

# My Own Trumpet

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

I've just had a [book of my essays](#) published in [Manchester](#). It's not my first book. I've written others on [Judaism](#), [theology](#) and [mysticism](#). But for me this book is rather special.

I was brought up in an oral society. My late father, universally known as [Kopul Rosen](#), was a famous orator. His style of grand oratory is no longer practiced nowadays. When we hear people talk in public they are lecturers, speakers, entertainers, some of note and distinction, but none of them that I have heard is an orator.

My father was born into a poor but loving and caring family of refugees in London over ninety years ago. He spoke Yiddish at home and English on the street. He grew up in a London in ferment, during the dramatic spread of Communism and Socialism, the Great War and then the Great Depression, and the rise of [Mosley Fascism](#). As a Jew he grew up during the classical formative Zionist struggle for a Jewish State.

It was a time before modern mass communication and electronic entertainment. As a result, thousands would turn up to hear great speakers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who would hold audiences spellbound for hours. As kids, my father would regale us with stories of great orators in Yiddish and English and the tricks and skills they employed to hold their audiences' attention. He would tell us about the hours he spent at [Hyde Park Corner](#) listening to the massively popular Sunday morning soapbox debates and the constant sparring and heckling.

It didn't matter what ideology you were preaching so long as you used words and language to make your point or to demolish a speaker. First-class minds sparred with each other. Fisticuffs were rare. It was language that was used in the most skillfully cruel and humiliating way. More often than not, humor was the weapon of choice rather than anger. By the time I visited Hyde Park Corner, cranks, lunatic missionaries, or intellectually-challenged fanatics occupied the soapboxes. It was a pale shadow of its illustrious past. But its impact on my father could be seen in the way he argued and debated, and totally demolished any argument his argumentative kids might try throwing back at him.

Even in Eastern Europe, where he went to study at [Mir](#), he was known for his Yiddish oratory and his facility with Yiddish for rhyming, jesting and entertainment. Throughout my life I have met people who recall the tremendous impact he made, even in one of the greatest yeshivas of all time.

My father became an amazingly popular and admired rabbi. His oratory packed synagogues wherever he went and his famous evidence to the Anglo-American Palestine commission in 1946 was regarded in its day as the most outstanding contribution made in the English language.

In 1948 he left the rabbinate in disgust and set up [Carmel College](#). Though he spent most of his time fundraising away from the school, his powers of speech and powerful personality inspired generations of pupils. The school was suffused with the magic of his personality even when he was absent.

I mention all this because I was not brought up to think of writing as my means of making a living, but speech. My father did write a small book on ["Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement"](#) for his MA in Manchester in 1939. He wrote a PhD on "The Concept of the Mitzvah", and shortly before he died he left a collection of popular essays to a mythical pupil, called ["Dear David"](#). But that was all. Sadly, only those who actually heard him speak can have any idea of what an amazing man and orator he was.

He didn't want me to try to follow in his footsteps and I originally went up to university to study architecture. But his death when I was 19 galvanized me into wanting to pick up his baton. So I threw myself into Jewish education and the rabbinate, using the tools he bequeathed me. Over the next forty years I talked and taught and spoke and lectured and used my own style of public speaking wherever I was. I am nothing more than a shadow of my father, but it's gratifying to be told so often that it was not wasted. But as I get older I become more and more aware of the ephemeral nature of the spoken word and the fading impact even of the greatest of personalities. So I have decided belatedly to switch out of speaking and into writing. This was how I came to turn to journalism and my newspaper columns. Simultaneously I began to start serious, literary writing as well—a very different skill and occupation.

I did not expect my more ephemeral essays to find a publisher. It was entirely due to the prompting and support of Mancunian [Joe Dwek](#) that this collection of my essays came into being. We were pupils together at Carmel. I must confess I was a very naughty boy. Having a father who was [headmaster](#) as well didn't help—I got into double trouble. Joe was my House Captain, Soccer Captain, and Prefect, and for some reason he took it upon himself to defend me. He has been a supportive friend ever since.

But we also share a legacy from my father of deep commitment to Judaism based on knowledge and scholarship. Joe's excellent brain always reacted against stupidity, fundamentalism and obscurantism, and he has always encouraged those in the Jewish community who were academically gifted, open-minded, and not a little iconoclastic.

So as someone born in Manchester, having a book published in Manchester, by friends who are Mancunian, with the support of the Manchester [Jewish Telegraph](#) makes this book very special. If you read it, I hope you'll enjoy it.

*To purchase Jeremy Rosen's book of essays, Beyond the Pulpit, or any of his other books, you can order [online](#) in the UK. (Just click on the word "online".)*

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