press,²³⁸ and was

addressed by the rabbinical delegation which visited America in 1924.²³⁹ In this sense, the story of the Kneset Harabbonim paralleled that of its founder, Rav Margolis, who intended to unify American Orthodoxy under his leadership, but, instead, furthered its disharmony.

Conclusions

Rabbi Margolis came to America with the intention of re-creating the kind of control over religious affairs which he had once exercised, but later lost, in Grodno. After a number of failures, in both Boston and New York, he finally decided to create a rabbinic organization, the Knesset Harabbonim, to try to implement his program for organizing religious observance. Such an organization, by its very nature, would not enable him to impose his own opinion in all circumstances. In order for the democratic process to work, R. Margolis was, at times, compelled to make concessions. Thus, he accepted the Knesset Harabbonim's resolutions to support Sunday schools and the work of the Zionist authorities in Palestine. However, as soon as it was no longer necessary for him to tolerate these positions, he openly expressed his true opinion. In 1924, therefore, after the Knesset Harabbonim had aligned itself with the Palestine program of the Agudat Israel, Rav Velvele proceeded to publish, in a pamphlet distributed that year at the Knesset's convention, a number of articles sharply denouncing the Zionist movement.

Rav Velvele's intention, it seems, always remained that of exercising full control over the religious affairs of the community which he served, first in Boston, and, later, in New York. This was, in fact, the manner in which he ran the Adath Israel synagogue, as described by a contemporary observer, who wrote, in 1924, "There is the synagogue of Adath Israel where the

fiery 'Rav Welwele' (sic) holds forth. Adath Israel is a picturesque synagogue and Rav Welwele is a picturesque figure. By a provision in the constitution of the synagogue, all members pay the same fee for the support of the synagogue and no member is permitted to pay one cent more. The result is that the absolute dominion of Rav Welwele is unquestioned, as no member however wealthy or however influential has a whit more say in the management of the congregation than the most humble person."¹

Rabbi Bernard Levinthal told an interviewer, in 1913, that he was opposed to the idea of the New York Kehillah, especially in terms of religious matters, because there were so many different elements in the city, from so many places of origin, that they could not be successfully united under one body. It was for this reason, he added, that Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Rabinowitz, the son of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan and his successor as rabbi of Kovno, declined an invitation to become Chief Rabbi of New York.² One may add that the spirit of individualism regnant in America militated against the unification of these diverse elements under one rabbinical leader. Rav Velvele's goal, then, although well-intentioned, was destined for failure.

Although Rav Velvele did not alter, throughout his years in America, his vision of communal leadership, he did on a smaller scale, adjust himself to the American scene. From the time he first came to Boston, he cultivated friendships with governmental leaders, and utilized these relationships to further his goals. In this area, he made good use of the talents of Rabbi Glazer,

who spent several years immersed in secular studies before joining the active rabbinate, in order to become a more effective rabbinical leader in this country. Rabbi Glazer gained a clear understanding of the workings of American politics, and Rabbi Margolis appreciated the importance of such knowledge. By placing Rabbi Glazer in a leadership position in the Knesset Harabbonim, he greatly enhanced the political clout of that organization. The concessions Rav Velvele made in deference to Rabbi Glazer, were, apparently, well worth the price. The use of governmental channels to further Jewish interests was a device which Rav Velvele had come to appreciate already in Russia through the example of his teacher, Rabbi Barit. Rabbi Glazer helped him in applying that device to the peculiar conditions of American politics.

In general, Rav Velvele was well-versed in political and military history, and followed current events closely. He also recognized the importance of a knowledge of the English language, which he acquired,³ and included in his personal curriculum for Talmud Torahs. He was, moreover, willing to experiment with modern systems such as the labor union. In short, while Rav Velvele was determined to maintain the model of rabbinic leadership that had once existed in Russia, he was not closed to the modern world. This was true even while he was still in Russia, as his initial participation in the Zionist movement attests. The fact that he occasionally made concessions to American conditions in connection with the Knesset Harabbonim,

then, is not as surprising as one may have imagined. Rav Velvele understood the workings of such an organization, and realized that, for it to run smoothly, he would have to make concessions. It is unfortunate that he did not make a more essential adjustment and abandon his unrealistic dream of being Chief Rabbi of New York, and even America.

On a small scale, Rav Velvele could boast of numerous accomplishments during his years in America. He was active in charitable organizations, helped further Jewish education, published a number of scholarly works, and was a very popular preacher. He was also one of the most important halachic decisors in this country at that time. On a more global scale, however, his constant involvement in controversy and his refusal to find some way to work in harmony with the wider Orthodox rabbinate added to the chaos and disorganization in Jewish life in America.

Appendix

Rabbi Margolis' Writings

An assessment of Rav Margolis' career would not be complete without at least a brief discussion of his published works. He was a prolific writer, and had already gained a reputation for his scholarship and homiletic abilities while in Russia.¹ One of his major concerns in Russia was for Jewish youth, which he tried to influence to remain true to Jewish tradition. This motivation led him to publish, in 1904, in Vilna, his first work, Agudat Ezov, a commentary to the Passover Haggadah. In his introduction to that work, he wrote that the proliferation of heretical writings in the Jewish community and its effect on the youth led him to publish the book, which discussed many fundamentals of the Jewish faith. Although one may be skeptical as to the effectiveness of the book in curbing heretical tendencies among Russian Jewish youth, it did prove to be very popular, and was re-printed in New York twice, in 1918 and 1924. Much of the material in the book was later incorporated in Torat Gavriel, which itself was, to a large extent, based on sermons which Rav Velvele delivered in his various rabbinical positions.

Typical of Rav Velvele's homiletic approach is his use of examples from the world of commerce, from recent military and political history, and from science to illustrate the message he felt was taught in the text which he was interpreting. In one instance, in Agudat Ezov, he compared the exodus from Egypt to

the victory of the Germans over the French in 1870. The Germans, at that time, forced the French to participate in a public demonstration of their defeat. In a similar manner, wrote R. Margolis, the Israelites did not leave Egypt at night, when the Egyptians actually set them free, but waited until the following morning, in order to publicly demonstrate their attainment of freedom.² Appended to the commentary on the Haggadah were a number of sermons and Talmudic discourses which Rav Velvele had given over the years. This practice would become typical for Rav Velvele in his subsequent books, as well. Besides appending scholarly material, he would also include discussions of current events of importance in the Jewish community. At the end of the 1924 edition of Agudat Ezov, for example, he referred to a recent scandal in New York City, in which bogus rabbis had granted kosher certification for a number of Passover products, and proposed a new plan for kashrut supervision in the city.³

Rav Velvele's book, Shem Olam, was published in Vilna in 1905. He wrote it on the request of friends, and especially the family of Rabbi Noach Levine of Vilna, who had asked Rav Velvele to print some of the eulogies he had delivered for the rabbi. Also included in the work are eulogies for a few other rabbis, commentaries on various Biblical verses, a discussion of some customs of Rav Velvele's father-in-law, R. Nachum Kaplan, speeches made at various festive occasions, and a homiletic sermon dealing with comforting the mourners over Jerusalem. In the sermon on Jerusalem, Rav Velvele wrote that the anticipated

redemption of all Jews will come in a supernatural manner, not through human efforts. This statement is significant because it represents an argument against the Zionist movement beyond the pragmatic problems of the non-religious character of its leaders, and the fear that the movement would provoke anti-Semitism which had been previously. Rav Velvele's major arguments, as well as the major reasons for rabbinic opposition, in general. The first fully articulated expression of this argument after the founding of the movement had been made by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, R. Shalom Dov Baer Schneerson, in the anti-Zionist tract Or Layesharim, published in 1900.⁵ Rav Velvele further elaborated on this argument in an essay he wrote in 1924.⁶ Despite these comments, however, one gets the sense that, even in 1924, his major objections to the movement were its anti-religious character, and his fear that its political program would engender anti-Semitism.

Rav Velvele's Torah commentary, Torat Gavriel, was first published in Jerusalem in 1910. The work to which was later appended his commentary on the megillot, Ginze Margolis, is a mixture of Biblical exegesis, homiletic explanations, halachic discourse and philosophical discussion. It is not, generally, a verse-by-verse commentary. Occasionally, in explaining the gist of a particular chapter or incident in the Torah, Rav Velvele does provide a running commentary, but his general pattern is to discuss a few verses in a section at length, and the rest not at all. As he wrote in his introduction to Shem Olam, his intention was, really, to publish his sermons on the weekly Torah readings.

As mentioned earlier, some of the material which eventually appeared in Torat Gavriel had originally appeared in Russia in a collection of sermons by various prominent European rabbis, entitled Beit Yitzchak. Torat Gavriel was, largely, a re-working of Rav Velvele's sermons in the format of a Bible commentary, with additional material to round out the work. In general, the sermons, today, seem a bit irrelevant for American readers, since the examples Rav Velvele used to illustrate his messages were taken largely from recent European history and the European business world. However, his intended audience was probably, for the most part, of East European extraction, and could thus better appreciate the material. Rav Velvele was, indeed, a very popular darshan on the Lower East Side, as he had been in Europe.⁷ His command of rabbinic, homiletic and philosophical literature is very impressive, and his interpretations are often ingenious, if a bit forced. Moreover, he constantly delivers a message of comfort to the Jews, still in exile, and emphasizes the imminence of the coming redemption.

The two volumes of Charuzei Margoliot, published in 1912 and 1919, are probably the most valuable of Rav Velvele's writings. Besides containing supplements to Torat Gavriel and additional exegetic, philosophic and sermonic material, the volumes also include commentaries on a number of Talmudic tractates, a lengthy essay on Rav Velvele's 1918 clash with the Agudat Harabbonim, a list of the enactments of the Rochester Vaad Hakashrut, many notes on various other events in Rav Velvele's

career, and a collection of some of his responsa. The responsa reveal to have been a prominent halachic authority whose opinion was sought by rabbis throughout America. In addition, a number of the questions sent to him reflect conditions in American life at the time. In one responsum, Rav Velvele is asked about sick benefits which a lodge must pay for someone who is sitting shiva.⁸ There is also a responsum about birth control on which issue Rav Velvele had a very lenient opinion.⁹ In a book written by Rabbi Sadowsky of Rochester, there are appended two responsa from Rav Velvele, one of which deals with the case of a Jew who married a non-Jewess in a civil ceremony, and later wanted to re-marry her halachically, after she had converted. Rav Velvele permitted him to do so.¹⁰ The other responsum deals with the sale of a local synagogue.¹¹ In the collection included in Charuzei Margoliot, there is one responsum in which Rav Velvele urges American rabbis, during World War I, to blow trumpets (chatzotzrot) to indicate that they were living through a time of urgency and distress. Rav Velvele himself had this practice carried out in his synagogue during the war.¹² In another responsum, dealing with the status of wine prepared by non-Jews, he mentions that he consulted with a chemist about the composition of the wine product in question.¹³ In the same responsum, he mentions that he went to the public library to get a copy of a certain work he needed in deciding the halachic point in question.¹⁴ Rav Velvele's responsa, then, reveal that he did not hesitate to use modern devices to facilitate his halachic

research. The responsa, of course, have their own intrinsic value, often presenting penetrating, thorough analyses of important halachic questions, which can still be consulted with profit. Some of the responsa deal with purely theoretical questions, such as laws of impurity inapplicable today. Here, again, Rav Velvele displays his mastery of the material, even in this seldom-studied area of Talmudic law. What emerges from the responsa, then, is that Rav Velvele was a thoroughly competent halachic authority who was recognized as such by his contemporaries, who sought out his opinion on difficult questions. The charges made against him by various members of the Agudat Harabbonim, such as Rabbi Jaffe and Rabbi Estersohn, were, then, completely unfounded, and were merely part of that organization's general effort to undermine Rav Velvele's credibility.

Rav Velvele authored a number of other works, which, unfortunately, have not survived. He often refers to a commentary on the siddur which he had written, as well as a third volume of Charuzei Margoliot, and an essay on the problems of American Jewry, to serve as a supplement to his essays in Hapeles. Mr David Jacobson, current director of the Adath Israel, related that, when the synagogue was re-furbished in the early 1950's, a shed in the back, which housed Rav Velvele's writings, was cleared out, and its contents, most of which were water-logged, were buried or discarded. At the time, their value was unappreciated, and no effort was made to preserve them.¹⁵

What does survive of his writings, however, constitutes an important contribution to Jewish literature, and deserves further study.¹⁶

Notes

Abbreviations

A.H. -- American Hebrew
J.A. -- Jewish Advocate
J.D.B. -- Jewish Daily Bulletin
M.J. -- Morgen Journal

Chapter One

¹Biographical material is taken from Ben-Zion Eisenstadt's "Biographical Notes" on R. Margolis published in the Morgen Journal (M.J.), September 9, 1935, pp. 3 and 5.

²The text of the certificate is reprinted in the first volume of R. Margolis Bible commentary, Torat Gavriel (Jerusalem, 1910) after the introduction.

³Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 1, (New York, 1912), pp.5-25, essay entitled "Torat Yakov." In his introduction to Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2 (New York, 1919), pg. 4, R. Margolis mentions that he has in his possession two additional halachic essays by Rabbi Barit, which he planned to publish in a projected third volume of Charuzei Margoliot. Unfortunately, volume 3 was never published.

⁴Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 1, pg. 5.

⁵The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1964 (reprint), Vol. 2, pp. 535-36.

⁶Eli Lederhendler, The Road to Modern Jewish Politics (New York, 1989), pp. 143-44.

⁷New York Times, Sept. 9, 1935, pg. 18.

⁸R. Margolis' ordination by the Netziv is not mentioned by Eisenstadt. It was, however, mentioned by an admirer of R. Margolis in a letter to the editor of the Morgen Journal, April 26, 1916, pg. 2.

⁹For Rabbi Berlin's role in the Hibbat Zion Movement, see Ehud Luz, Parallels Meet, (New York, 1988) pg. 12.

¹⁰The book was reprinted in Jerusalem in 1979.

¹¹Agudat Ezov, (New York, 1924) pg. 113.

¹²For more on R. Nachum, see Yisroel Miller, Toldot Menachem (Jerusalem, 1950), and Shmuel Yerushalmi, Rabbi Nachum Ha-Tzadik (Jerusalem, 1978). Yerushalmi quotes R. Margolis extensively in regard to R. Nachum, while Miller does so only occasionally. Rabbi Shimon Finkelman's The Story of Reb Nachumke (New York, 1985), is an English adaption of the Biographies by Miller and Yerushalmi. Also, see Reshumot, old series, Tel Aviv, pg. 27, vol. 5, pp. 427-43, and new series, Tel Aviv, 1945, vol., pp. 49-52.

¹³R. Nachum told R. Margolis about these letters and about the Chofetz Chaim's saintly personality, in general. See Yerushalmi, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

¹⁴See, for example, R. Margolis' Shem Olam, Vilna, 1905, pp. 49-52.

¹⁵Yitzchak ben Nisan Roctbord, Sefer Beit Yitzchak, (Jerusalem 1910, 1973). Rav Velvele's sermons appear on pages 13, 26-27, 34-36, 40-42, 106-108, 111-12, and 120-22. Among the other rabbinic personalities whose sermons were included in the volume are R. Yisroel Salanter, and R. Yosef Dov Soloveichik of Brisk.

¹⁶Eisenstatdt, op. cit.

¹⁷The Jewish Encyclopedia vol. 6 pg. 93.

¹⁸Eisenstadt, op. cit.

¹⁹Yerushalmi, op. cit., pp. 70-71

²⁰Hapeles, 1903, pp. 329-38, 397-401, 453-460, and 520-533

²¹Ibid., pg. 330.

²²Ibid., pp. 330-32.

²³Sefer Knesset Harabbanim Ha-Ortodoksim, vol. 2, pp. 18-20, It should be noted that a much different account of these events was given by and eyewitness in an article published in Ha-Melitz, no. 272, Dec, 8, 1898, pg. 3. That article was written in response to an earlier one in Ha-Melitz, no. 239, Oct. 30, 1898, pg. 3, which was apparently written by Rabbi E. A. Rabinowitz, the editor of Ha-Peles, claiming that R. Velvele's first speech in Pinsk was very anti-Zionist, and that R. Velvele had told his audience that he was going to Basle only for the show. The eyewitness, in contrast, wrote that Rav Velvele's second address was much more pro-Zionist than the first. He explained that when R. Velvele first arrived in Pinsk, he was un-aware of the very pro-

Zionist attitude in the city, and, therefore, measured his remarks. After speaking with a contingent from the city about his address, he realized his mistake, and therefore, spoke in a much different manner the second time.

²⁴Hapeles, 1903, pg. 334

²⁵Israel Klausner, Oppositziyah Le-Herzl, (Jerusalem, 1960) pp. 29-34.

²⁶Tziyon Be-Mishpat (Warsaw, 1899). In the introduction, pg. 3, R. Rabinowitz wrote that he did not understand why the other rabbis at the Congress had not come out publicly against the movement. Actually, Rav Velvel had done quite the opposite in October, 1898. In a letter published in Hamelitz, no. 236, Oct. 27, 1898, pg. 3, addressed to Rabbi Mordechai Frankel, Chief Rabbi of Soroka, R. Velvel praised the Zionist movement, saying it had great potential to unite Jewry. The newspaper's editor wrote (ibid, pg. 2) that he was publishing the letter to demonstrate that the movement had rabbinic support. See Yosef Salmon, Dat Ve-Tziyonut, Imutim Rishonim (Jerusalem, 1990) pg. 329. Among other things, Rav Velvel writes that the religious participants in the movement would atone for the non-observant through joining together with them.

Rav Velvel's letter places into question his later contention that he had already turned against the movement before the 1898 Congress in Basle, and gives credence to the report of the eye-witness, cited above, note 23. Rav Velvel, as noted, wrote his series of anti-Zionist articles only in 1903. Interestingly, the Russian government, at first, had a friendly attitude toward the Zionist movement. In 1902, it changed its attitude, and began to view it as part of the revolutionary movement, as pointed out by Luz, op. cit., pp. 118-119. Rav Velvel himself was an outspoken opponent of the revolutionaries, as we will see, and this factor may have moved him to denounce Zionism, as well. Certainly his work with Rabbi Rabinowitz in 1902 and 1903 in countering the revolutionaries could have the effect of affecting his attitude to Zionism, and adopting R. Rabinowitz's view. His ideological opposition, then, may very possibly have been an outgrowth of his opposition due to the movement's perceived revolutionary nature. In his articles in Hapeles, however, he tried to give the impression that he was ideologically opposed to the movement as early as 1898, perhaps in order to conform to Rabbi Rabinowitz's opinion.

²⁷Hapeles, 1909, pg. 330, and Hamelitz, October, 1898, no. 236, pg. 3.

²⁸Hapeles, 1903, pg. 329.

²⁹Rav Margolis mentioned those factors, in an interview in

New York, in 1907. For the breakdown of religious observance, see The Jewish Outlook, Denver, Colorado, Feb. 22, 1907, pp. 6-7. Also, see Isaac Levitats, The Jewish Community in Russia, 1844-1917 (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 179-187, and 202-206.

³⁰I. Levitats, The Jewish Community in Russia, 1772-1884 (New York, 1943) pp. 148ff.

³¹Ibid, pp. 58-60.

³²Eisenstadt, op. cit. Also, see editorial in Morgen Journal, August 9, 1911, p. 4, which points out that since the position of Chief Rabbi had not existed in Grodno for about the last hundred years, the influence any particular rabbi had in the city was due to his personal qualities and scholarship. The strong influence which Rav Velvele had in Grodno then, it was argued, attests to his greatness.

³³Shmaryahu Levin, The Arena, translated by Maurice Samuels, (New York, 1932), p. 125.

³⁴Letters of Shmaryahu Levin, (Tel Aviv, 1966), p. 153.

³⁵Levin, The Arena, pp. 163-166. Also, see Azriel Shochat, Mossad "Harabbanut Mitaam" Be-Russia, (Haifa, 1976), pp. 122.

³⁶The Jewish Outlook, op. cit., pg. 6. See, however, Henry J. Tobias, The Jewish Bund in Russia (California, 1972), pg. 73, for a discussion of Bund activity in Grodno around 1897. Tobias quotes Governor Batiushkov of Grodno as saying, "I am compelled to say that disorders among the factory workers are especially prevalent among the Jews."

³⁷Introduction to vol. 1, pg. 6.

³⁸The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, pg. 94.

³⁹Darka Shel Torah, Vilna, 1902. The essay was reprinted in 1928 in Jerusalem as an appendix to the work Et Sofer, a collection of responsa by the Sephardic scholar, Rabbi Ezra Tawil. My thanks to Rabbi Mordechai Ostwald of Philadelphia for informing me of this source.

⁴⁰Hapeles, 1902, nos. 8-9. See also Luz, op. cit., pp. 220-22, on the Machzikei HaDat movement.

⁴¹Letters from R. Margolis and other prominent rabbinic personalities were included in a special pamphlet entitled Machzikei HaDat, Pietrokov, 1903.

⁴²Yakov Gudman, editor, Mekitz Nirdamim (Pietrokov, 1904), pp. 41-42.

⁴³Eisenstadt, op. cit.

⁴⁴An account of the proceedings at the conference is given in Mekitz Nirdamim, op. cit., and, with a different slant, in Hapeles, 1903.

⁴⁵Mekitz Nirdamim, op. cit., pp. 18-21. See also Tobias, op. cit., pp. 256-257.

⁴⁶Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pg. 359, and Torat Gavriel, vol. 1, introduction, pg. 6.

⁴⁷Albert Ehrenfried, A Chronicle of Boston Jewry (Boston, 1963), pg. 342. Ehrenfried erroneously states that Ramaz came to Boston in 1880. See Isaac Fein, Boston--Where it all Began (Boston, 1976), pg. 52.

⁴⁸Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pg. 359. Rav Margolis wrote there that he was not a stranger to the problems in America, because he had head of them from American visitors to Russia.

⁴⁹Torat Gavriel, vol. 1, 143a.

Chapter Two

¹M.J., Feb. 6, 1907, pg. 1.

²American Hebrew (A.H.), Feb. 22, 1907, pg. 416.

³Ibid.

⁴Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2 (New York, 1924), pp. 5-6, and The Jewish Advocate, Boston, (J.A.), May 24, 1907, pg. 1.

⁵Harold Gastwirt, Fraud, Corruption and Holiness (New York, 1974), pp. 92-93.

⁶The newspaper had already voiced its suspicions about this reception in an editorial on May 17, 1907, pg. 8.

⁷J.A., May 24, 1907, pg. 1, June 28, 1907, pg. 1, and July 8, 1907, pg. 1.

⁸Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2, pg. 1, and also in a memorandum by R. Margolis in connection with a controversy in 1913, found in Yeshiva University Rare Book Room, Ms. 707. In his introduction to volume 1 of Charuzei Margoliot, he wrote that of all the rabbis who were in Boston when he was there, only

Rabbi Aaron Hillel Sirk was a fully competent scholar. The rest, he wrote, were largely ignorant of Jewish law.

⁹The Glazer Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹⁰Charuzei Margoliot vol. 2, pp. 388-89.

¹¹Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 391-2, footnote.

¹²Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 263-64, 66-69, and also memorandum in Y.U. Rare Book Room.

¹³Charuzei Margoliot vol. 1, pp. 1286-1296.

¹⁴Memorandum in Y.U. Rare Book Room.

¹⁵Charuzei Margoliot vol. 1, pg. 128b.

¹⁶Ibid. Also, the Magnes Archives, in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem, Israel, file P3/1661, and the American Hebrew, March 7, 1913, pp. 532-533.

¹⁷Shlomo Sadowsky, Parperaot LeChachma Ve-Gufei Halachot (New York, 1918), pp. 54 and 64. Also, Charuzei Margoliot vol. 2, pp. 265-66.

¹⁸Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 1, pg. 129b. The rules of the Vaad are reprinted in English translation in Jeremiah J. Berman's Shechitah (New York, 1941), pp. 365-68.

¹⁹American Hebrew, March 7, 1913, pp. 532-533, and the Magnes Archives, File P3/1661.

²⁰Y.U. Rare Book Room.

²¹The Jewish Advocate, May 14, 1909, pg. 1.

²²Ibid, pg. 8.

²³Ibid, May 21, 1909, pg. 1, Aug. 29, 1909, pg. 1, etc.

²⁴Ibid, Sept. 12, 1909, pg. 7.

²⁵Ibid. Oct. 26, 1916, and American Hebrew, Oct. 27, 1916, pg. 880.

²⁶A brief history of the society is given in its Jubilee Journal on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Adath Israel of New York, United Hebrew Community, 1901-1926, (New York, 1926), and a somewhat more extensive one in its Forty Years, 1901-1941, United Hebrew Community of Greater New York (New York, 1941).

Also, see Arthur Goren's Saints and Sinners: The Underside of American Jewish History (Cincinnati, 1988), pp. 10-12, and Gastwirt, op. cit., pp. 95-97.

²⁷Sefer Divrey Ha-Yamim Le-Hevrat Adat Yisroel of New York
This work written on ledger pages contains records of the society from 1901-1912, and is in the possession of the Adath Israel on 203 E. Broadway. I thank Mr. David Jacobson, director of the Adath for allowing me access to the work in September, 1990.

²⁸Gastwirt, op. cit., pp. 95-97.

²⁸Divrey Ha-Yamim, op. cit., pg. 869.

³⁰M.J., July 14, 1911, pg. 7.

³¹A.H., Sept 15, 1911, pg. 581.

³²Arthur Goren, Dissenter in Zion (Cambridge and London, 1982), pp. 133-34.

³³A.H., July 25, 1911, pg. 301, and J.A., Sept. 22, 1911, pg. 1.

³⁴M.J., August 15, 1911, pg. 1. The newspaper reprinted Rav Velvele's letter of acceptance, which is also included in the Adath's Divrei HaYamim, pg. 862.

³⁵Goren, Dissenter, pp. 133-134.

³⁶For the Morgen Journal's view of the Kehillah, see Arthur Goren, New York Jews and the Quest for Community (New York, 1970), pp. 81-82, 127-28, and 156-57. In note 64 on page 270, Goren mentions Saphirstein's outrage with the Kehillah for its attempt to arbitrate between the Chief Rabbinate of England and himself in connection with the Rabbinate's accusation that he had pirated an English edition of the High Holiday prayer book. For more on Saphirstein and his involvement in Orthodox Jewish politics, see Y. Fishman, "Finf und Fertzig Yahr Morgen Journal", in Jacob Gladstone, ed., Zibtsiq Yahr Yidishe Press in America (New York, 1945), pp. 62-64. Fishman writes there that Saphirstein played a major role in bringing Rav Velvele to New York.

³⁷Goren, Dissenter, pg. 134.

³⁸Tageblatt, Feb. 18, 1915, pg. 4, Feb. 21, pg. 1. On Feb. 24 on pg. 1, the Tageblatt published a notice from Rabbis H. Klein and M. Z. Margolies that they were ending their affiliation with the Kehillah because of Magnes' connection with Der Tag. They also claimed that they had considered resigning six months earlier because the Bureau of Education was attempting to control

the Talmud Torahs. The Agudat Harabbonim also issued a protest against the Tag for publishing on the Sabbath, and Rabbi Klein wrote to Magnes personally on the matter. See the Magnes Archives, file P3/543.

³⁹M.J., Sept. 14, 1911, pg. 1, and J.A., Sept. 14, 1911, pg. 1. See also Torat Gavriel, Vol. 1, introduction, pg. 6.

⁴⁰Letter found in the Magnes Archives, file P3/1878. See also Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, The Silver Years (New York, 1981), pg. 28.

⁴¹August 9, 1911, pg. 4.

⁴²J.A., August 11, 1911, pg. 1. References to study groups he founded in the city are scattered throughout the two volumes of Charuzei Margoliot.

⁴³M.J., Nov. 8 and 16, pg. 1. See also J.A., Nov. 17, 1911, pp. 5 and 8. Rav Velvete provoked a minor incident during his visit to the city, when he refused to fulfill his commitment to speak at the Adath Jeshurun synagogue on the Sabbath. His refusal was seen as an indication of his displeasure with the synagogue's recent appointment of R. Israeli, a modern, university-educated rabbi, as its spiritual leader. The Advocate, in an editorial, wrote that Rav Margolis had been a "storm center" during his years in Boston, and was now trying to set up, in Boston, a society similar to the Adath Israel in New York, and to install a Chief Rabbi!

Chapter Three

¹Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 1, introduction, pp. 1-6.

²Arthur Goren's New York Jews and the Quest For Community is the classic study of the Kehillah.

³Goren, New York Jews, pp. 76-85, and 125-33.

⁴Wechter, Feb., 1912, pg. 11.

⁵Gastwirt, op. cit., pp. 103-5.

⁶Ibid., pg. 105, and A.H., Dec. 21, 1911, pg. 139.

⁷Wechter, Feb., 1912, pp. 4-5.

⁸Ibid., pp. 9-10, and, also, March, 1912, pg. 23-24.

⁹Ibid., pg. 7.

¹⁰Ibid., June, 1912, pp. 69-70.

¹¹Wechter, July, 1912, pg. 88.

¹²A.H., July 12, 1912, pg. 297.

¹³M.J., April 29, 1912, pg. 8, and Dec. 13, 1912, pg. 4.

¹⁴Ibid., Sept. 11, 1912, pg. 1.

¹⁵Ibid., Nov. 25, 1912, pg. 1.

¹⁶Ibid., Dec. 2, 1912, pg. 1, and New York Times, Dec. 2, 1912, pg. 2.

¹⁷M.J., Nov. 25, 1912, pg. 4, Dec. 13, 1912, pg. 4, Dec. 14, 1912, pg. 4.

¹⁸Ibid., Dec. 13, 1912, pg. 4.

¹⁹Gastwirt, op. cit., pp. 107-9.

²⁰M.J., Dec. 16, 1912, pg. 1.

²¹M.J., Jan. 26, 1913, pg. 5.

²²Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2, pp. 8-9.

²³The Magnes Archives, file P3/1661, has a complete report on the controversy, including a notice issued by shochtim in Rochester complaining about their loss of revenue. Also, see Stuart E. Rosenberg, The Jewish Community in Rochester 1843-1925 (New York, 1954), pp. 166-67.

²⁴Tageblatt, Feb. 12, 1913, pg. 1. Also, J.A., Feb. 28, 1913, pg. 1.

²⁵Letters in Y. U. Rare Book Room.

²⁶Der Tag, Feb. 26, 1915, pg. 6. The notice issued by Rav Velvele referred to the article of Feb. 21, 1913, as well as a notice against Rav Velvele issued by a few rabbis and published in the Tageblatt in February, 1914. After mentioning these items, Rav Velvele referred to a trial he was to have with the Tageblatt the following Monday, but did not specify what the issue was. I have not been able to find any other mention of this trial in the press of the time.

374. ²⁷M.J., Jan. 10, 1913, and Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pg.
- ²⁸Magnes Archives, file P3/1661.
- ²⁹Y. U. Rare Book Room.
- ³⁰Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2, pg. 9.
50. ³¹Sefer HaYovel Shel Agudat Harabbonim (New York, 1929), pg.
- ³²M.J., July 19, 1913, pg. 4.
- ³³Ibid., July 22, 1913, pg. 8.
- ³⁴Ibid., August 1, 1913, pg. 8.
- ³⁵Ibid., Nov., 1913. The notice was reprinted in M.J. on Jan. 27, 1914, but, on Jan. 29, Rav Velvele retracted it, saying that it was two months old and no longer accurate, due to recent investigations he had made. The notice, he said, had been reprinted by mistake.
- ³⁶Forward, Jan. 17, 1914, pg. 7.
- ³⁷Ibid., Jan. 15, 1914, pg. 1, Jan. 16, pg. 1, Jan. 17., pg. 6, Jan. 19, pg. 1.
- ³⁸Ibid., Jan. 14, pg. 7.
3. ³⁹M.J., Jan. 20, 1914, pg. 8, Tageblatt, Jan. 15, 1914, pg.
- ⁴⁰Wechter, Feb., 1912, pg. 11.
- ⁴¹Forward, Jan. 22, 1914, pg. 1.
- ⁴²Ibid., Jan. 17, pg. 6.
- ⁴³Ibid., Jan. 19, pg. 1.
- ⁴⁴M.J., Jan. 29, 1914, pg. 8.
- ⁴⁵Ibid.
- ⁴⁶Tageblatt, Feb. 6, 1914, pg. 3.
- ⁴⁷M.J., May 19, 1916, pg. 2, letter to the editor from R. Alter Shaul Pfeffer, who worked together with Rav Velvele on his Vaad Hakashrut in 1914. In the letter, R. Pfeffer explained Rav Velvele's opposition to the 1916 shoctim strike by giving the

background of the events of 1913-14.

⁴⁸Articles in the Forward, Jan. 1914.

⁴⁹Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 391-92, footnote.

⁵⁰The Agudat Harabbonim supported the 1918 strike of the shoctim union, as will be discussed below.

⁵¹Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 389 and 401-402.

⁵²Louis Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, vol. 1, pp. 146-59, and vol. 2, pg. 80. Also, Tobias, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

⁵³A.H., May 1, 1914, pp. 5-6 and 7-8. Also, M.J., April 23, 1914, pg. 8.

⁵⁴A.H., May, 1, 1914, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁵Ibid., May 22, 1914, pg. 95, and May 29, pg. 119, Also, M.J., May 20, 1914, pg. 8, and May 21, pg. 8.

⁵⁶M.J., May 20, and A.H., May 29.

⁵⁷M.J., May 21, A.H., May 29.

⁵⁸A.H., May 22, pg. 95.

⁵⁹Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pg. 385.

⁶⁰M.J., May 20, pg. 8.

⁶¹Ibid., May 21.

⁶²Included in "Brief on Behalf of the Attorney General of the State of New York," pg. 2, in Magnes Archives, P3/1895, quoted from Laws of the State of New York: Passed at 138th Session of the Legislature, Albany, 1915, I, 748-49, cited by Gastwirt, op. cit., pg. 203, note 53. Also, M.J., April 8, 1915, pg. 1.

⁶³Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 208-210. It should be pointed out that, in later years, Rav Velvele was less enthusiastic about kashrut legislation. In 1924, in Sefer Kneset Harabbonim, vol. 2, pg. 1, he mentioned a Kosher Bill recently passed in Albany, and the attempt to create a Vaad Hakashrut to enforce it. He was very skeptical about this attempt, because, he felt, the rabbis involved were interested in monetary gain. The major factor in kashrut enforcement, he felt, was the participation of honest, competent rabbis. This attitude is reflected in the stance of Rav Velvele's organization, the Kneset Harabbonim, in regard to the recommendations made by a

committee of rabbis to Mayor Walker in 1932 to improve enforcement of the Kosher Bill. The Knesset opposed the recommendations, arguing that they would interfere with the individual discretion of rabbis in determining the kashrut of foods. See Gastwirt, op. cit., pp. 129-30.

⁶⁴Gastwirt, op. cit., pp. 112-113.

⁶⁵Berman, op. cit., pp. 112-113.

⁶⁶M.J., March 15, 1916, pg. 8.

⁶⁷Ibid., March 23, 1916, pg. 10

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Gastwirt, op. cit., pp. 115-16.

⁷⁰M.J., March 7, 1916, pg. 12, March 10, pg. 4.

⁷¹Gastwirt, op. cit., pp. 99-100, quoting from Hayyim, Ball, Shemira Tova (New York, 1925), pp. 41-50. Ball's work was translated into English and included in the volume The Status of Nikkur in the United States (Benei Brak, 1982), pp. 1-29. His discussion of the change of system after the death of R. Jacob Joseph is on pages 13-15 there.

⁷²M.J., March 19, 1916, pg. 16, and April 10, 1916, pg. 12.

⁷³Ibid., March 15, 1916, pg. 4.

⁷⁴Ibid., March 19, 1916, pg. 16.

⁷⁵Ibid., March 15, 1916, pg. 4.

⁷⁶Ibid., March 22, 1916, pg. 10.

⁷⁷Ibid., March 23, 1916, pg. 10.

⁷⁸Ibid., March 24, 1916, pg. 12.

⁷⁹Ibid., March 26, 1916, pg. 12.

⁸⁰Ibid., March 29, 1916, pg. 12.

⁸¹Ibid., April 10, 1916, pg. 12.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid., April 12, 1916, pg. 11.

⁸⁴Ibid., April 26, 1916, pg. 2.

⁸⁵Ibid., May 3, 1916, pg. 2.

⁸⁶Ibid., April 2, 1916, pg. 2.

⁸⁷Ibid., May 19, 1916, pg. 2.

⁸⁸Ibid., April 13, 1916, pg. 1.

⁸⁹Ibid., pg. 10.

⁹⁰Ibid., May 17, 1916, pg. 5.

⁹¹Gastwirt, op. cit., pg. 117.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 116-17.

⁹³Ibid., pg. 117.

⁹⁴M.J., June 19, 1918, pg. 10.

⁹⁵See M.J., May 16, 1918, for an appeal by the Agudat Harabbonim U'Matifim to support the two-cent surcharge.

⁹⁶M.J., June 19, 1918, pg. 10.

⁹⁷Ibid., June 11, 1918, pg. 9, and June 16, 1918, pg. 7.

⁹⁸Ibid., June 16, 1918, pg. 9, June 20, pg. 8, July 18, pg. 8. In Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 1, pg. 94, footnote, Rav Velvele, in discussing an attempt made in Boston in 1910 to unify the community, mentions the popular prejudice against imposing a surcharge for kosher-slaughtered animals, which was popularly called korobka. Rav Velvele felt this criticism was unjustified, given the small amount of the surcharge, and the benefit it would bring by providing funds for Jewish education, care for the sick, etc. Still, he advised against the imposition of the surcharge, because the criticism it would provoke would hamper the success of the projected kehillah. It should be emphasized that the surcharge Rav Velvele approved of in 1910 was one which would be used for public services, unlike the surcharge which the New York shoachim demanded in 1916 and 1918 as a supplement to their income.

⁹⁹M.J., June 21, 1918, pg. 12.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., July 1, 1918, pg. 8.

¹⁰¹Ibid., July 8, 1918, pg. 1, and New York Times, July 8, 1918, pg. 8.

¹⁰²M.J., July 11, 1918, pg. 1 and 8.

¹⁰³Ibid., July 12, 1918, pg. 1.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pg. 8.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., July 16, 1918, pg. 8.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., August 16, 1918, pg. 10.

¹⁰⁸Der Groyser Kundes, September 29, 1911, pg. 8, "open letter to Jacob Saphirstein".

¹⁰⁹See, for example, Forward, July 27, 1918, M.J., August 21, 1918, pg. 4, M.J., August 26, 1918, pg. 4, etc.

¹¹⁰Der Tag, July 25, 1918, pg. 3.

^{110a}Magnes Archives, P3/1882, and Gastwirt, op. cit., pg. 125.

¹¹¹Ibid., August 6, 1918, pg. 3.

¹¹²Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 373-404.

¹¹³Ibid., pg. 372, and 379, footnote, etc.

¹¹⁴Ibid., pg. 379.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pg. 379-81.

¹¹⁶Ibid., pg. 397-98.

¹¹⁷Ibid., pg. 274-75.

¹¹⁸Ibid., pg. 400.

¹¹⁹Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 394-395.

¹²⁰A.H., December 10, 1915, pp. 133 and 142.

¹²¹Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2, pg. 42.

¹²²A.H., December 10, 1915, pg. 133.

¹²³Pg. 402.

¹²⁴M.J., November 26, 1911, pg. 7.

¹²⁵Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2, pg. 44.

¹²⁶Charuzei Margoliot, Column 2, pg. 395.

¹²⁷See Levitats, op. cit., (1981), pp. 53-4.

¹²⁸Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pg. 394, and Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2, pp. 42 and 44-45.

¹²⁹Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2, pg. 44.

¹³⁰The Levin Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹³¹Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 379-80, footnote.

¹³²Ibid., pp. 391-92, footnote.

¹³³Ibid., pg. 389.

¹³⁴Ibid., pg. 399.

¹³⁵See above, note 52.

¹³⁶Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 401-403.

¹³⁷Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 1, pg. 15 ff.

¹³⁸Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 390-91.

¹³⁹Wechter, February, 1912, pg. 11.

¹⁴⁰Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 391-92, footnote.

¹⁴¹Ibid., pg. 389.

¹⁴²Ibid., introduction, pg. 4.

¹⁴³Ibid., pp. 396-98.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 400 and 391-92, footnote.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 401-402.

¹⁴⁶Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 1, pg. 3.

¹⁴⁷The Glazer Papers. In 1924, Rabbi Glazer wrote to Albany about the Knesset's charter, and to check if the Agudat Harabbonim was chartered. As he discovered, it was not.

¹⁴⁸Biographical material is taken from Rabbi Glazer's introduction to his translation of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah (New York, 1927), pp. 33-48, the Kansas City Jewish Chronicle, August 3, 1923, pp. 1 and 8, and from Joseph P. Shultz and Clara L. Klausner, "Rabbi Simon Glazer and the Quest for Jewish Community in Kansas City, 1920-1923", in the American Jewish Archives,

April, 1983, pp. 13-25.

¹⁴⁹Shultz and Klausner, op. cit., pp. 15-17.

¹⁵⁰These letters are found among the Glazer Papers.

¹⁵¹A great deal of Rabbi Glazer's correspondence on these matters can be found among the Glazer Papers.

¹⁵²Letter to Rabbi Glazer from Rabbi Y.L. Epstein, found in the Glazer Papers.

¹⁵³Kansas City Jewish Chronicle, August 3, 1923, pg. 8, and telephone conversation with Prof. Joseph Shultz of Kansas City, May 28, 1990. See also Aaron Rakefet-Rothkoff, The Silver Era (New York, 1981), pp. 95-96, for a discussion of the use of English by rabbis in America in the 1920's.

¹⁵⁴Pp. 47-48. From R. Glazer's brief comments, it seems that he was charged with heresy.

¹⁵⁵J. D. Eisenstein, Otsar Zichronothai (New York, 1929), pp. 189-91.

¹⁵⁶Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 391-92, footnote.

¹⁵⁷Magnes Archives, P3/1895.

¹⁵⁸Much of the material on Prohibition brought here is taken from Hannah Sprecher, "'Let Them Drink and Forget Our Poverty': Orthodox Rabbis React to Prohibition", in the American Jewish Archives, Fall/Winter, 1991, pp. 115-79.

¹⁵⁹Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 1, pg. 11.

¹⁶⁰The contract is found in the Levin Papers.

¹⁶¹Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 1, pp. 3-4, and 74-77.

¹⁶²Ibid., pp. 12-13.

¹⁶³The Levin Papers. The American Israelite reported on Sept. 4, 1924, that six cases of sacramental wine had been taken by Prohibition officers from Rabbi Levin's son, Samuel. Samuel was taking the wine to the home of a member of his father's synagogue, Ohev Shalom, and had a permit to do so. The Israelite article is cited by Jonathan D. Sarna and Nancy H. Klein in The Jews of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, 1989), pg. 114. It should, incidentally, be noted that the date of Rabbi Levin's death given on pg. 114--i.e., 1929--is incorrect. He died on May 2, 1926, as reported in the New York Times, May 3, 1926, pg. 21.

¹⁶⁴Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 1, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 14-15. It is not altogether clear that Rabbi Grodzinski ever was, in fact, a member of the Knesset Harabbonim. Although he was chosen, at the organization's first convention, to be part of the "Sabbath Committee", (see Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 1, pg. 24), this may have been done without his knowledge. His name does not appear on a list of members which Rav Margolis sent to the Treasury Department in 1925 (now found in the Glazer papers).

¹⁶⁶Sprecher, op. cit., pg. 144, citing articles in the Providence Journal and New York Times, Jan. 4, 1922, both on page 1.

¹⁶⁷Sprecher, op. cit., pg. 144.

¹⁶⁸The Glazer Papers.

¹⁶⁹March 1, 2 and 3, 1921.

¹⁷⁰New York Times, Jan. 4, 1922, pg. 1.

¹⁷¹Telephone conversation, April 2, 1990.

¹⁷²The photograph is on display at the Ohav Shalom synagogue in Washington, D.C. Rabbi Gedaliah Silverstone, former rabbi of the synagogue, is also in the picture.

¹⁷³Providence Journal and New York Times, Jan. 4, 1922.

¹⁷⁴The Knesset Harabbonim, on its part, also tried to gain a monopoly over the granting of wine permits. In late 1923, Rabbi Glazer wrote to Prohibition Commissioner Robert A. Haynes, asking that the Knesset Harabbonim be permitted to furnish a list of authentic rabbis, who would be the only ones empowered to grant permits. The proposal, however, was rejected, because Haynes felt that the "Jewish Church" was so divided that no one organization could speak for all Jews. It may be in connection with this attempt that Rabbi Glazer wrote Albany in early 1924 to verify that the Knesset Harabbonim was a chartered organization and the Agudat Harabbonim was not. (This material is in the Glazer Papers).

In general, in the years following the Menorah Wine scandal, the Knesset Harabbonim endeavored to end abuses of the Volstead Act. At its conventions it passed resolutions calling for members to conform to the law of the land, and, in 1925, when one of its members was convicted for violating Volstead, the organization imposed disciplinary measures upon him, as letters in the Glazer Papers reveal.

¹⁷⁵Although in the pamphlet itself R. Epstein is named as the

editor, in a letter to Rabbi J. M. Levin, found in the Levin Papers, R. Margolis wrote that he was working very hard to complete the pamphlet.

¹⁷⁶Goren, Saints and Sinners, pg. 12, and Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Resistors and Accommodators", in American Jewish Archives, April, 1983, pg. 183, note 129.

¹⁷⁷The Glazer Papers.

¹⁷⁸Ibid. In 1927, the organization legally changed its name from the Central Council of Orthodox Rabbis of Greater New York, Inc., to the Central Conference of Orthodox Rabbis of America, Inc. However, at least by 1932, it seems to have reverted back to its original name, as indicated by a document in the Glazer Papers. In 1927, a tax audit of the Knesset Harabbonim was ordered. A record of the audit is included in the Glazer Papers, and reveals that the Knesset was running on a deficit, and being financed by the Mercaz Harabbonim. Because of the financial crisis the Knesset Harabbonim was facing that year, a special convention was held, minutes of which are found in the Glazer Papers. Letters from members concerning the convention reveal that it was feared the Knesset would have to go out of existence if it did not begin to function more efficiently.

¹⁷⁹The Levin Papers.

¹⁸⁰For a discussion of the entire controversy, see Ira Robinson, "The Kosher Meat War and the Jewish Community Council of Montreal, 1922-1925", in Canadian Ethnic Studies, vol. XII, no. 2, November 30, 1990.

¹⁸¹Letter from R. Margolis to R. Rosenberg, provided by Ira Robinson.

¹⁸²See, for example, A.H., Feb. 18, 1921, pg. 421.

¹⁸³M.J., Feb. 24, 1921, pg. 1.

¹⁸⁴Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 1, pg. 1.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 4, 27-28, 74 and 77-80. The telegrams were reprinted in newspapers throughout the country.

¹⁸⁶Found in the Glazer Papers.

¹⁸⁷Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 1, pg. 29.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., pg. 1.

¹⁸⁹See Sheldon M. Neuringer, American Jewry and United States Immigration Policy (New York, 1980), pg. 138.

¹⁹⁰Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 1, pg. 9.

¹⁹¹Kansas City Jewish Chronicle, March 4, 1921, pp. 1 and 4.

¹⁹²Ibid., pg. 4.

¹⁹³Notices of synagogue activities appeared regularly in the Jewish Advocate, and consistently mentioned the Baldwin Place synagogue's Sunday school.

¹⁹⁴Levin was a very ardent worker for Zionist causes, as documents in The Levin Papers reveal. His published sermons (Leket Yosef, New York, 1906, and Le-Beit David, Baltimore, 1916), also contain Zionist material, including a eulogy for Herzl. See also Gershon Greenberg, "Separation and Reconciliation--American Orthodoxy and the Concept of Zion", in Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem, 1985), pg. 126.

¹⁹⁵See his work, The Palestine Resolution (Kansas City, 1922), and Shultz and Klausner, op. cit., pp. 20-25.

¹⁹⁶Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2 (New York, 1924), pp. 11-23.

¹⁹⁷Das Yiddishe Licht, July 27, 1923.

¹⁹⁸Jewish Daily Bulletin, (J.D.B.), Sept. 3, 1923, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

²⁰⁰The Levin Papers.

²⁰¹Melvin Urofsky, A Voice that Spoke for Justice (New York, 1982), pp. 210-211.

²⁰²Press release found in the Glazer Papers.

²⁰³The Glazer Papers.

²⁰⁴J.D.B., May 17, 1928, pp. 2-3.

²⁰⁵Degel Yisroel, Shevat (February) 1927, pg. 7. Also, Gastwirt, op. cit., pp. 145-146, and Israel Tabak, Three Worlds (Jerusalem, 1988), appendix 2, pp. 391 ff.

²⁰⁶Degel Yisroel, Tamuz (June-July), 1928, pp. 10-11.

²⁰⁷Ibid. The text of the halachic decision is printed on pg. 11. The report on the convention is on pages 5-10. See also J.D.B., June 20, 1928, pp. 2-3, and June 21, pp. 1 and 4. The June 20 issue reported that members of the two organizations had

received threatening messages from the Agudat Harabbonim, warning them not to participate in the convention.

²⁰⁸Hapardes, July, 1928, pg. 2.

²⁰⁹The Glazer Papers.

²¹⁰The photograph can be found in the Agudath Israel Archives in New York City, which recently had it reprinted in an article on the Archives in Das Yiddishe Vort, Iyar-Sivan, 1989, pg. 19.

²¹¹Telephone conversation, May 4, 1989.

²¹²New York Evening Graphic and New York Evening Journal, July 8, 1931, and August 17, 1931. This information was related to me by Ann Birstein in a telephone conversation on April 11, 1991. Ms. Birstein is the daughter of Rabbi Bernard Birstein, who served as secretary of the Knesset Harabbonim under Rav Velvele. In her biography of her father, The Rabbi on Forty-Ninth Street (New York, 1982), pg. 122, she writes that Rav Velvele appeared in a photograph taken at a Knesset Harabbonim convention during which a cherem was placed on German products. This convention took place in September, 1933 (see New York Times, September 7, 1933, pg. 6, and J.D.B., September 7, 1933, pp. 1 and 4), and it is highly unlikely that Rav Velvele attended. His name does not appear in the reports on the convention, and, moreover, as Rabbi Goldberg related, he was bed-ridden the last few years of his life. Ms. Birstein agreed that she must have confused the various pictures, and that her book is inaccurate.

²¹³Beit Vaad L'Chachamim (Satmar, Roumania), Adar, 1932, pp. 10-12.

²¹⁴Hapardes, March, 1932, pp. 2-3.

²¹⁵Ibid., April, 1932, pp. 2-3.

²¹⁶New York Times, June 3, 1954, pg. 21. The Knesset Harabbonim was still in existence in the early 1950's, according to Rabbi Abraham Schwartz, currently of Florida. Rabbi Schwartz was a member of the credentials committee of the Rabbinical Council of America in the 1950's. In a conversation on July 20, 1991, he related that, at that time, the Knesset Harabbonim was granting semicha certificates. He added that the requirements were minimal.

²¹⁷Rabbi Pinchos M. Teitz came to America in 1935 on a fund-raising tour for Telshe Yeshiva, and travelled throughout the country. When asked in an interview in January, 1990, about the various rabbinic organizations in the country in 1935, he remarked that "there was only the Agudat Harabbonim".

²¹⁸Magnes Archives, P3/1895.

²¹⁹Goren, New York Jews, pg. 224.

²²⁰Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2, pg. 1.

²²¹Tageblatt, August 1, 1924, pg. 6.

²²²M.J., August 1, 1924, pg. 6.

²²³Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 2, pp. 27-40.

²²⁴Ibid., unpaginated insert.

²²⁵Ibid., pg. 27.

²²⁶New York Times, Sept. 10, 1932, pg. 21.

²²⁷Torat Gavriel, vol. 5 (Jerusalem, 1925), pp. 207b-210a.

²²⁸Sefer Knesset Harabbonim, vol. 1, pp. 16-17.

²²⁹Ibid., pg. 9. and K.C. Jewish Chronicle, March 4, 1921, pg. 4.

²³⁰J.D.B., Nov. 18, 1925, pg. 4. A document from the New York branch can be found in the Glazer Papers, with R. Margolis' name on the letter-head. The address give, 29 Eldridge St., is the same as that of the Knesset Harabbonim at the time.

²³¹J.D.B., June 20, 1920, pg. 3.

²³²Sefer Ha-Yovel Shel Agudat Harabbonim, pg. 94.

²³³Joshua Hoffman, "Rav Kook's Message to America", in Orot, A Multidisciplinary Journal of Judaism, vol. 1, (New York, 1991), pp. 78-79.

²³⁴Emile Marmorstein, Heaven At Bay (London, 1969), pp. 79-83.

²³⁵The Glazer Papers.

²³⁶Two notable cases are those of Rabbi Jacob Mendelsohn of Newark and Rabbi Isaiah Margolin of Brooklyn. As he describes in his work, Mishnat Yavetz (Newark, 1925), pp. 72-77, Rabbi Mendelsohn had a major controversy with the Agudat Harabbonim in 1924 over the rights to supervision over a slaughterhouse in Newark. As a result of this controversy, Rabbi Mendelsohn left the Agudat Harabbonim and joined the Knesset Harabbonim, in which he served as vice-president until his death in 1941. (Some of this information was conveyed to me by Rabbi Jacob Mendelsohn of

Bridgeport, Connecticut, a grandson of Rabbi Mendelsohn of Newark, in a telephone conversation on July 2, 1989.)

Rabbi Margolin switched from the Agudat Harabbonim to the Knesset Harabbonim after an incident that occurred in 1931. At that time, the Agudat Harabbonim issued a list of names of factories which produced both kosher and non-kosher foods, and declared that all products made in such establishments are non-kosher. Rabbi Margolin's synagogue then fired him, because he supervised one of the factories on the list. He went on to sue the Agudat Harabbonim in a secular court for \$75,000, and was backed by the Knesset Harabbonim. See Gastwirt, op. cit., pp. 145-46, and Hapardes, August, 1931. Rabbi Margolin appears in a picture of delegates to the 1932 convention of the Knesset Harabbonim, printed in the New York Evening Graphic and New York Evening Journal. See above, note 217.

²³⁷See, for example, Hapardes, August, 1931. Also, see Rakeffet-Rothkoff, The Silver Years, pp. 104 ff., for a discussion of standards for membership in the Agudat Harabbonim which Rabbi E. Silver wished to impose.

²³⁸Das Yiddishe Licht, Feb. 24, 1924, pg. 7, Tageblatt, August 1, 1924, etc. In Das Yiddishe Licht, 24 Sivan, 1923, pg. 3, Shraga Feivel Mendelovitch refers to the four major rabbinic organizations then in existence in America as the "arba avot nezikin", the four categories of damages, because of the destructive influence their controversies had on Orthodox Jewish life.

²³⁹J. Hoffman, op. cit., pg. 86.

Conclusions

¹Das Yiddishe Licht, March 23, 1924, English section, pg. 3.

²Morgen Journal, Jan. 8, 1913, pg. 5. It should be noted that Rabbi P. M. Teitz did successfully set up the community of Elizabeth, N.J. on the model of a European kehillah. Elizabeth, however, was much smaller than New York and Boston, and, more importantly, was in its early stages of development when Rabbi Teitz came there to replace his father-in-law, Rabbi E. Preil. It would be interesting to contrast R. Teitz's career with that of Rabbi Margolis, but such a study is beyond the scope of this thesis.

³A number of letters written by him in English are extant in the Magnes Archives and the Glazer Papers.

Appendix

¹See Chapter One, note 15.

²Agudat Ezov (New York, 1924), pp. 31-32.

³Ibid., pp. 159-160.

⁴Shem Olam, pp. 47-48.

⁵Luz, op. cit., pp. 213-217.

⁶Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 22 ff.

⁷Recollection of Rabbi Jacob Friedman, former sexton of RIETS synagogue, in an interview, May, 1989. Rabbi Friedman studied in RIETS on the Lower East Side, and frequented the Adath Israel synagogue, which was down the street on East Broadway.

⁸Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 327-28.

⁹Ibid., pp. 319-23.

¹⁰Sadowsky, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 53-54.

¹²Charuzei Margoliot, vol. 2, pp. 324-27.

¹³Ibid., pg. 293.

¹⁴Ibid., pg. 295.

¹⁵Interview, September, 1990.

¹⁶The Adath Israel is, in fact, currently planning to re-issue Torat Gavriel, in memory of one of its directors, who died in 1990.

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