



## THE DAVID CARDOZO ACADEMY

Machon Ohr Aaron & Betsy Spijer  
Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo, Ph.D., Dean

5 July 2017 /11 Tammuz 5777

Rabbi S.F. Zimmerman  
Gateshead Hebrew Congregation  
180 Bewick Road  
Gateshead, NE8  
England

In Defense of Rabbi Dweck and Orthodox Judaism

Nathan Lopes Cardozo

An Open Letter to Rabbi S. F. Zimmerman  
Rav of Gateshead, England

*Several weeks ago Rabbi Joseph Dweck, senior rabbi of the S&P Sephardic Community in London, gave a bold lecture on Judaism's attitude toward homosexuality (1). Soon after, a major controversy broke out in which Rabbi Dweck was attacked for his views and for some of his other halachic opinions. Sadly, this controversy spread like wildfire via the media, throughout the Jewish and non-Jewish world, embarrassing Rabbi Dweck and even British Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis. I feel the moral and halachic obligation to defend Rabbi Dweck, especially after the distinguished rabbi of the ultra-Orthodox Gateshead Hebrew Congregation (which has the largest rabbinical institutions in Europe), Rabbi Shraga Feivel Zimmerman, called for Rabbi Dweck's resignation – also published via the media. Here is my response to Rabbi Zimmerman. (A printed copy was sent to the Rav by postal mail.)*

7 Cassuto Street, Jerusalem, 9643307, Israel  
T: +972.2.642.7272 \* F: +972.72.240.0108 \* E: [office@cardozoacademy.org](mailto:office@cardozoacademy.org)  
[www.cardozoacademy.org](http://www.cardozoacademy.org)

Dear Rabbi Zimmerman, *Shelita*,

Shalom u-vracha.

As an alumnus of Gateshead Yeshiva, where I studied for eight years and from where I received *heter hora'ah* (rabbinical ordination) from its Rosh HaYeshiva, HaRav Aryeh Leib Gurwicz, z"l; and having been very close to your predecessor, HaRav Betzalel Rakov, z"l, and to the *mashgiach ruchani* (spiritual educator and leader) HaRav Moshe Schwab, z"l, both of whom I greatly admired; and having studied for several more years in Chareidi (ultra-Orthodox) yeshivot in Israel; and having been deeply involved in the world of Halacha, Hashkafa, Mussar and Chassidut for more than 50 years (I am 71 years old), I was taken aback by your letter in which you accuse Rabbi Joseph Dweck, senior rabbi of the S&P Sephardi Community, London, of not being "equipped to rule on Halacha, due to his limited knowledge, weak halachic reasoning skills and lack of training." You then accuse the rabbi of lacking "fear (of Heaven), modesty, purity, rabbinic training and scholarly interactions with his colleagues," after which you conclude with the harsh pronouncement that "he is not fit to be a rabbi" (2).

This extraordinarily condemnatory letter, which is conspicuously sparse in detail, has sparked several strong reactions in letters by rabbis who seem to have lost all sense of proportion and are now attacking Rabbi Dweck not only for his observations on homosexuality, but also for other halachic rulings and for his critique on the rabbinical establishment's lack of knowledge. On top of this, in a separate letter, the same (or several other) rabbis have now threatened Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis:

If Joseph Dweck is maintained in office as a rabbi, whether it is fully or even partially, in spite of all the letters received from highly respected Orthodox Rabbinical authorities in Gateshead and in Israel and worldwide, Chief Rabbi Mirvis should realize that he will be responsible for the splitting of Anglo-Orthodoxy and lose his credibility as a Chief Rabbi to a large consensus of Orthodox communities....We remind Chief Rabbi Mirvis.. that letters condemning Joseph Dweck and calling for his removal from the Rabbinate have already been issued by the Chief Rabbi of Israel HaRav Yitzchak Yosef, by HaRav David Yosef, by HaRav Shalom Cohen and HaRav Shimon Baadani, by the Beit Din Tsedek of Bnei Brak (HaRav Sarel Rosenberg, Av Beit Din), and by the Av Beit Din of Gateshead (HaRav Shraga Feivel Zimmerman), and it would be incongruous for any decision to contradict the conclusion of any of these letters" (3).

This letter constitutes nothing less than blatant blackmail. Moreover, some other letters attacking Rabbi Dweck reflect shameful cowardice on the part of the rabbis who did not even have the decency to sign their names.

It is a known fact that Rabbi Dweck has already apologized for some of his derogatory remarks (4) about several rabbis' Torah and halachic knowledge which, it must be admitted, are not entirely untrue. (To my knowledge, Rabbi Dweck never referred to anyone by name, while several of his opponents even deprived him of his rabbinical title!) Rabbi Dweck's type of rhetoric is commonly used in the Sefardic world. While he was no doubt wrong in making these statements, the problem with these rabbis' attacks on him is that they (deliberately?) took some of his halachic observations out of context, seemingly did not listen carefully to his words (perhaps having learned of them only by hearsay), and lacked the knowledge to judge these halachic suggestions on their real worth. I became aware of this after I carefully studied the relevant material.

While it may very well be true that Rabbi Dweck made several minor mistakes in his halachic observations (what rabbi doesn't?), it is most disturbing that you provided the impetus for the rabbis to declare war on Rabbi Dweck, and now on Chief Rabbi Mirvis as well, by declaring that Rabbi Dweck *must* be removed from the S&P because otherwise British Orthodoxy will be split.

I am astonished at the threats made by these rabbis. Do they not understand that by trying to undermine and blackmail the chief rabbi they have gone beyond the tolerable? Even more than that, they are playing into the hands of those they fear the most – the Reform and Mesorati communities. After all, if Orthodoxy *itself* has now rejected Rabbi Mirvis' Chief Rabbinate, these denominations will no longer feel the need to view the chief rabbi as the primary representative of all British Jewry.

There is little doubt that your letter will also push people away from Orthodoxy and right into the arms of other denominations, or even secularity.

I sincerely wonder whether before you made this most offensive observation you were in contact with Sefardic rabbis of the Syrian and Portuguese community (to which I belong), to ascertain what the Syrian or Portuguese-Spanish *masoret* (halachic tradition) is all about, as it is quite different from the Ashkenazic one, which you are used to, and even from the Sefardic Moroccan tradition. I am referring here to those authorities who have not learned in or been influenced by Ashkenazic yeshivot.

I wonder whether you've made an in-depth study of this *masoret*, which Rabbi Dweck happens to rely on. Were you not able to at least see Rabbi Dweck's point of view, even if you yourself would not *pasken* (decide) similarly? Isn't that an accepted practice in the halachic community?

Such an approach would have been wiser, instead of throwing oil on an already burning situation in which Rabbi Dweck was being attacked even before some of these letters were written.

What seems to be totally forgotten is that Rabbi Dweck's methodology in studying, understanding, and applying Halacha is very different from yours (and perhaps mine) but absolutely authentic and legitimate.

I would recommend that you and the other rabbis study the halachic works of: Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel (1880-1953), especially Responsa *Mishpatei Uziel*; Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Glasner (1856-1924), author of Responsa *Dor Revi'i*; Rabbi Chaim Hirshenson, z"l (1857-1935), particularly his magnum opus, *Malki Ba-Kodesh*, which is now being reprinted; Rabbi Yosef Mashash (1892-1974), former Sephardic chief rabbi of Haifa, and his highly unusual and controversial halachic rulings in Responsa *Mayim Tehorim*; and Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits (1908-1992), the *talmid muvhak* (distinguished and brilliant student) of the Sridei Aish, Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg (1884-1966), especially his book *HaHalacha, Kocha VeTafkida*. You would then see that Rabbi Dweck's approach is surely acceptable and may hold the future of halachic Judaism.

To deny that these great men are supreme masters of Halacha would be a farce.

I must also add that your letter begs the question of why you did not write and circulate similar letters concerning other rabbis, even well-known *poskim*, who have expressed views that are much worse than those of which Rabbi Dweck is accused. Why did you not call for *their* resignations? I am willing to send you, privately, their names and *piskei din* (rulings of law) with exact references. Some of these *piskei din* are hair-raising and oppose the very foundations of Judaism, having hurt many people, and having given a very bad name to our holy Halacha. I do not want to name these *poskim* here, as doing so would shame them and add to the great *chillul Hashem* that has been created around Rabbi Dweck.

Although I am aware that you stated, in 2015, that child abuse in the Orthodox community should be reported to the police, I am puzzled as to why (as far as I know) you did not protest against any of the other scandals that are taking

place within the Orthodox communities in England and around the world. They are by now common knowledge, even outside the Jewish community, bringing shame to us and our holy Torah.

Why, for example, do you (and the other rabbis opposing Rabbi Dweck) not voice your condemnation against the abuse of women and the financial corruption in the ultra-Orthodox community in England and beyond? Why do we not hear from you concerning the constant discrimination, in large segments of ultra-Orthodox sectors, against Orthodox converts, Ethiopians and Black Jews, not to mention the enormous suffering inflicted on *agunot*, or the fact that Israeli Chareidi soldiers are now being harassed by their own Chareidi brothers for having joined the Israeli army so that others can sit and learn in safety in Israeli Chareidi yeshivot? (I myself had the *zechut* [merit] to serve in the Israeli army for a short period of time, which gave me the opportunity to do a lot of *kiruv* work by explaining the beauty of Orthodox Judaism.)

Aren't these scandals much worse than anything Rabbi Dweck may have said? Unfortunately, I could mention many more examples.

Why focus on Rabbi Dweck's minor mistakes, when the Orthodox community has so many greater and more severe problems (many created by its own rabbis), which have caused incredible harm to Torah Judaism?

Furthermore, I ponder why you did not invite Rabbi Dweck to discuss this matter with you privately. Given the pressing nature of the issue of homosexuality within the Orthodox community, I cannot understand why you would not want to hear his perspectives and ideas on this, as well as on a large number of other subjects, which are of utmost importance to our people and to Orthodox Judaism. This would surely have been a more productive and less destructive way of voicing any disagreement you may have with him. By writing an open letter as you did, you actually dodged the substance of the issue, and it is being perceived as nothing more than an attempt to shame a man of courage who is trying his best to bring people closer to Orthodox, albeit not Chareidi, Judaism.

Have you read Rabbi Chaim Rapoport's book *Judaism and Homosexuality: An Authentic Orthodox View*, for which I wrote a letter of approbation and which contains a foreword by Emeritus Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks? It also includes a preface by Dayan Berel Berkovits, *z"l*, who served on the *beit din* of London's Federation of Synagogues, and with whom I studied in Gateshead Yeshiva. The book in many ways reflects what Rabbi Dweck said.

And even if you do not agree with some of these ideas, is that really a reason to attack him the way you did, undermining his integrity, religiosity and standing in the Spanish-Portuguese community? Do you sincerely believe that calling for his resignation is justified?

You may wonder why I publish this letter to you on the internet. I indeed would not have done so if not for the fact that by now, your letter and those from the other rabbis have had extensive exposure via the internet, giving Rabbi Dweck and Orthodox Judaism a bad name.

So I had no choice but to use that same internet to defend Rabbi Dweck and Orthodox Judaism against these verbal assaults, which came in the name of a complete misrepresentation of authentic Judaism and its halachic tradition.

I feel the need to tell people that *real* Judaism is far removed from these types of misguided attacks.

I am therefore writing this letter, as an expression of my great love for Orthodox Judaism and Halacha. I strongly believe in their supremacy, their ethos, and their compassion and wish to share this great way of exalted living with others.

I want to tell my readers that I, as an Orthodox Jew, together with many rabbinical colleagues, will have no part in this meaningless condemnation of a qualified rabbi, which is clearly a personal vendetta motivated by power struggles and jealousy among several rabbis and laypeople.

I call on Chief Rabbi Mirvis – who will have to learn that playing it safe is regrettably not always possible – and all decent rabbis and Jewish leaders to end this travesty. I urge the S&P community to continue to stand with Rabbi Dweck and to ensure that he will not appear before any *beit din* or other ad hoc authority. He must continue to sit on the Sephardic Beit Din, even if its *piskei din*, including on issues of *gittin*, will not be recognized by Rabbi Dweck's opponents.

The time has come to stop giving in to this kind of blackmail, whatever the consequences. In the long run, this policy will be victorious and will save Orthodox Judaism from its downfall. That which is healthy and honest will ultimately win. If Rabbi Dweck and the S&P will be marginalized, so be it.

And if it means that Chief Rabbi Mirvis will have to step down, let him do so with pride. We will be behind him!

But if the S&P and Rabbi Mirvis will give in, rabbis will no longer be able to speak their minds. The S&P and other communities will lose their independence and be subject to censure by all sorts of self-acclaimed rabbinical extremists, creating a situation that will terribly compromise Judaism.

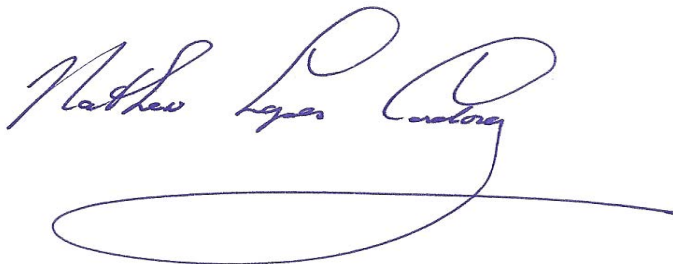
We cannot permit those rabbinic forces that want to own and dictate Judaism to destroy it. Inquisitions do not belong in authentic Judaism. Without strong opposition to this destructive trend the beautiful house of Judaism will collapse; and without proper renovations it will crumble to nothing.

I therefore suggest that you, as one of the most important halachic authorities in England, retract your comments concerning Rabbi Dweck and advise those rabbis who follow you to do the same. It would show great integrity and strength and will be seen as an outstanding example of how a real Orthodox rabbi acts.

Having the courage to admit a mistake is what turns life into unmistakable splendor. Rabbi Dweck did it. Now, those who oppose him should follow suit.

I care as much about your honor as I care about the honor of Rabbi Dweck and, above all, the honor and integrity of Judaism.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nathan Lopes Cardozo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending from the bottom of the name.

Nathan Lopes Cardozo,  
Yerushalayim

\*\*\*\*\*

[1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPhgFvZPK-o>

See my earlier observations at <https://www.cardozoacademy.org/thoughts-to-ponder/modern-day-inquisition-rabbi-joseph-dweck/>.

[2] Rabbi Zimmerman's letter of 15 Sivan 5777 / 9 June 2017.

[3] Quoted in *The Jewish Chronicle*, 30 June 2017.

[4] <https://www.thejc.com/news/news-features/dweck-says-sorry-for-criticising-rabbis-1.440817>.