

## Correspondence

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### The Haredim

TO THE EDITORS:

In “The Haredim: A Defense” (AZURE 25, Summer 2006), Aharon Rose criticizes secular depictions of Haredim for failing to distinguish between a “center” and a “periphery” in Haredi society, yet his own attempt at differentiation is both unclear and contradictory. For example, he writes that the periphery consists of “the numerous outer or fringe elements that have attached themselves to [Haredi society] in the last generation.” But he also states that the majority of those who joined the IDF unit Nahal Haredi did not come “from the core of the Haredi community,” but rather from “followers of the Lubavitcher and Breslaver Hasidic groups.” Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Lubavitcher Hasidism, died in 1812, and Rabbi Nahman of Breslav, the founder of Breslaver Hasidism, died two years earlier. These groups certainly did not join Hasidism recently. On what grounds, then, does Rose consider them peripheral? Rose also places *hozrim bitshuva* in the “peripheral” category, but had previously pointed to their growing numbers as evidence of a “Haredi renaissance.” Surely he sees a contradiction here?

The real problem, though, is that Rose seems confused about the essential character of Haredi society. He explains that the Haredim aim “at preserving the same rigid theological principles that continue to guide them as they did generations of Jews in the past.” This past, Rose writes, is specifically “the time of the revelation on Mount Sinai, and the days of the biblical prophets and the Temple.” Rose then cites the transition from Yiddish to modern Hebrew in many yeshivot as a “concession.” But if the Haredim wish to strengthen the connection to the biblical era, modern Hebrew is far closer to biblical Hebrew than “traditional Yiddish.” In addition, those from the “core” of Haredi society have never been at the center of movements such as the Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful, whose goal is the building of the Third Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in our lifetime. Nor have they been at the center of movements for prophetic social justice in Israel. Surely, then, the past of the “revelation on Mount Sinai” is not the period to which the Haredim aspire.

Another candidate for the “past” which the Haredim want to preserve is, according to Rose, “the traditional Jewish identity in Eastern Europe

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that preceded the Emancipation.” But again, which aspects of this particular past do the Haredim seek to preserve? The author already discounts dress and language when he asserts that the Haredim want to maintain “principles and values” rather than “praxis.” Rose points to the value placed on education. Yet he does *not* consider universal yeshiva learning a value preserved from the past. Rather, he states that “the Haredim would be the first to admit, for instance, that the universal duty to study in a yeshiva derives from the distinctly *modern* need to rebuild the world of Tora that perished in the Holocaust.” Moreover, he cites the Hazon Ish and the Slonimer Rebbe to support his claim for the modern creation of universal long-term learning. Once again, we are left with confusion, and little in the way of a definition of Haredim at all.

Rose’s view that Haredi values “cannot, by their very nature, be upheld fully” contradicts the traditional Jewish understanding of halacha, and the two examples he uses to illustrate the point—the requirement to learn Tora day and night, and the prohibition on gossip—are misguided. Regarding the first example, later Jewish halachic authorities discuss how one can fulfill this requirement even though one works during the day. As for the second, the Hafetz Haim, in

his introduction to *Shmirat Halashon*, states that the reason he wrote the book was to convince Jews that the laws of gossip *could* be observed in practice.

Finally, the “acceptance of rabbinic authority” is also not a value unique to Haredim. Does Rose mean to imply that the religious Zionists do not follow their rabbis? Even Reform and Conservative Jews do this. Furthermore, this is not a value preserved exclusively from the past, because the author has already agreed that “as a vehicle for the expansion of rabbinic authority, it [*daat tora*] is a new thing.”

Overall, Rose fails to convince the reader of the shortcomings of modern academic literature in its efforts to characterize the nature and future of Haredim. Indeed, the author’s personal ruminations and anecdotes only serve to obfuscate the subject.

**Joel Worthman**  
New York

TO THE EDITORS:

Aharon Rose assumes that there is no Jewish religious alternative to secularism other than that espoused by Haredi Jews. But surely a religious Judaism can be described, and lived, with the benefits of Judaism as practiced by the Haredim, but without its detriments. That Judaism is the classical biblical and rabbinic (talmudic)

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model, without the problematic layers of Kabbala, Hasidism, and “Haredi Judaism.”

In that regard, I note that the author—if he had his way—would put his two principles of the Haredi community before Maimonides’ thirteen. But how can the twentieth-century idea of *daat tora* take precedence over the twelfth-century ideas of Maimonides, if we accept the Haredi principle of *yeridat hadorot*, which holds that recent religious attitudes are inferior to earlier ones? Doesn’t the principle of *yeridat hadorot* compel us to accept Maimonides’ much earlier view that the wisdom (*hochma*) of other peoples and nations, including particularly the sciences, is part of Tora and the way to love and fear God, even though it runs contrary to the more recent religious outlook of the Haredim? It would seem that the Haredi principles as described by Rose in his article *themselves* negate crucial ideas of Judaism as practiced by the Haredim, and may thus be considered self-contradictory.

**Lippman Bodoff**

Glen Rock, New Jersey

TO THE EDITORS:

Aharon Rose’s essay was an impressive repudiation of intellectual thought about the Haredi lifestyle. Yet while he touched briefly upon

the dialectic between the ideas of “progress” and *yeridat hadorot*, he ignored the scope and importance of, or at least misframed, the real battle that is taking place within the Haredi world today. Namely, just as the destruction of the Second Temple cast Jewish identity into crisis, the combined historical effects of the Emancipation, Zionism, and the creation of a sovereign Jewish state in the land of Israel have reignited, in modern times, the age-old war over the true nature of Judaism.

The revolutionary idea within Zionism is its goal of reinventing the Jewish people and the Jewish religion on Jewish land. This represents a fundamental shift in Jewish life from dependence—as was always the case in the diaspora—to sovereignty. From the beginning, the notion of Jewish sovereignty was contested by traditional Jewish communities, especially those that developed and thrived in the diaspora. Even before the advent of Zionism, in fact, traditional Jewish authorities opposed the very notion of rebellion against one’s fate, or of attempting to hasten divine redemption. The reason is clear: The very *idea* of Jewish sovereignty and independence, taken to its logical conclusion, could lead eventually to the idea of Jewish independence from even God himself.

Naturally this causes serious ideological and theological implications

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for the Haredim. The revolutionary ideas of Zionism are in many ways opposed to the “rigid theological principles” upon which the Haredi community is based. Indeed, the Haredi community developed in an environment of complete dependence upon surrounding peoples, and so, even today, while Haredim may have established a flexible system to preserve [those] principles, they still operate within the same paradigm of dependence.

This is not to say that Judaism and Zionism are antithetical; despite what Jews such as the Neturei Karta say, Zionism is inherently Jewish. The reality is simply that because Judaism has always internalized elements of its host cultures, now that there is a sovereign Jewish state, the battle to determine the future of the Jewish people and religion is waged by the competing forces of Zionism and “diaspora-ism.”

Rose is correct when he remarks that most of the supposed “Haredim” who, for example, serve in the IDF are not a part of the cohort who are “central to that society’s vitality.” Yet he is wrong to discount their potential contribution to the allaying of secular-religious tensions both in Israel and around the world. For in this “periphery” lies the difference between the path of national self-realization and the fulfillment of the

creative energy of the Jewish people, and the path of simply continuing on with the way of life that was before in a perpetual battle to continue the chain of tradition.

Rose beautifully notes the battle between a Judaism “incorporating certain aspects of contemporary Western liberal culture” and a Judaism finding refuge behind “the walls of tradition.” Unfortunately, however, he simply sticks to the level of this battle that occurs over assimilation, a battle that has been commented on thousands of times ever since the walls of the ghettos were torn down. He ignores the other levels that are just as, if not more, important: The fight over the very soul of the Jewish people.

**Jason Lustig**  
Boston

AHARON ROSE RESPONDS:

Many thanks to those readers who pointed out lapses in clarity in my article, thus allowing me the opportunity to set the record straight.

Joel Worthman argues that I did not adequately distinguish between “core” and “peripheral” elements in Haredi society. This is a complicated issue, and one that would require its own essay. I thus cited the matter as merely one example of the type of issue that both popular and academic literature on Haredi society ignore,

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thereby obstructing a better understanding of that society. Indeed, the problem is amplified when researchers engage in prognosis of Haredi societal continuity based on the activities of the group's periphery alone.

As to Worthman's comment regarding my inclusion of Lubavitcher and Breslaver Hasidim in the peripheral category, I am not saying anything that has not been said before: The general sentiment, among both "core" Haredim and the secular world alike, is that Lubavitch Hasidism is a separate phenomenon entirely.

Worthman also claims that there is a contradiction between my view of *hozrim bitshuva* (newly religious) as a sign of Haredi vitality, and my including this subgroup as part of the periphery. But I do not see any contradiction: The fact that the Haredi world not only does not intend to disappear from Jewish history, as those who have studied it have forecasted, but in fact has succeeded in courting new recruits is to my mind proof that Haredi vitality is unparalleled.

Worthman also opposes my definition of Haredi values, which strive for perfection and as such are essentially unattainable for the majority of adherents, since the halacha, by definition, is practicable. But the traditional Jewish values espoused by Haredim are drawn more from extra-halachic sources (*musar* and *drashot*)

than they are from purely legal works, the former being sources that guide the spiritual development of an individual who wishes to extend himself beyond what is minimally required by halacha.

Moreover, Worthman ignores the two references I made to the philosophy of the Hazon Ish, whom I quoted as legitimizing the status of mediocrity with little hope of achieving perfection, and instead chooses to challenge me based on the Hafetz Haim's preface to *Shmirat Halashon*. Yet this preface is extremely complicated in its effort to move the concept of *lashon hara* out of the world of *musar* (moral teachings), with which it was until then classically associated, and into the realm of halacha.

Also, for whatever reason, Worthman seems to have difficulty getting over my statement that Haredim see themselves as the preservers of ancient Judaism, concluding from this that Haredim should, if this were truly the case, be active supporters of the Temple Mount Faithful. What he misses is that the Haredi connection to ancient Judaism runs via traditional Jewish literature and its exegesis. The question therefore becomes not whether the Haredim are rebuilding the Temple, but whether they continue to preserve the traditional belief in an eventual messianic redemption.

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Finally, Worthman asks: “Which aspects of [the] past do the Haredim seek to preserve?” My essay did not attempt to break any new ground, only to document the self-awareness of the Haredim as steadfast and consistent keepers of an ancient tradition. It is no secret that the modern Orthodox rivals of Haredi thought are embarrassed by questions as to the extent of tradition-based authority. Do modern Orthodox adherents believe, as is the traditional understanding, that the giving of the Tora at Sinai is a binding historical event? Or do they prefer to see it as an allegory bordering on myth? In the encounter between traditional values, like obedience, family, and education, and modern values, like autonomy, freedom, and individualism, does the modern Jew lean towards tradition when making decisions? For the Haredi Jew, there is no contest; the very strength and essence of the Haredi community lies in the fact that tradition dictates in matters of personal autonomy and modern considerations.

Lipmann Bodoff argues that a Haredi lifestyle is not the only alternative to secularism, since modern Orthodox society offers many of the same advantages as Haredi society, but without its drawbacks. As the Haredim see it, however, the main thing separating the respective camps

is not each group’s attitude towards nationalism or secular culture (although religious Zionists may believe this to be the case), but rather modern Orthodoxy’s lack of commitment to mitzva observance.

In addition, Bodoff challenges my assertion that the Haredim seem to place more importance on the principles of *yeridat hadorot* and *daat tora* than on Maimonides’ thirteen, citing an internal contradiction: If each generation has less authority than the previous one, Maimonides’ authority to set principles surely supersedes that of our generation. Bodoff, of course, is correct. However, my comment was meant to be part irony and part sociological reflection, and I apologize if I was misunderstood.

Last, Lustig is correct in that the internal Haredi struggles between isolation from the rest of Israeli society on the one hand, and nationalism and the need to influence Israel’s future on the other, are among the most important developments in contemporary Jewish history. These struggles have been part of Orthodoxy from its inception, and ultimately will determine the future of Haredi society: Will it see fit to become more culturally involved with broader Israeli society, or will it turn once again inwards?

Lustig intimates that in his view, Haredi society is headed towards

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greater integration into general Jewish national life, and it seems that he may be correct. At this point, I can only hope that he may convince the editors at *AZURE* to request an article from me on the subject.

## **Jews and Power**

TO THE EDITORS:

Michael Oren's "Jews and the Challenge of Sovereignty" (*AZURE* 23, Winter 2006) is replete with insights into the Jewish antipathy to power. To underscore Oren's argument, I would adduce the legend of the *golem*. In a sixteenth-century variant of this Jewish folktale, Rabbi Loew of Prague (the Maharal) creates the *golem* to defend the Jewish community against its hostile neighbors. Although the *golem* succeeds in this purpose, its uncontrolled power becomes a danger to the Jews themselves. In the end, the rabbi is forced to turn his creation into dust to ensure his community's safety.

How remarkable and counterintuitive a denouement when one reflects on the beleaguered and defenseless situation of Europe's Jews in that age. But then, one need not reach back into the sixteenth century. The lessons of the twentieth century's

seminal event—the Holocaust—are also depressingly misunderstood by many Jews.

One would like to think that the experience of the Holocaust would have infused the Jewish people with a sense of the utter necessity of power for self-preservation. But this is not the case. To many Jews, particularly some residing in the diaspora, the primary lesson of the Holocaust is that *all* manifestations of power are evil, and are therefore to be shunned. Even power wielded to defend oneself, if necessary, is viewed as lamentably necessary.

Have the Jews learned anything at all from their history as powerless victims? I believe some have, and each new day in the existence of the State of Israel is a testament to the comprehension by these Jews that power is required for self-preservation.

Indeed, the State of Israel has restrained the full fury of its *golem*, often at ill-advised cost to itself. But unlike the Maharal, Israel will not turn it to dust, a distinction that Israel's neighbors would be well advised to keep in mind as they seek to indulge their medieval—and, sadly, twentieth-century—fantasies.

**Darren Pinsker**  
New York

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TO THE EDITORS:

Michael Oren writes that Jews who built “unauthorized settlements in the territories” essentially subverted the democratic process. This begs the questions: What is the law in Israel on settlements? And if Jews *are* in violation of that law, should they be punished and removed? Finally, should this law apply equally to non-Jews as well?

Last year, a report commissioned by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and named after its author, Talia Sasson, concluded that outposts were illegal because they did not receive full government authorization. Yet the hundred or so outposts in question are connected to large, established communities and are strategically located. Moreover, they comprise fewer than 2,000 people, mostly young religious families. In contrast, the report did not deal with the more than 100,000 illegally erected Palestinian buildings in Israel—*not* including those in Judea and Samaria.

Sasson held that in order to get authorization, settlements must be approved by a ministerial committee; have a valid zoning plan; be on land owned by the state; and have a municipal boundary set by the regional IDF commander. Settlements that do not meet all four conditions, she concluded, are illegal. These criteria seem clear enough, but the problem

is that even those settlements which do not meet all four conditions were in fact built through the involvement of agencies of the state and with approval from the highest levels of government. Indeed, since authorization and approval were implicit when the appropriate government ministries and public institutions, including the Israeli military, were involved, it would seem to make them legal. The outposts are well within the boundaries established for communities, according to building and zoning plans submitted some fifteen years ago, and all outposts in question are built on state land, or land which was purchased and/or unclaimed.

When we add to the mix the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of instances in Israel in which buildings, neighborhoods, and even entire communities were built without full approval, and received it only subsequently, we can only conclude that the dismantling of new outposts and long-established settlements is done *not* because they are illegal, but rather for political and ideological reasons. In fact, the government itself has not taken any decisions on the matter: The appropriate ministerial committee required to determine the settlements’ legality has never convened, nor has the Knesset passed any laws or recommendations or the courts issued any rulings. Critics of outposts



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and settlements must thus rely on a combination of Jordanian laws and Israeli procedures that are unclear and open to interpretation.

Ultimately, however, the issue is not really a legal one. The fate of Jewish communities in the West Bank goes beyond strict legal definitions; rather, it bears on the continued existence of the Jewish state: Surrendering to American (and UN, EU, and Russian) demands may trump historical and legal arguments, but appeasement never brings peace. Political expediency and concessions may buy us a little more time, but to what end?

In the final analysis, destroying Jewish communities is not an act of

*mamlachtiyut* (the exercise of sovereignty), but its opposite. It sends an unmistakable message: We don't belong there. In principle, therefore, there is no difference between outposts and settlements, or what constitutes the State of Israel itself. As recent events in Gaza and Lebanon prove, it doesn't matter where Jews live in Israel, but that a state called Israel exists at all. Consequently, denying the right of Jews to live in "outposts" threatens the moral and ideological basis for all settlement in the land of Israel. And this is both anti-democratic and anti-Zionist.

**Moshe Dann**  
Jerusalem

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