

B”H

Introduction

In our first article on the AOJS, we explored interactions between Rebbe and Dr. Offenbacher — its founder. In this article, we will make note of additional interactions the Rebbe had with the AOJS. While the full story of the relationship between the Rebbe and AOJS is worthy of a more detailed study, we will focus here on a few specific interactions.

Dr. Cyril Domb

Professor Dr. Cyril (Yecheil) Domb (5681-5772) was born in North London, England, into a Chasidic Jewish family. He was deeply affected and inspired by his grandparents who were deeply religious Jews. He, in turn, retained this deep religious feeling, was meticulous in his observance of the Mitzvos — which always took precedence over activities for professional advancement¹— and spent much of his free time devoted to Talmudic studies (including attending a daily Daf Yomi Shiur).

Dr. Domb led a long and fruitful career in the study of Theoretical physics and statistical mechanics, lecturing at Oxford and Cambridge Universities, King’s College, London University, Bar-Ilan University, University of Maryland, Yeshiva University, Hebrew University, Jerusalem College of Technology and the Weizmann Institute. Shortly before making aliyah to Israel, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.

After encountering AOJS members in 5718, during a sabbatical year at the University of Maryland², he helped found and lead a sister organization of the AOJS in London, in 5722³.

In 1971, Domb became the general editor of a book series which was sponsored by the AOJS, the purpose of which was to systematically present material which could be used for Jewish education.

In addition, in this capacity, Domb went on to publish several papers on science and religion, in collaboration with Rabbi Aryeh Carmell. A collection of these articles, which reconciled scientific theories with Jewish beliefs, were later published in the book (which he co-edited), “Challenge: Torah views on science and its problems,” printed in 5736. He was also the founding editor of the journal, “Bekhol Derakhekha Da’ehu: Journal of Torah and scholarship” (published by Bar-Ilan University Press), to which he contributed several articles.

¹ A small example, is where the time of a lecture could not be scheduled to conflict with the time of Minchah.

² At the midwinter AOJS dinner, and during the subsequent 7 months, when he observed the organization in full swing, with the participation of over 400 members. During this time, he also contributed to the programs and progress of the organization.

³ Cyril Domb, “Challenge: Torah Views on Science and Its Problems.” (Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists; Feldheim Publishers, 1989), p. 18, Elmer L. Offenbacher, “The Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists (AOJS) The First Two Decades (1947–1967)” <http://bit.ly/2ER97Oj>; see also Dr. Offenbacher’s biographical notes on Domb in “Encounter: Essays on Torah and Modern Life”, ed. H. Chaim Schimmel and Aryeh Carmell, pp. 338-341.

The Rebbe maintained a relationship with him. As a matter of fact, much of his work in the realm of Torah and Science had been prodded along by the Rebbe.

The Man Who Connected Him with the Rebbe

Domb's first interaction with the Rebbe came about through Rabbi Dr. Kopul Rosen (1913-1962). Rabbi Rosen was a prominent and dynamic Rabbi, educator and founder of Carmel College in Oxfordshire, UK; and for a short time, the Chief Rabbi of the Federation of Synagogues, a rival organization to the United Synagogue⁴.

Rabbi Rosen had been one of the prime Torah personalities who had influenced Domb during his formative years (the other two Rabbi's being, Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler and Rav Gershon Henoch Yudenleiv⁵). Rabbi Rosen's discussions, conducted for young people in his own home, were filled with Philosophical and pedagogical ideas which later served as fruitful kernels for Domb's own writings.

Rabbi Rosen had descended from Chassidic stock, but was educated by Lithuanian Rabbis, and he was molded by his years of study at the Etz Chaim Yeshiva in London, and the Mir Yeshiva in Poland. However, with time, Rosen had found himself being drawn to Chabad, as the warmth and humanity it exuded appealed to his nature. Rabbi Rosen maintained a friendly relationship with Chassidim, such as Rav Ben-Tzion Shemtov and Rav Sender Nemptzov, and also maintained a correspondence with the Rebbe.

Towards the end of his life, after falling ill with leukemia, Rabbi Rosen traveled to New York to visit the Rebbe.

His wife, Mrs. Bella Rosen wrote:

“The Rebbe talked to my husband for two successive nights. My husband told me that never before had he been so deeply impressed by any other human being. The Rebbe's appearance, his eyes, his clear, penetrating and kindly look, his sharp perception, his leading questions, and his intellectual profundity overwhelmed him. At a time when he was approaching his ‘heavenly Father,’ my husband felt he was being assisted by a newly found ‘spiritual father.’”

“From that moment, my husband no ceased to concern himself with the probable outcome of his illness, but seemed to be injected with a lively optimism, which he maintained until the end. He even influenced the stream of visitors who called on him until he was unable to receive them anymore⁶. “

At the time, Rabbi Rosen shared some of his feelings with Domb, and encouraged Domb to write to the Rebbe about matters pertaining to Torah U'Madda — matters of Torah and science.

⁴ For a full and comprehensive picture of his life see “Memories of Kopul Rosen”, Cyril Domb, 1970.

⁵ “Encounter: Essays on Torah and Modern Life,” pp. 315-316.

⁶ Mrs. Bella Rosen, in “Challenge: an encounter with Lubavitch Chabad” (published by the Lubavitch Foundation of Great Britain), 1970, pp. 156-158.

A few years later, Dr. Domb produced and edited a book on the life on Rabbi Rosen. In this book, Domb shares with us a peek into this period⁷.

“For the first time in his life, Kopul felt the need to consult someone about his personal affairs, and he chose the Lubavitcher Rebbe, in New York. Kopul had been interested in Lubavitch ideas and their positive approach to all sections of the Jewish community. During his stay in Manchester, he had established close relations with the local group. Now, he flew to New York to spend several hours with the Rebbe, on two different occasions, and the inspiration he derived was clearly the dominating influence during the last days of his life.

Kopul recorded the gist of the discussion. The Rebbe emphasized to him that bodily health was not his concern — medicine should be left to the doctors. A soldier must concentrate on his gun — his personal requirements are the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief. Kopul should do his job and allow the Almighty to do His ... This was a great responsibility and challenge requiring all his mental energy and he should devote himself single-mindedly to it.”

To illustrate the impression which the Rebbe made on Rabbi Rosen, Domb quoted from a letter that Rabbi Rosen wrote to a young friend in Australia.

“I am very eager to tell you about the saintly, wise leader of Lubavitch. Your uncle, the Chief Rabbi, will tell you that I am not a starry-eyed hero worshipper and I do not easily become any man’s disciple, but my meeting with the Rebbe brought me into contact with a person who seemed to be on a plane quite different from what I had experienced hitherto.

“I spent hours on two occasions talking to him. I was not only amazed by his breadth of knowledge of all that was going on in Jewish life throughout the world, even in areas where I should have had a far more detailed knowledge than he, but there was such an outpouring of love and concern in every opinion which he expressed, that I resolved that even in my own work (in which I have hitherto regarded myself as sufficiently competent not to require any other person’s instructions or guidance), I would keep contact with him and seek his opinion wherever possible.

I am guilty of no exaggeration, Mr. Sheink, when I say that in the course of my life I have never met a man who impressed me more profoundly and in whose presence I sensed a greater feeling of wisdom, insight and utter selflessness.”

Dr. Domb’s Correspondence with the Rebbe

Around that time, the Jewish Chronicle in London reached out to Domb and asked him to write an article on the issue of Judaism and how it relates to the Big Bang Theory.

In the 5720’s a debate was raging between proponents of the “Big Bang” and the — since scientifically discredited — “Steady State” theory, which opines that the world continuously

⁷ “Memories of Kopul Rosen”, Cyril Domb, 1970, pp. 28-30.

expands since the beginning of time. It was generally assumed that religious thinkers would support the “Big Bang” over “Steady State” — as proponents of “Steady State” did not attribute any starting point to the universe.

Up until that time, Domb had lectured privately on issues that were related to Science and religion⁸; however, this would be the first time in which he was requested to publicly wade into this discussion.

“My reply was to say unequivocally that Torah thinking could live with either cosmology, and I proceeded to explain the reason in an article that attracted wide attention. This was the first time in which I entered a public discussion of this nature, although I had previously engaged in discussions largely with religious groups” Domb wrote⁹.

The Rebbe, however, read the article, and in turn, reached out to him and encouraged him to get more involved in the issue about which he had written, which at the time vexed many Jewish intellectuals. Their quandary was how one can reconcile Torah U’Maddah — Judaism and Science.

In a lengthy letter, the Rebbe turned to Domb and wrote that notwithstanding his vast Jewish pursuits, he should devote time to further write about Judaism and its relationship with science.

The Rebbe then dispatched a second letter, in which he explained that in the present age, many Jews were rejecting Yiddishkeit as a result of various scientific theories and how they relate to the teachings of the Torah. As a matter of fact, a question popular in those days was: How can a rational scientist be a committed Jew? It was incumbent on individuals like Domb to rise to the challenge and articulate answers for these individuals.

Professor Domb responded that he heard what the Rebbe was saying, but equivocated with regard to the task at hand. In turn, the Rebbe sent him another two letters, strongly reinforcing his view on the matter. They also contained positive suggestions, as to how he could organize and package his arguments for maximum effect.

In addition to this topic, there was a lively discussion about whether the Torah’s view accepts theories of evolution, and how the first 6 days of creation are to be perceived¹⁰.

Decades later, Domb expressed himself with the following reflection: “I felt deeply honored that the Rebbe had taken the initiative to write to me, and I benefited greatly from all my subsequent correspondence with the Rebbe¹¹.”

⁸ “Encounter: Essays on Torah and Modern Life”, pp. 326-328.

⁹ B’Or HaTorah vol. 18, page 183.

¹⁰ This exchange has been dramatically condensed for the article. In order to capture the full picture, this writer suggests reading the full read-out of the exchanged. It first appeared in the B’Or HaTorah Journal, Vol. 18, pp. 183-192, and has subsequently been republished here:

https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default_cdo/aid/664329/jewish/On-Science-and-Its-Truths.htm.

¹¹ Ibid Page 186. Dovid Zaklikowski (see note 14) quotes Domb’s son Meir as having said that his father “greatly admired the Rebbe and respected his opinion.”

These letters provided an impetus for Domb and gave him the push he needed¹², and he began spending more time on the above-mentioned works, which was to work with other Jewish scientists on religious issues, in the capacity of the British branch of the AOJS; subsequently writing several articles and books on topics of Torah U'Maddah, — Religion and Science. These works were widely distributed and were considered classics at the time^{13, 14}.

Readers that have any additional light to share on the content of this article are encouraged to do so in the comments, or by emailing, N.Ahavaschesed@gmail.com.

¹² Ibid page 188.

¹³ See our coming article for more details with regard to the relationship between the Rebbe and Dr. Domb and the printing of an article in the book Challenge.

¹⁴ In preparation for this article I have been aided by, https://www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/1787865/jewish/Physicist-Bridged-Religion-and-Science.htm, and Dovid Zaklikowski, “Footprints – Colorful lives, huge impact”, 2017, pp 33-43. See there for a fuller picture into the connection which the Rebbe had with Dr. Domb.

It should be noted, that the main focus of this article is to shed light on one specific area of Dr. Domb's life. We make only brief note of other areas of his life. For a compressive biographical picture into his life see Dr. Elmer L. Offenbacher's biographical notes on Domb in “Encounter; Essays on Torah and Modern Life,” Ed. H. Chaim Schimmel and Aryeh Carmell (Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists; Feldheim Publishers, 1989), pp. 312-350. See there pp. 345-350 for a full listing of Dr. Domb's publications.



The late Rabbi Dr Kopul Rosen during a visit to Kfar Chabad



