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Sh'ma שמע

Inside Haredi Judaism

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Talk About the Passion

Yehudah Mirsky

Sh'ma's readers, it seems safe to say, share a number of characteristics. University-educated; economically middle class or better; broadly liberal-minded in outlook and politics, pluralist with regards to their understandings of Jewish tradition and community; at the very least respectful and regularly outright devoted, passionately, to Jewish tradition and Jewish continuity; spiritually curious and at times adventurous; at home, at least to some extent, perhaps conversant with the world of Jewish texts, and the texture of Jewish rituals; appreciative of the many genuine intellectual, ethical and political benefits of secular modernity, though not unaware of its fraught relationship with Jewish life; people for whom their Jewish identity is a vital, perhaps the central component in an ongoing process of self-creation and expression, by the lights of their understanding of morals, community and spirituality, a process they share with other families of humanity, and with concerned individuals everywhere.

Who are these people who choose not to act according to the liberal narrative?

This is of course a broadly schematic (though I think roughly accurate) picture. There are, however, some very different pictures of Jewish life in our time, deeply at variance with this one and in this issue we hope to open a window onto one of them, a window through which we look on them and, hopefully, ourselves. This issue is devoted, primarily, to the ultra-Orthodox, the Haredim.

In the pages of this issue you will encounter ultra-Orthodox women in Jerusalem, their spiritual lives, their musical culture; a self-described "Hassidic Heretic," who blogs anonymously from Brooklyn; the editor of the Artscroll publishing empire, whose combination of Haredi ideology and top-of-the-line production and editing values has created a new and powerful Orthodox readership; Chabad Hasidim; Sephardi Jews who have found their best vehicle to power and dignity in Israel in the creation of a Sephardic ultraorthodoxy that never existed before. Also included is an analytic perspective on the "shift to the right" in Orthodoxy, the ambivalent heritage of modernist Jewish philosophy, and for a comparitive perspective, a reflective look at contemporary European Islam.

Haredi Judaism, a phenomenon that is shot through with paradox, has in recent decades generated an extraordinary amount of academic discussion. There is no doubt that Orthodox halakhah more closely resembles the way of life lived by the vast majority of Jews for centuries than do other contemporary forms of Jewish life. At the same time, ultra-Orthodoxy is not a simple, unmodified continuation of the tradition, but is itself — in its ideological self-consciousness, internal organization, creation in Israel of an entire subculture of full-time adult students, sophisticated and often compelling uses of religious freedom and the opportunities of democratic societies, not to mention its integration into information technology and its creating its own marketing niche — involved in a range of fascinating, surprising negotiations with modernity. There is striking diversity within the Haredi world and within Haredi groups as well.

People and groups who choose not to act according to the script laid out by modernization theory and the liberal narrative of secularism's march through civilization challenge those of us who do. The categories we deploy to understand them, such as "fundamentalism," at times obscure as much as they explain.

Shmuel Eisenstadt, the dean of Israeli sociologists, defines fundamentalists as "strong

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sectarian-utopian movements oriented to a pristine reading of the tradition, in light of which they seek to reconstruct the social-political order." Yet Ashkenazi Israeli Haredim consistently refuse to serve in ministerial positions and argue that Zionism is the ruinous sectarian utopia of our time. Even so, the word "pristine" may hold the key. Unlike liberal Jews and even unlike Modern Orthodoxy, Haredi Judaism offers a pristine Torah, a liberation from this world, a vision unblemished by the ruptures, discontinuities, failings, and often terrible fragmentation that constitute the modern lens onto reality, which is the epistemological and metaphysical price modernity pays for its own vision of liberation.

The boundary marking Haredi and not, runs deeper than terminology and categories and speaks to how we live our Jewish lives. Indeed recognizing the inadequacy of most social science categories to capture the lived realities of religious life is maybe its own reminder that Torah never really fits in boxes.

One thing that all the people and groups presented in this issue share is passion, a passion for Judaism, for Jewish learning, and for Jewish peoplehood, however they understand it, a passion that shapes their lives and by our shared peoplehood, shapes our lives as well. Do we, who move in Judaism's more avowedly liberal spheres, have an equal passion, something that could enable us all to work to build the Jewish future together?

The Changing Face of Orthodoxy

Samuel C. Heilman

Over the past 35 years, there has been a gradual shift in the center of gravity of the most traditionalist of American Jewish religious denominations. That shift is constituted by a consistent "slide to the religious right," during which elements of what has come to be called "Haredi" Orthodoxy have grown increasingly assertive and public, in many instances becoming the dominant voice and face of Orthodoxy. They stand in contrast to the Orthodox who embrace the plural and sometimes inconsistent life of American culture and parochial Jewish Orthodoxy. These Jews, whom I call "contrapuntalists," and who turn increasingly outward toward a concern with a cosmopolitan lifestyle, seek to remain firmly planted both in contemporary mainstream culture as well as the world of parochial Jewish commitments, even if that entails tension and living with inconsistency.

The more traditionalist Haredi Jews reject this stance and choose instead to remain ensconced in Orthodox Jewish enclaves, keeping American culture at arm's length. Moreover, because they stay put almost completely inside these enclaves, and "Jewish" is for them the paramount concern and field of activity, they have become the keepers and defenders of Orthodoxy and its institutions, as well as the framers of its ideology and mores. While their contrapuntalist counterparts sought engagement with the outside world believing that by doing so they would demonstrate one could be both fully Orthodox and fully American, in practice they became largely occupied by their professions, pursuit of an American lifestyle, power, and some wealth. In contrast, Haredi Jews who remained in the Orthodox enclaves became the Jewish educators, rabbis, Torah scholars, religious functionaries, and the like because they believed that all that was Jewish was all that counted. While contrapuntalists went to the university and pursued careers outside the four cubits of Jewish life, even as they maintained loyalties to Orthodox praxis and deferred to the rabbi/scholars in matters of halakhah, their Haredi counterparts stayed in and built up the walls around the Orthodox enclaves, which they fashioned according to their standards and parochial norms. In time, they naturally came to feel that they "owned" these enclaves and spoke for Orthodoxy. Moreover, as they have grown more politically astute and experienced, they have also begun to exert clout in local and national politics. Although at this point in time, the Haredi population still appears to constitute a numerical minority, at most somewhere around 35 percent of the approximately 750,000 to 800,000 of American Orthodox Jews, their confidence is that of a majority.

Demographically, the numbers of those who chose to remain in the enclaves are growing both because of their high birthrate (more than three times as high as the rest of Jewry) and their ability to discourage religious drop-

ping out. At the same time, all other Jews are at best stagnant, if not in demographic decline. American Orthodox Jewry has not only been extraordinarily successful in holding onto its offspring, it has actually spawned youth that distinguish themselves by choosing to move further to the traditionalist right, both in religious ideology and behavioral practice, than their parents. This is an Orthodoxy that looks to Haredi rabbis and teachers for leadership and is far more assertive than ever before in both speaking for and setting the agenda of Orthodox Jewry, if not for American Jewry in general. This is an Orthodoxy that demands *galus hanefesh,* a moral and spiritual "sense of separateness and estrangement" from the contemporary, often enticing, westernized, materialistic world that they continue to believe "devours those who seek to embrace it." They want no competing melodies in their lives, no dissonant harmonies, no lives in several keys — as do the contrapuntalists. They want one tune, a Jewish one, with only the inflections of the tradition.

Several factors have lead to this phenomenon, including: 1) the perceived decline of American culture, which led to an anxious retreat among many Orthodox from their rush to embrace that culture, its values and institutions; 2) the complete handover by the family of the responsibility of Jewish education to the day schools and yeshivas coupled with, 3) the decline of contrapuntalists in the ranks of the Orthodox rabbinate and Jewish education, such that the values and practices of Judaism to which the next generation was exposed were no longer in sync with those of the contrapuntalist parents but rather were made to reflect those of the educators who were in general committed to a far more parochial and traditionalist Orthodoxy; and, 4) the emergence as an essential experience in Orthodox education and a tool of continuity of the year or more of study in Israeli yeshivas and women's seminaries by high school graduates. In these institutions, young American Orthodox adolescents are separated from their home environment and culturally reshaped in religiously rightwing enclaves; they are presented with values and practices that celebrate highly parochial Judaism and Jewish identity as the most noble form of life.

As these adolescents have come of age, they have increasingly chosen an assertively parochial Orthodoxy to represent their version of "Torah-true" Judaism. Moreover, they have done so in an America where religiously rightwing, highly particularist, and proudly ethnic identities are no longer considered out of step with the norm.

As Haredi versions of Orthodoxy have grown, the variations within it begin to loom larger. Hence the differences between the Lithuanian-style yeshiva Orthodox and the Hasidic groups; between those who work (however partially) in gainful employment and those whose goal is to make Torah learning a full-time vocation supported by others; those who embrace material wealth and its pursuit and those who see such concerns as vainglorious. But these potential fracture lines are only visible from inside Orthodoxy. Whether or not they will deepen and lead to competition for resources and authority remains to be seen. Moreover, the ability of those within strictly Orthodox enclaves to financially sustain their way of life, without the traditional support they have in the past received, remains uncertain. As well, the Jews who have built the walls against the cultural and social domains outside may find their isolation something less than splendid and their institutions withering from lack of economic resources. As a consequence, the future of Orthodoxy as it is evolving continues to remain an open question.

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MARCH:
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Jews and Evangelicals: Can We Work Together?

Samuel C. Heilman is Distinguished Professor of Sociology at Queens College C.U.N.Y. and author most recently of Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy.

A Conversation on Haredi Life, Israel,

Shmuel Goldin: I just returned from a year's sabbatical in Israel where I had the opportunity to spend time with my sister who lives in Har Nof, a Haredi community. Are the two Haredi communities — in the U. S. and in Israel — different?

Nosson Scherman: While I can't really speak authoritatively, the Haredi community in Israel seems more self-contained — they don't mix much with the rest of the population, which is a shame. Haredim here in the U. S. interact more — there are more people in a profession or in business. Even those in *hinuch*, education, do outreach and are therefore less insular. It's changing, but by and large the traditionalists anywhere tend to be insular. By the way, insularity cuts more than one way; non-religious Jews are often quite ambivalent about getting to know us.

Goldin: How do you feel about the title Haredi?

Scherman: Although I don't like labels, rightwing or fundamentalist, the title Haredi was adopted by the fervently Orthodox people 100 years ago. It comes from the last chapter in Isaiah, where God describes people who serve Him zealously.

Goldin: Why are the Haredim insular?

Scherman: Primarily because Haredi Jews must preserve their values and religious way of life. I think we both agree that what passes for modern culture — the worship of money, loose sex, general crassness, and vulgarity — is not what we want for our children. All Haredim agree about that. But there are subtle differences between the so-called Lithuanian yeshiva world, which is more study-oriented and more rigid in matters of principle, and the Hasidic world. Hasidim are more likely to be in the business or workforce and often more ready to negotiate. But these are generalities, not hard and fast rules. Much of the insularity in Israel, getting back to your question, dates back to the early waves of *aliyah*. Most of the immigrants who came to Palestine were rebelling against the Orthodoxy of their parents and grandparents. They arrived and saw the traditional Haredi community that was already living in Yerushalayim. The newcomers derided it as a black, medieval community that refused to come into the 20th century, and this created a great deal of hostility. The ill will remains. One must know history to understand current events, just as we must know the history of the Civil War and Reconstruction to understand race relations in America.

Goldin: In my Modern Orthodox community, Zionism is a major part of our gestalt. How do you feel about the existence of the State of Israel?

Scherman: The Haredi community, whether in the U. S. or in Israel, is opposed to the political leadership of the country. The Knesset, the government, and the Supreme Court under Aharon Barak, are engaged in a stealth war against traditional Judaism. Both the Haredim and the secularists are demonized by one another.

Goldin: Are you opposed to the policies of a particular government, or are you opposed to the institution of the state?

Scherman: I'm not opposed to the institution of the state.

Goldin: Is the Haredi community supportive of the existence of the state of Israel?

Scherman: Yes, the vast majority are. In the last two U.S. elections, the general Jewish community was over 80 percent Democratic, but Haredi Jews voted over 80 percent for Bush in 2004 and for Republicans in 2006, primarily because of Bush's support of Israel. It's true that in the pre-state years, Haredim were afraid that the secularists would mount an all-out war against traditional Orthodoxy. And many of them wanted to do exactly that. It took Ben Gurion — as non-Haredi as they come — to convince his colleagues that unity was more important than ideological victory. While many Haredim opposed statehood on theological grounds, history shows that the vast majority went along, voted, and were represented in the Knesset from the start. A few years ago, there was a mass rally in Washington in support of Israel. There were mostly Modern Orthodox Jews but there was a large representation of Haredim as well. But in the papers and on the television, the stars of the show were a dozen or so Neturei Karta people demonstrating against Israel. And in Israel, in the Knesset there are Haredi political parties — Agudath Israel, Degal HaTorah, and Shas. The political system in Israel is sick — but not because of the conflict between Haredim and seculars; it's just a sick system.

Goldin: One difficult issue is that most Haredi children do not go to the army. I hear

Learning, and Divine Providence

many Israelis say, "My children go to the army. My children defend the country. And I find it problematic that there is an entire population within Israel that isn't doing that." There's a perception that the Haredi community is benefiting from the sacrifice of others.

Scherman: It's hard to respond to that because the response is something that most people today cannot accept. A young Hasidic man tells this story: "How does Israel come through all of these crises? Well, there's a miraculous way, and there's a normal way. The miraculous way is if the Jewish people can settle their differences and become unified and work together, and the Arab people are ready to make peace. The normal way is for God to intervene." Theologically, the Haredim are learning and praying and doing breathtaking amounts of *chesed* in Israel. The mayor of Yerushalayim created an organization, Yad Sarah, where tens of thousands of volunteers help the sick and needy. Of course there are other people who smoke cigarettes on street corners and say that they're Haredim so they don't have to go to the army. I hold them in contempt. But as for the people who are really learning Torah, we believe they are our protection; the survival of Israel depends on God's mercy and protection. The Talmud, based on a verse in Jeremiah, teaches that if there was ever a moment when there was no Torah study happening, anywhere on earth, Creation would cease to exist. And it is the people who serve God sincerely and often at personal sacrifice who earn that protection for the entire country.

Goldin: How do you feel about secular knowledge, culture, pursuing a career? Do the benefits of secular knowledge and secular culture go beyond just making a living?

Scherman: I'm certainly not opposed to having a profession to make a living. Secular culture for the sake of secular culture is not a traditional Jewish value. That's a difference between the Haredim and the Modern Orthodox. Going to the ballet because the ballet is beautiful or going to the Metropolitan Opera, that's where we diverge.

Goldin: I think we diverge more about the study of mathematics, or science — the acquisition of knowledge. Is there intrinsic benefit to secular knowlege, or is such learning only to be pursued for the purpose of a career? Is the Haredi community closing itself out from beneficial dimensions of knowledge and culture?

Scherman: It happens. It's wholesome to be insular but not extremely so. And most people I think are really not extremely so. It's impossible to draw hard and fast lines because human beings can't be pigeonholed.

Goldin: The *kolel* (adult male yeshiva) has always had a major place within the Jewish world. But it has always been a place for the best and the brightest who would then somehow give back to the Jewish world in kind, whether it was as a *dayan* or rabbi. But today it appears to have become a goal within the Haredi community that everyone should sit and learn all day. Is such a situation sustainable financially, or humanly?

Scherman: Young men do not become really serious about learning until they're 16, 17, 18 years old. So several years in the *kolel* is part of the educational experience. When you're just a young man getting married, you still need more learning; even a year or two in a rarified Torah atmosphere sets the tone for future family life.

Goldin: Many of our children go for a year of study in Israel immediately following high school, which is definitely beneficial. But more and more young people within the Haredi community, and some within Modern Orthodoxy, are choosing to sit and learn as a life goal.

Scherman: For many people it's an excellent idea. For others, it's horrible. In my observation, when the men reach a point where they can't manage anymore or are not growing anymore, they leave the *kolel*. Either they go into teaching or business or a profession.

Goldin: There are lots of families, though, who are living in poverty, who are not managing in Israel or the U. S.

Scherman: Let's be practical. When it can't be sustained anymore, people will go to work. There is a tension between two important values. On the one hand is the importance of Torah study as a benefit to the family and its spiritual influence on the cosmos. On the other hand, a husband has the responsibility to support his family. Families make their own decisions.

Goldin: Today, there are parents who are not sitting and learning so they can provide for the children who are sitting and learning. But when the children who are sitting and learning have children, they're not going to be able to provide for them.

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin has served as spiritual leader of the Orthodox congregation, Ahavath Torah in Englewood, New Jersey, since 1984. He is an instructor of Bible and Philosophy at the Isaac Breuer College and the James Striar School of Yeshiva University and serves on the Executive Committee of the Rabbinical Council of America.

Rabbi Nosson Scherman studied at Torah Vodaath and its post-graduate division, Beth Medrosh Elyon. After fourteen years as a teacher and principal, he became general editor of ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications. He is the author of the Stone Edition of the Chumash, the ArtScroll Siddur *and* Machzor, *and the recently completed three volumes of the* Rubin Edition of the Early Prophets.

Scherman: Societies and individuals cope with economic realities — over time making needed adjustments. The explosive growth of yeshivas and kolels has transformed Jewish life exponentially for the better. The Orthodox world was almost moribund before it happened. I think it was Divine Providence that gave the Jewish community and this country the prosperity that made this possible. What will happen next, no one knows.

Goldin: But you can project learning as *one* option; not the sole option. Doing so would prevent giving those who don't sit and learn the sense that they're failing because they're not in the elite.

Scherman: I agree with you. Some of the men who are not suited to full-time learning feel that they're failures. Every yeshiva recognizes that problem. But if the Rosh Yeshiva gives options, then their institutions — and the Jewish people — might lose the most talented.

Goldin: But we are saying two things to our community: first, that there is one particular goal that everybody should aspire to, and anyone who doesn't quite make that grade really isn't cutting it. Then, quietly, we say to those who aren't cutting it, "you're not really a problem." Aren't we creating an unhealthy situation particularly for the men who can't sit in a yeshiva and learn? If we create an unreasonable expectation in the community at large, aren't we doing our young people a disservice?

Scherman: On the other end of the spectrum, in the U. S. — especially in the Jewish community — the ideal is a college education, preferably graduate school. But there are plenty of good Jewish boys and girls who can't hack it.

Goldin: You're right. No community benefits from having just a cookie-cutter mentality. I wonder whether we wouldn't all be better served if we reset our expectations. What about the dropouts — people leaving the Haredi world?

Scherman: I think that by and large it's like the Neturei Karta demonstrating with the Arabs or going to Teheran to embrace Ahamanidinejad. They get the headlines. Of course a tiny percentage leave, but nothing like what the publicity tries to portray.

Goldin: How does the Haredi community perceive the concept of *or l'goyim,* playing a role in world events on a positive level? Will this be accomplished by active interface with the non-Jewish world, or by just having non-Jews emulate our lives?

Scherman: It's not by close interaction. The Talmud's definition of *kiddush haShem* is to live the way the Torah wants us to live and have people look at us and say, "Wow, how fortunate and praiseworthy are the parents who have such children."

Divine Sparks

Simon Jacobson

I'll never forget the question posed to me by a woman in South Miami Beach. I had just finished a lecture about my book, *Toward a Meaningful Life*, presenting the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, to the secular public.

"Did the Rebbe recognize Conservative Judaism?" asked the woman. "If not, I don't want to buy the book of a bigot," she bluntly stated. The auditorium fell silent.

I paused before I replied. "No, he did not recognize its legitimacy." The audience became uncomfortably restless, until I continued: "But he also didn't recognize Orthodox Judaism, ultra-Orthodox, reformodox, reconstructodox, and all the other 'doxes' that have been and will be created. The reason being: Nowhere is mention made of all these labels in the constitution of Judaism — the Torah."

And then I asked them: Was Moses Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform? Anyone with even a rudimentary understanding of spirituality knows that one cannot stereotype and fit the soul into man-made labels and structures; the soul is a Divine force in each of us, infusing us with an indispensable mission to fulfill in our lifetime.

I learned this fundamental truth in Chabad, as a student and Hasid of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Rabbi Schneerson, or as he is lovingly called, "The Rebbe," was the seventh in a dynasty of rebbes, spiritual leaders, that began with the founding of the Chabad Hasidic movement in Belarus by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812). Rabbi Schneur Zalman, whose lineage traces back to King David, was the youngest student of Rabbi Dovber of Mezeritch (d. 1772), who in turn was the student and successor of Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer

(1698-1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism in 1734.

The contribution of Chabad Hasidus can be appreciated by placing its advent in historical context. The primary challenge facing the Jewish people following the Emancipation in the 18th century was: how to benefit from newfound freedoms while not compromising the integrity of millennia-old Jewish tradition. Indeed, modern assimilation was birthed as a result of a people unprepared for the challenges of accelerated emancipation. The challenge would take on different forms in the subsequent years — the battle between religion and science, between church and state, and between faith and reason. Some chose insulation to protect themselves from these progressive forces; others compartmentalization, and yet others assimilation.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman, and the six successive generations of Chabad rebbes, developed an eloquent and comprehensive system to bridge the schism between the material and the spiritual, offering a dynamic blueprint for Jewish life, one that makes the spiritual journey personally relevant to contemporary times.

Drawing from the vast corpus of mystical and talmudic teachings, Chabad (an acronym for *chochma, binah, dat,* the three defining intellectual faculties — conception, understanding, knowledge) teaches that within all of matter lies potent spiritual energy. Each of us is charged with the mission of discovering the Divine "sparks" allocated to us in our respective corner of the world and sphere of influence.

We relieve the tension between matter and spirit by spiritualizing the material, releasing the Divine energy embedded in every person, object, and experience. Redemption is the natural culmination of this process. Recognizing the Divine soul in each person naturally leads to a loving attitude toward every individual, regardless of background or persuasion.

If Kabbalah manifests the Divine in the human, then Chabad Hasidism transforms the human into the Divine. This interface between God and man allows us to enter the emancipated world without compromising timeless values. On the contrary: it begets the opportunity to integrate both freedoms, material and spiritual, by refining and spiritualizing material secularism, turning the world into an intimate home for the Divine. Chabad offers man the tools to perceive and reveal the Divine in every aspect of life, to integrate personal independence with the highest moral standards of Torah, to blend fiery passion with profound intellect.

The ultimate litmus test for the success of any movement or philosophy is its future: Does it inspire passion and commitment in its youth? Does it have the power to perpetuate into future generations?

Since its inception, some 250 years ago, Chabad has spawned generations of adherents, men and women from all walks of life. Today, Chabad is a vibrant force in Judaism. Infused with a profound sense of mission, tens of thousands of young revolutionaries can be found all across the globe, directing Chabad houses, schools, synagogues, and community centers — perpetuating Jewish life and igniting souls.

What lies behind this power is a profound philosophy that plumbs the depths of Talmud and Kabbalah and integrates it into a systematic lifestyle, joining ritual and spiritual in a seamless union. The intimate appreciation of each soul's dignity — regardless of background, education, or Jewish experience — drives the Chabad individual, welcoming all with an unmatched warmth and non-judgmentalism. Eternal and humble respect for the mysterious journey of every unique soul, and the responsibility to do everything possible to actualize that soul's potential, lies at the heart of a Chabadnik's commitment: to not just warm yourself in this cold universe, but to warm all those around you. A Jew is a Divine soul, period. And "who can know their [every soul's] greatness and excellence of in their root and source in the living God...all Jews are called real brothers" (*Tanya* chapter 32).

The Hasid is driven by the absolute belief that we now stand at the threshold of redemption, when all the Divine "sparks" will be actualized. We therefore are compelled to do everything possible to finish our work of refining and transforming the material universe into a Divine home; to be "a light unto nations" and reveal the Godly "spark" in every human being and in every part of existence. Then our accumulative effort, coupled with the hard work of generations past, will finally erupt into a global surge of goodness and spirituality, bringing on the age of redemption, the messianic age, when the world will be filled with Divine knowledge as the waters cover the sea.

Simon Jacobson is the author of Toward a Meaningful Life *(William Morrow, 2002), founder of The Meaningful Life Center (meaningfullife.com), and publisher of the Yiddish-English weekly,* The Algemeiner Journal *(algemeiner.com). Rabbi Jacobson served as the documenter and publisher of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe's public talks from 1979 till 1992.*

Online Diaries: Blogging and the Hasidic Life*

One of the core things the Internet has taught me is that the rabbis are not always right. Ironically this realization proves the rabbis right. For years, the rabbis, insisting that access to the "impure" Internet corrupts the mind and soul, forbade it.

I grew up Hasidic, totally oblivious to the world outside our community. Television, movies, radio, or English newspapers never entered the house. I went to c*heder*, where we spent most of the time learning Torah; "English" studies consisted primarily of arithmetic. Socialized to act and think differently, I thought of myself not as a stranger but rather as a superior being — a chosen one.

And then, some years later, I found the Internet and uncovered my ignorance. Although the Internet was forbidden (at that point I was still practicing), I couldn't accept the idea the rabbis insisted as doctrinaire — that reading and thinking about the core tenets of Judaism is prohibited. As suspicious as such a decree might sound, I managed to cognitively reason that this ban was for those people who might understand the questions but not wholly grasp the answers offered by the great rabbinical philosophers, and so, to not walk into a potential soul-destroying peccadillo one should refrain from reading "outside" material. I believed in myself a little too much, I guess, and thought that I would understand all the answers. I began to explore and question everything I had been taught — wondering if it just might be a farce. I realized that the rabbis did not have satisfying answers; I suspected that no one did (nor did they have the questions). From this realization to acting out — in secret, of course — did not take long, and soon I began to voice my frustrations and speak online with a community of likeminded questioners.

I took my cue from other Hasidic bloggers who write to a diverse array of readers, not only likeminded Hasidim. I started writing my own online diary, calling it "A Hasid and a Heretic" (hassid.blogspot.com). In one of my first posts I admitted to eating on Yom Kippur and to a host of other transgressions and sins and got shocking responses both online and offline — controversy really does sell. Unlike my blog heroes "Hasidic Rebel" (hasidicrebel.blogspot.com) and "Shiagetz" (theshaigetz.blogspot.com), my grammar was horrendous — I had never really learned to write. But since the other bloggers were much more accepting of the dogma and were only critical of the lifestyle, compared to my heresy, I had people who cared to read, debate, and convince me to change my sinful ways. Soon I found good fellows who took their time to correct my English and teach me how to be more articulate. Most of my readers, I believe, are Hasidim. Some are likeminded who identify with the tale, or proselytizing-minded who try to convert me. But, surprisingly, I get emails and comments from people I wouldn't believe would be at all interested — people from southern states or from as far away as Germany, Brazil, or Malaysia.

After writing a few posts mostly just for fun with no thoughtful plan at the urging of a virtual friend, I found the interaction with readers very curative. It gave me my own beaten chair in the mythological Hyde Park to stand on and preach to half-interested bystanders and the occasional tourist with a camera.

Alas, the longer I stood selling my idea, the tougher it became. I found myself screaming at times, begging bystanders and supporters alike to bring me a shred of evidence with which to hang on, naturally to no avail. Continuing to live the life of a *frum* Jew didn't help matters too much. It's one thing to fast believing that you serve a higher purpose, it's quite another to drive my family to the shopping malls on December 29th (taking advantage of the season's sales), while fasting because the children know that the tenth of Tevet is a fast day. Had I known what I was getting myself into, I might rather have remained ignorant.

Before long, people I know in real life would mention blogs in general or mention the bad-boy "Shtreimel" (my pseudonym). I had to try very hard to inconspicuously avert the subject. The absurdity peaked one day when I took a Hasidic hitchhiking couple from Brooklyn to Monsey. The man, sitting with me in the front seat, wouldn't stop talking about the "Heretic" who "washes our dirty laundry in public," while the woman in the back talked about the Internet's bad influence.

Most Hasidic bloggers are aware of the dangers of people finding out their real identities. "Baal Devarim" (sitra-achra.blogspot.com) is a

** This essay was written anonymously to protect the identity of the writer.*

great new addition to the *frum* blogsphere. For some time he commented on other blogs under the name "szhgknb," and he is "not eager to find out" what might happen to him if his secret is revealed. Another blogger, "Hasidic Rebel," is aware that "there are always firebrands — folks who can decide to demonstrate outside my home, [where] a random rock might find its way into my daughter's bedroom."

The greatest danger lies in the potential destruction of the family fabric. No one deems it worthy to break up a marriage and get shunned by the community for a blog. And none of us want our children to be expelled from their schools — and we are all aware of that possibility — so we go the extra mile to hide our identities. I post a disclaimer on every page: "In order to hide my identity," it reads, "I use a lot of misinformation and intentionally misguide you on anything that could lead back to me… God is in the details they say, and when I gave up on God I gave up on the details too, but the essence of anything I write is unfortunately true."

The Many Shades of Black:
Diverse Voices in Haredi Society

Sima Zalcberg

There is a tendency to see the ultra-Orthodox society as a solid mass of "black hats." In actuality, however, this society includes a variety of groups that differ from one another in their worldview, way of life, and degree of commitedness to the tradition and halakhah. Moreover, even these subgroups contain voices that are not only different but are also sometimes in opposition.

This phenomenon is true, as well, among the women in one of the most extreme groups in Hasidic society, the Toldot Ahaaron. The Hasidim of Toldot Aharon, known for their extreme stand against modernity, secular knowledge, and Zionism, stand out because of their unique outward appearance. The women, who are required to wear plain, dark-colored clothing, shave their heads upon marriage and wear a black kerchief. This outward appearance sends the message that the group has a unified collective identity.

Although all of the women wear similar dark-colored clothes and black kerchiefs, subtle differences do not merely reflect the woman's personal taste, but attest to differences in the strictness with which the women adhere to the community's modesty restrictions and their degree of religious zealotry. For example, the kerchief considered "most modest" is the longest one, fitting closely to the woman's head and covering the entire scalp. The two ends of the kerchief come down the woman's chest, serving to hide it. In contrast, the kerchief considered "the least modest," not only fails to hide the woman's neck and chest but is raised from her head by a thin sheet of foam, which the women feel provides a more flattering appearance. One of the reasons the color black was chosen for the kerchief is that "there are no shades of black," and yet the women have figuratively introduced "shades of black" by wearing the black kerchief in different ways.

Among the women I studied, I encountered a variety of voices that reflected the existence of different camps within the group — ranging from extreme zealots, who reject all innovation, to those who favor more progress and openness.

There were, for example, a variety of voices about the character of the girls' school. Some women supported offering art classes in the school, saying that "the girls live in this world, so they must be given the tools to cope with it." Others were opposed to such classes because they believed that art would confront the girls with "elements that will taint their spirit." The debate eventually led to a split in the school and great tension.

This was not a trivial debate, as it involved essentially different opinions about how the girls should be educated, as well as the group's view of its relations with the secular society and modernity. The different views reflect a continual tension between tradition and modernity — between the need to adapt to changing situations, on the one hand, and the tendency toward conservatism and the rejection of all novelty, on the other.

These differences demonstrate that Toldot Aharon is not monolithic and that human reality is never black-and-white. The ultra-Orthodox society, including Toldot

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Aharon, defines itself a priori as the most religiously stringent and uncompromisingly committed to halakhah. A hierarchical structure, therefore, develops according to the degree of commitment to tradition and halakhah each group displays. Since the members of Toldot Aharon inevitably adapt to modernity to some degree, different camps arise. This multi-vocality reflects the complexity of the ultra-Orthodox society, demonstrating that different camps — even in the most extreme groups — exist, and that even they are not invulnerable to the influence of modern society.

Women's Voice and Song

Asya Vaisman

On a Sunday two years ago, I set out for the neighborhood of Williamsburg, Brooklyn to record Hasidic women singing Yiddish songs. My first appointment was with Mrs. F., who had told me on the telephone that she knew a number of Yiddish songs but did not have a good voice. As part of the interview, I asked her about the songs. "I'm not into singing," she replied, insisting that she never sings. When I reminded her of our earlier conversation, she reluctantly conceded that she did know a few songs. When she began singing, it turned out that one of the songs was actually a lengthy ballad to which she knew all of the words. This pattern was repeated during many of my interviews: women would deny knowing or singing songs and would then proceed to sing extensively.

At the end of the interview, Mrs. F. took me to several of her neighbors' apartments, from which I acquired a large repertoire of songs — Sabbath songs, children's songs about biblical figures, elaborate songs from musicals, and some original compositions.

The material I collected is mostly unknown to people outside the Hasidic community. *Kol isha,* the halakhic regulation of a woman's voice, forbids Hasidic women from performing publicly or recording songs; additionally, the insular nature of Hasidic communities makes this material almost inaccessible. The interviews I conducted with women from Satmar, Ger, Bobov, and Tolner Hasidic communities provide rich insights into the role that songs and singing play in a Hasidic woman's life.

The Yiddish songs I heard were learned by the women primarily in one of four ways: at music classes in all-girls' schools, at all-girls' camps, at home, or from tapes. Generally, the girls are given photocopied booklets with song lyrics, and they learn the melodies to the songs by ear. They almost always sing in groups or choirs, and this affects their style of singing. Singing at home is less frequent, although women do sing during all-female gatherings — for example, at a party for a bride the weekend before her wedding. Women seem to sing most when they are school-age and when they have small children. As they get older, women generally sing less, to the point where many of the women interviewed who were in their sixties claimed to have forgotten all the songs they knew for lack of occasions to sing. There are, of course, many exceptions, such as women who run daycare centers or teach small children.

Most of the songs I've collected have some religious content — songs about Jewish holidays, faith, and the role of God in the life of Hasidim. There are also historical songs, mostly about the Holocaust, as well as lullabies and songs with stories from the Torah. The songs about the Holocaust are particularly interesting and disproportionately popular in the community. These songs struggle with difficult theological questions, such as how far a Jew can go to save his life. The responsibility to make a decision between *pikuach nefesh* (saving one's life) and *kiddush haShem* (dying for one's faith) lay on the shoulders of ordinary people, not wise rabbis with years of halakhic training. In one song, for example, a mother is forced to leave her child with non-Jews to protect him, and she warns the child: "Don't speak another Yiddish word, don't sing another Yiddish song, but remember in your heart that you are a Jew." In another song, a woman sings a lullaby to a child she had adopted whose mother had been killed by the Nazis.

While the melodies of most songs are original, some children's songs are sung to non-Jewish melodies — like a song about body parts sung to the tune of "Frère Jacques" and a Rosh Hashanah song to the tune of "Oh My Darling Clementine." Women usually do not seem to be aware that these melodies originate from outside their community.

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Most of the Yiddish songs that I have collected are sung regularly only by women. Men generally sing *niggunim*, songs without words, or songs in Hebrew, rather than in Yiddish. While women know the men's songs from hearing their husbands singing and from public gatherings, they do not sing these songs as often.

Much can be learned about Hasidic culture by examining the songs of Hasidic women, speaking to the women who sing them, and learning about their singing practices.

Shas: A Religious Response to Cultural Distress

Avi Picard

For more than fifteen years, ultra-Orthodox political representors in Israel's Knesset have come from a group whose own standing in ultra-Orthodox society is secondary, namely Sephardic Haredim. The ultra-Orthodox worldview, of course, developed among Eastern European Jews struggling to define themselves against the Haskalah, Jewish Enlightenment, and Zionism. In Israel, likewise, ultra-Orthodox society is essentially Ashkenazi; those who refuse to use Hebrew as a mundane language speak instead the language of Ashkenazi Jews, Yiddish. How, then, has it happened that the principal ultra-Orthodox representation in the Knesset belongs to a small, marginal group of ultra-Orthodox Sephardim?

The Shas movement was founded with the support of an Ashkenazi scholar, Rav Eliezer Shach, who led the Lithuanian branch of ultra-Orthodoxy. In his battle for the spiritual leadership of Agudat Yisrael, Shach harnessed the sense of discrimination that the Sephardim felt. Since its founding, not only has Shas freed itself (to a large degree) from the patronage of Agudat Yisrael, but it has in fact become twice as powerful, with twice as many seats in the 2006 election. The reason for this success lies in the fact that a majority of people who voted for this ultra-Orthodox Sephardic party were not themselves ultra-Orthodox — at least not according to the standard Israeli definition of the term. These were voters who work for a living, serve in the army, identify with the state of Israel, and live in mixed neighborhoods. Indeed, a not insignificant number of Shas voters are not observant, defining themselves as traditional, or even secular.

So how can we explain their vote? In trying to solve this puzzle, political analysts have tended to focus on circumstantial explanations. They attributed Shas's remarkable success in the 1996 elections, for instance, to the distribution of amulets by the kabbalist Rabbi Kadouri. They explained the large turnout in 1999 as a protest vote against the indictment of Shas leader Aryeh Deri and the 2006 vote as a protest against the economic policies of then-Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

But these explanations can be easily refuted, and the need for a different explanation for each election suggests that something deeper is at work.

Social activists, meanwhile, ascribe Shas's success to the social services it provides, from formal and informal education to hot meals for the poor. But a statistical study would show that the number of those who benefit from Shas's social services is smaller than the number of its voters and therefore cannot explain the dimensions of Shas support. Movements that have offered services far more broadly, moreover (the Labor Party, for instance, by means of the Histadrut), have not always succeeded in persuading those who received their services to vote for the movements that provided them.

Another explanation for Shas's support among non-ultra-Orthodox voters looks at how the movement tried to rectify what had been for years the Israeli classification of the cultures and traditions of Jewish immigrants from Islamic countries as second-class. In order to integrate into Israeli society, Jews from Muslim countries were required to shed their culture and undergo "modernization." Those who clung to the traditional cultural patterns comprised the lower rungs of Israeli society, what would come to be called "the second Israel."

Many of those whose parents had emigrated from Muslim countries in the 1950s thus inherited a condescension toward their parents' culture. While the social parties — and other parties that pretended to speak in

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the name of discrimination against Sephardim — mainly addressed economic gaps, Shas sought directly to touch a more sensitive nerve. It insisted that poverty and educational failure were but the symptoms of a much deeper malady: the trampling of Sephardic heritage and, as a consequence, of Sephardic pride and identity. Shas sought "to restore the crown to its glory" (a Shas motto employed by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef).

Many Sephardic Jews, including those who were not religious, saw this restoration as an answer to their distress. They saw the very existence of Shas in public life as a way to reclaim the self-esteem that "modernization" had undermined. Only Shas, this very "unmodern" movement, could confront the demand to modernize, which itself concealed a less explicit demand: to become Ashkenazi.

In this way, Sephardic Jews, those who see Shas as the party that shores up their identity, bestow upon it great political power and have, therein, created a disproportionate ultra-Orthodox representation in Israeli politics.

Mendelssohn and Modernity

Abraham Socher

In the beginning, the question of Enlightenment was intertwined with what came to be called the Jewish question. Did the ideals of the European Enlightenment require Jewish rights? And if they did, what did Jews have to give up in return? How "Jewish" could they be, and of what did Jewishness consist? Could Enlightenment universalism countenance Jewish particularism, and vice versa?

In Prussia, every liberalization of Jewish rights from 1780 to 1812 came with a corresponding demand to change or give up something: one's name, one's beard, one's language. In France, Napoleon convened a "Sanhedrin," which was asked such questions as to whether their first loyalty was to members of the French nation or to other members of the exiled Jewish people, wherever they might be.

Such cultural imperialism is impossible to justify. On the other hand, civil society is impossible in the absence of some real cultural commonality. While I have no ready answers (and distrust anyone who does), such contemporary questions do make the Jewish experience in the 18th-century Enlightenment of particular interest now. No one is more identified with this experience than the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786).

There are moments in which the large and pressing questions of the day seem to coalesce in a particular human life. Mendelssohn's Christian contemporaries sometimes referred to him as the "Socrates of Berlin," in honor of his most popular book, *Phaedon*, which updated one of the great Platonic dialogues. But he was also called the "Circumcised Socrates," a particularly pointed way of marking their astonishment that a Jew could fill such a role in the German Enlightenment. Another of Mendelssohn's nicknames, the "Jewish Luther," refers to the reforms that some people hoped he would initiate to integrate his brethren into enlightened civil society, a task he declined.

If Moses Mendelssohn can be said to have written anything equivalent to Luther's "95 Theses," it was his book *Jerusalem: On Religious Power in Judaism*. He wrote *Jerusalem* in 1784, near the end of his life, after the publication of an anonymous pamphlet that challenged him with being inconsistent and several decades when he tried to diplomatically finesse the questions of how the modern state must reform itself in order to fully integrate Jews and how Jews must reform themselves to be citizens of that state.

The anonymous pamphlet ended, "One step more and you will become one of us. ... Your most sincere admirer, S**** Vienna, 12. June 1782." Mendelssohn and his friends wondered if the writer was Joseph von Sonnenfels, an advisor to Emperor Joseph II, who advocated a liberalization of Jewish rights in exchange for religious and cultural concessions. But Sonnenfels was also the son of a Jewish apostate, so the suggestion seemed to be that Jewish enlightenment required not only cultural reform but religious conversion. In short, Moses Mendelssohn found himself in the position of medieval predecessors like Moses Nachmanides, forced to debate an apostate.

In fact, "S*****" wasn't Sonnenfels, but an obscure scribbler named Cranz. And yet the pamphlet managed to draw forth

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Mendelssohn's deepest thoughts and highest rhetoric on religious and cultural autonomy and the separation of church and state. In the marvelous closing paragraphs of *Jerusalem,* Mendelssohn addressed both his fellow Jews and his fellow (Christian) Europeans.

" ... House of Jacob ... Adapt yourselves to the morals and the constitution of the land to which you have been removed; but hold fast to the religion of your fathers too. ... It is true on the one hand, the burden of civil life is made heavier for you on account of the religion to which you remain faithful, and on the other hand, the climate and the times make the observance of your religious laws more irksome than they are. Nevertheless, persevere, remain unflinchingly at the post to which Providence has assigned you ..."

And to those Europeans for whom this seemed insufficient, he wrote: "in order to be under the care of the omnipresent shepherd the entire flock need neither graze in one pasture nor enter and leave the master's house through a single door."

Mendelssohn's ideals still resonate for us, the Jewish children of the Enlightenment, but the question of how to fulfill them remains as difficult for us as it was for him.

The Paradox of Liberalism

Naomi Gryn

Fundamentalism has been talked about mostly, since 9/11, in the context of Islam. Some say this is unfair, even biased. Others insist that it is inevitable — an unavoidable byproduct of contemporary political, religious, and social trends worldwide. The following essay by Naomi Gryn reflects on how even liberal, pluralistic sensibilities can collide with the religious elements of Islamic fundamentalism. — SB

I live in the heart of what has become the Arab Quarter of London. At the bottom of the street is the Reform synagogue where my late father was rabbi for 32 years. These days, a Lebanese grocery store next door to the synagogue is probably its best defense against terrorism, even though escalating membership fees reflect conventional security measures, and armed police greet congregants on the High Holy Days.

When peace in the Middle East still seemed within grasp, I facilitated dialogue groups between Jews and Muslims and traveled throughout the Arab world searching for deeper understanding between our communities. Maybe I lost hope on that fateful day in September 2000 when the second Intifada erupted, or maybe it was a year later, watching with horror as the World Trade Center collapsed, triggering a global brawl between "us" and "them."

As national borders become blurred by the European Union and birthrates dwindle, Europeans have benefited both socially and economically from recent waves of immigration, and though there are concerns about how we might absorb such large numbers, we have developed a taste for diversity. But there is a growing sense of crisis about the rapid rise to center stage of Muslim dissenters to our secular ways.

In contrast to the extended family network supported by religious communities, our nuclear families are in meltdown. Our children seem confused and undisciplined, obsessed with celebrity and material possessions. On the face of it, our communities have much to learn from each other. But Britain woke up to the reality of its disaffected Muslim population when four suicide bombers — three of whom were British-born — killed 52 commuters at the height of the London rush hour on July 7th 2005. Since then, security alerts have become as commonplace on the Underground as they were during the IRA's bombing campaign of the 1970s, and we have, almost without question, traded personal freedoms for constant surveillance by closed circuit television. The police now have unprecedented powers to "stop and search," and our prisons are filling up with suspected terrorists as we plunge toward an Orwellian dystopia.

London has been a safe haven since the 1980s for radical Islamic groups whose activists declare that they are working toward world domination of Islam and the implementation of *Sharia* law. One such group, *Al-Ghurabaa,* organized a demonstration last February that marched through Central London to protest against the publication of the Danish cartoons. The protestors' placards shocked Britain with their bloodthirsty slogans:

"Butcher those who mock Islam," "Europe you will pay, your 9/11 is on the way," and "Free speech go to hell."

Al-Ghurabaa has now been banned under new legislation outlawing the glorification of terrorism, but as Voltaire wrote as long ago as 1764: "the law is impotent against these attacks of rage; it is like reading a court decree to a raving maniac. What can we say to a man who tells you that he would rather obey God than men, and that therefore he is sure to go to heaven for butchering you?"

As the spiritual inheritors of the Enlightenment, Europeans usually sneer at American creationists with their quirky ideas about intelligent design and consider fundamentalists of every creed to be religious weirdoes. While Islamists might view European society as a decadent cesspit plagued by binge drinking and sexual promiscuity, in Western minds, honor killings and the persecution of homosexuals are far more appalling.

We're told that Muslims have been radicalized by Israel's occupation of Palestine and America's invasion of Iraq. It's a tidy argument that appeals to many Europeans' guilt about Western imperialism. But fearing angry mobs and further reprisals, freedom of expression — the central doctrine of democracy — is at risk as a new spirit of self-censorship takes root. In this most accommodating of societies, how can we tolerate the intolerant? It's a paradox that has sent into a tailspin our fragile system of values.

I long to apply my instinctively liberal sentiments to Muslim women's right to wear *hijab,* but walking down nearby Edgware Road, swamped in summer months by visitors from the Gulf taking refuge from the heat, the sea of black *burkas* fills me with dread. After battling so hard for equal rights, it turns out that women's emancipation from male domination still can't be taken for granted; neither can equality for homosexuals.

It was in the Netherlands — famed for its liberal social policies — that in 2004, a Muslim assassin killed Theo Van Gogh for making a film about the abuse of Muslim women by Muslim men. Now Dutch authorities have produced their own film to prepare potential Muslim immigrants for the realities of life in Europe, with images of two men kissing, naked breasts, and bad weather. Muslim fundamentalists have been warned: Europe is fighting back.

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Notwithstanding the sages' account that even he had difficulty giving up his post, the Torah makes it clear that Moses succeeded in setting aside his personal needs for power for the long-term good of the people. So committed was he, for example, to the development of new leaders that he tolerated, indeed encouraged, the unconventional and untested leadership aspirations of Eldad and Medad (Numbers 11:24-29). Further, the biblical narrative makes clear that it was Moses himself who pushed God to name his successor (Numbers 27:15-17). And, according to Rashi and others, in the end Moses not only acknowledged Joshua's selection, he embraced it wholeheartedly (Rashi and *Sifre* to Numbers 27:23). Thus, despite the great sense of loss experienced by many at the end of their service, Moses' example serves as a dramatic reminder that an uncompromising focus on the future needs of the enterprise must always trump one's quest for personal glory.

A variety of contemporary best practices from industry and academe confirm the wisdom of these ancient insights. Even in the best of circumstances, leadership development is a difficult, protracted process. It succeeds only with the imprimatur of the incumbent leadership who must 1) create an ongoing organizational culture in which future leaders are constantly identified, nurtured, and trained, and 2) when appropriate, personally embody that principle by recognizing that the boldest act of effective leadership is often the decision to pass the torch to the next generation.

Discussion Guide

Bringing together myriad voices and experiences provides Sh'ma *readers with an opportunity in a few very full pages to explore a topic of Jewish interest from a variety of perspectives. To facilitate a fuller discussion of the ideas, we offer the following questions:*

1. Does modernity collide with an ultra-religious life? How do we integrate tradition with freedom?

2. How does the concept of "Divine sparks" explain the outreach efforts of Chabad?

3. Does religious-state separation preclude the wearing of religious garb in the military?

Here is a prophetic verse, in numerous senses, which describes some of the dynamics in the mirroring-self-definition of the Haredi. "Your brethren who hated you and cast you out for My Name's sake." The Haredim have not forgotten the ill-treatment that their *Va'ad haHatzalah,* Rescue Committee, received during WWII, when the purveyors of "civilized Judaism" thwarted their attempts, out of embarrassment, to meet with President Roosevelt. The more vindictive among them read the rest of the verse "... He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed" with anticipation. Indeed, feelings of grievance felt by the self-righteous are at the center of fundamentalist ire, felt currently throughout the world.

But the compassionate Haredi* will remember the teaching recorded by the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov: "The Messiah will justify the actions of all Israelites, claiming that even the wicked are justified. By defending them they will repent and bring salvation, for the Great Salvation depends on repentance. The lesser righteous love the less wicked, but the great tzaddik loves even the most wicked, and one who proclaims the merits of *all creatures* manifests messianic consciousness." [*Teshu'ot* Chen 1816]

We may define the Jewish concept of Divine-dread, *haredi'ut,* as the awakening of conscience on account of self-perceived guilt. The self-perceived guilt of the tzaddik enables her/him to justify the wicked, seeing their shortcomings mirrored in his/her own deficiencies (being "ashamed" at oneself) and justifying their shortcomings by appreciating the circumstances that brought them about. This awakening of conscience sanctifies the Holy Name, by demonstrating the expansion of Immanent Divinity from limited exclusion to unlimited inclusion — mirroring the Infinite Divine potential. But until then, one may tremble before a God whose judgment seems fixed. If the religiously-liberal would be so fully dedicated to Divine evolution as to tremble before God in self-examination, appreciating the aspirations toward holiness found amongst the Haredim, we could win each other over, so that in the end, when the arrogance of both sides is overcome, no one will "be ashamed."

Isaiah 66:5, "Hear the word of God, you who tremble *[haHaredim]* at His Word. Your brethren who hated you, and cast you out for My Name's sake, said, 'Let God be glorified: but He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.'"

**Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, z"l, used to say: Sometimes you're walking down the street and see a Haredi and feel contempt and other times, you feel love. The difference of reaction depends on whether the Haredi performs the mitzvot for the sake of his own salvation or for the sake of all creation.* —Menachem Kallus

In the aftermath of the tsunami in the Pacific in 2004, I sat with some friends and asked if any had made any donations toward the relief efforts. None had. A thoughtful discussion ensued, in which the underlying sentiment of most became clear: We care a great deal about our own, but pityingly little about anyone else.

It's us versus them, a Haredi child is taught almost from the cradle. The ways of the outside world are abominations, their days spent frivolously, concerned only with mindless matters of the material world, their aspirations only for *chayei sha'ah,* temporal life. We, on the other hand, aspire toward *chayei olam,* eternal life, toward which all our thoughts and actions are directed.

In our fervent desire to keep our communities pure and our lifestyles intact, we have disengaged from the world around us, wishing only to be left alone to live by our cherished traditions. Surrounded by mind-numbing materialism and the relentless erosion of moral and spiritual values, we fear its impact on us and our children.

But as Jews we have been tasked not only with serving God through fulfilling His commandments, but also to bring about an awareness of God and His will to all people. To teach, to influence, and to inspire. And for that we first need to care. Only when we care about the material well-being of all people, and respect their spiritual yearnings, can we teach. And most certainly, only then can we teach by example. We must not fear being scorned, vilified, even hated, because we're perceived as stand-offish, if that would've been our task. But we must examine carefully whether we're shirking our duty to others by losing their respect, jeopardizing in turn our ability to bring all of mankind to an awareness of the Divine. —Sholom Deen

This small verse captures the splendid confidence and the cruel provincialism I found when I lived among Brooklyn's Lubavitcher Hasidim. There's no irony here: they are intimately entwined. For a searching agnostic like me, the Lubavitchers' rock-strong faith was deeply compelling. On these gritty Brooklyn streets, people walked around expecting that, one day, the Messiah would appear, banishing death, reuniting us with deceased loved ones, and ushering in a glorious new world where God's presence is as manifest as the sun on a clear warm day. Those who believed — who felt God so strongly that they trembled at His word — had found a form of paradise. Even the doubters often felt a rare peace, as long as they could follow the laws and embrace the Orthodox life.

But those who couldn't fit into Hasidic life — ardent disbelievers, artistic rebels, gays and asexuals, and many others — were strangers in paradise. Some left Orthodoxy. Often their former community shunned them; at times, even their families shut them out. Still, the nonconformists trembled, too — if not from the God of Orthodoxy, then from the incredible passion they brought to their lives: a passion that grew out of the spiritual fervor that once surrounded them. The faithful and the faithless are all brethren in spirit, though, sadly, hatred sometimes divides them. The mother who ostracizes her child, the teacher who scorns her former student, the ex-friends of those who stray from the path: they shall be ashamed. They are good, righteous people in so many ways. If the world holds the meaning and logic they claim, they will realize their folly eventually. —Stephanie Wellen Levine

Sh'ma שמע
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Let us hear

Rabbi Dr. Menachem Kallus was born into a Hasidic family that emigrated to Brooklyn after WWII. He received smikha *from Reb Zalman and Reb Miles and his PhD from the Hebrew University for a dissertation on the contemplative practices of Lurianic Kabbalah. He is currently working on a translation of and commentary on the contemplative teachings of the circle of the Baal Shem Tov and lives in Jerusalem with his wife Betsy and their son Yochanan.*

Sholom Deen grew up in the Hasidic community of New Square and now lives with his family in Monsey, N.Y.

Stephanie Wellen Levine is the author of Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey among Hasidic Girls, *which won the 2004* Moment Magazine *book award for nonfiction and was a Hadassah book club selection. She teaches at Tufts University and speaks often about her year among Lubovitch teenage girls in public venues.*

Sh'ma שמע

Sigi Ziering Ethics

This year our Sigi Ziering column will focus on the ethics of leadership. Each month an esteemed guest columnist will wrestle with questions concerning communal leadership and its abuses. The column is cosponsored by Bruce Whizin and Marilyn Ziering in honor of Marilyn's husband Sigi Ziering, of blessed memory. Visit www.shma.com to view the series of columns, with responses.

Succession Planning

Hal M. Lewis

Jewish organizations wishing to develop new leaders face a number of systemic challenges. Among them:

• Incumbents are hard-pressed to focus their energies on the next generation when current exigencies demand the experience of veterans.

• It is uncomfortable to raise issues of transition with organizational founders, philanthropists, or tenured executives.

• Past leaders who remain involved often serve as encumbrances to the seamless development of new ones.

Creating a culture in which leadership development is an organic component of the enterprise, then, is far from easy.

Premodern Jewish sources recognized these challenges as well. Many understood that power is alluring and difficult to abandon. As the *midrash* states, "It is easy to go up to a dais, difficult to come down." *(Yalkut, Va'etchanan* 845) While many believe recruiting a leader is an insurmountable task, it pales in comparison to the larger challenge, making room for the person who follows. Having savored the limelight, holders of high office are often reticent to walk away. The Talmud relates this story:

Rabbi Joshua ben Quivsay said: "All my life I would run away from office. Now that I have entered it, whoever comes to oust me I will come down upon him with this kettle." (Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 6:1; also see Menahot 109b)

Even Moses is said to have had difficulty forsaking the mantle of leadership. The sages compared him to a governor "who … as soon as he retired and another was appointed in his place … had in vain to ask the gate-keeper to let him enter [the palace]." (Deuteronomy *Rabbah* 2:5)

Notwithstanding the ubiquity of these obstacles, however, ignoring the development of new leaders impedes an organization's viability. Today, many of American Jewry's leading institutions have long-serving lay and professional officers who, despite their longevity, manifest little interest in addressing the issue of succession planning. Rare is the congregation or Jewish group, for example, with a comprehensive approach to volunteer or executive/rabbinic transition. Organizations that wait for a retirement announcement before thinking about future leadership jeopardize their integrity. Similarly, when decisions about the next lay leader are deferred to the eleventh hour, an organization's visioning and planning are irreparably compromised.

Further, only an enterprise that is genuinely open to new leaders and leadership styles can hope to attract and sustain the ongoing interest of younger individuals. Too often, prominent posts and important decision-making go only to the elite few, those pledging obeisance to conventional organizational praxis. Leaders on the inside are likely to stay there, with little more than lip service being accorded to alternate approaches. As recent surveys make clear, in the 21st century serious young Jews feel unwelcome in such environments and opt instead to dissociate themselves from communal organizations.

A number of classical Jewish sources suggest that the responsibility for making leadership development a top priority rests with those already considered leaders. Indeed, absent such a commitment, the moniker "leader" is simply inapposite.

No one personified this precept better than the Bible's quintessential leader, Moses.

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Hal M. Lewis is Dean of Continuing Education and Associate Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies at Spertus College. A former nonprofit executive, he is the author of Models and Meanings in the History of Jewish Leadership *and* From Sanctuary to Boardroom: A Jewish Approach to Leadership.

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