

The Haredim: A Defense

Aharon Rose

The Haredim will be the first to admit that their existence today is little short of miraculous. For centuries, the traditional Jewish way of life suffered one setback after another, each more perilous than the last. First came the Emancipation, which threw open the doors of modern culture to Eastern European Jews; after generations in the confines of ghetto and shtetl, where the Jewish religion was preserved in its traditional forms, many Jews began the journey toward secularism. So, too, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, did the movement known as the Haskala, or Jewish Enlightenment, encourage secular studies and scientific methods to approach the Jewish tradition, leading an even larger number of religious Jews to withdraw from the classical way of life.

Traditional Jewish society was still further challenged by successive waves of emigration to the United States and Western Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To survive economically in a Christian culture, many immigrants abandoned Jewish practice. But it was by far the Holocaust, which annihilated entire Jewish communities and a generation of sages, that brought traditional Judaism to its knees. Within a decade, the once-vibrant culture of Judaism centered on the Tora and its laws—a culture of great spiritual richness and intellectual

brilliance—was almost entirely wiped out, and the millennia-old chain of Jewish wisdom and tradition nearly came to an end. When the State of Israel was established just a few years later, many survivors of the destruction saw it as the ultimate blow: An end to the Diaspora, they believed, should come not at the hands of secular Zionists, but only at those of the messiah. Here, then, was the greatest evidence to date of their leaders' failure to foresee the future, and their own failure to understand Jewish history. To them, modern Zionism spelled the end of Jewish life as they knew it.

Yet, like so many times in the past, traditional Judaism's death knells were premature. Six decades after the death camps and the ascendance of secular Zionism, the Haredi, or ultra-Orthodox, community—the last vestige of prewar traditional Jewish society—is experiencing a revival of incomparable scope. With one of the highest birth rates in the Western world, Haredi communities both in Israel and abroad boast numbers in the hundreds of thousands, and enrollment in Haredi yeshivot, or centers of learning, is at higher levels than ever. Perhaps none are more surprised by this reversal of fortunes than the Haredim themselves: The late Rabbi Shalom Noah Brozofsky, the Slonimer Rebbe, explained in 1987 on the *yahrtzeit* of the previous Slonimer Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Weinberg, who had perished in the Holocaust:

We are seeing with our own eyes the most amazing phenomenon of our generation: Suddenly, a generation has arisen and prospered, a generation of Tora and meticulous attention to the commandments. The houses of learning blossom again, and the halls of the Hasidim thrive in all their glory.... And does this not raise the question—who brought all this about? Who has the power to bring forth such a generation... and from what power did such a generation grow? It has no natural explanation, of course, other than God himself, the one and only God.¹

Whether or not we see in today's Haredi renaissance the hand of God, it is nonetheless striking to consider the forces that have kept the various Haredi communities, both in Israel and in the Diaspora, alive. In light of

its past of persecution and destruction, and of the pressures it faces today from an increasingly invasive secular culture, the evidence of the Haredi world's vitality—growing numbers of *hozrim bitsbuva*, or non-observant Jews who adopt the Orthodox way of life; the creation of Shas, an Israeli political party intended to further the interests of Sephardic Haredim; and the gradual movement of the modern-Orthodox and religious-Zionist communities towards greater religious stringency and an increasing similarity to Haredi norms—is genuinely remarkable.

For much of the Israeli public, however, these developments are greeted with a measure of anxiety. Rightly or wrongly, they are viewed as a threat to the authority of the secular Zionist culture that has dominated Israeli society since the founding of the state. And it is this anxiety—often swelling into hostility—that is reflected in the majority of academic works that purport to examine the Haredi community today. These works form the basis for much of the secular world's understanding of the Haredim, yet they are distinctly at odds with Haredi society's perception of itself.

As someone who was raised in the world of Hasidic yeshivot, yet now walks the halls of Israel's universities, it is my hope that my acquaintance with both realms will enable me to shed light on the distorted portrayal of the Haredim in academic literature. And, while it is not necessarily my purpose, in the course of this essay I might just convince some of my readers of the value—indeed, even the beauty—of many aspects of one of Judaism's most reviled, yet least understood, communities.

On one point, at least, there is agreement between those who study Haredi society and the Haredim themselves: That what primarily sets this Jewish movement apart from others is its total rejection of modern values, norms, and forms of inquiry. Haredi Judaism, regardless of its particular faction, objects to Jews entering the cultural fray of the modern West, studying in its institutions, revering its leaders, fighting in its wars, or partaking of its cultural bounty. This rejection must be understood in two ways.

First, Haredi Jews aspire to be *different* from the surrounding culture, whose values, behaviors, and worldviews conflict with their own. Second, they seek to remain *loyal* to the traditional Jewish identity in Eastern Europe that preceded the Emancipation. It is only by means of this identity, the Haredim believe, and the lifestyle through which it finds expression, that the Jew can fulfill his obligation to live a life in accordance with God's will.

Yet while the Haredim trace the roots of their contemporary identity to the traditional form of Judaism practiced by their forebears, academics have taken an altogether different view. Most scholars of the Haredim regard today's Haredi Jew as an essentially *new* phenomenon, one that evolved over the last two centuries as a reaction against the Haskala and the integration of Jews into Western society. For proof, they point to a series of beliefs and practices adopted by today's Haredim that developed, or became decidedly more pronounced, over the course of the past century. They then conclude that these principles and behaviors have had the unintended effect of changing the very way of life they sought to preserve, and leading inadvertently to the creation of an entirely new community.²

The first scholar to assert that today's Haredim are in truth a new phenomenon was Jacob Katz, the foremost historian on the Orthodox communities of Eastern Europe.³ Katz distinguished between the "tradition-bound" society which received traditions and viewed them as self-evident, and the Haredi community, which consciously chooses the traditional way of life, and as such is merely "traditionalist."⁴ In this way, claims Katz, the Haredim cannot claim to be defenders of the "pure Judaism of old."⁵ In time, this view became the dominant one in the field. Thus, for example, the historian Michael K. Silber writes that Orthodoxy "is in fact not an unchanged and unchanging remnant of pre-modern traditional Jewish society, but as much a child of modernity and change as any of its 'modern' rivals."⁶ Similarly, Israel Bartal of the Hebrew University explains that "The two major responses of the Ashkenazi Diaspora to the encounter with modernity were the Haskala movement and Orthodoxy. Both flourished in Central Europe, inexorably intertwined."⁷

Having declared Orthodoxy a relatively new phenomenon, Katz and his students attempted to show that in the struggle with modernity, the overriding need to defend traditional values often forced the Orthodox, and especially the Haredim, to invent new doctrines and principles and then to portray their violation as heresy. Yet these principles, these scholars insist, were often of marginal value in the Jewish tradition. A prime example is the principle of *daat tora*, which grants great rabbis the authority to issue rulings on matters not directly concerned with Jewish law—such as, for instance, for whom to vote in an election.⁸ This claim—that certain doctrines are inventions whose aim is to augment rabbinic authority in response to modern attempts to curtail it—is the common thread running through the articles that appear in the anthology *Between Authority and Autonomy in Jewish Tradition*, published in 1997 and edited by Ze'ev Safrai and Avi Saguy.⁹ Indeed, the main disagreement among the contributors to this anthology concerns when and where the *daat tora* innovation appeared. Katz, for example, traces it to conflicts between Orthodox and Reform Jews in Hungary during the 1860s,¹⁰ whereas Judaic scholar Lawrence Kaplan argues that it first cropped up among Lithuanian groups in Israel after the Holocaust.¹¹

Yet this view, while widely accepted in academic circles, is highly problematic. Often allowing ideology to skew their reading of the data, some researchers are inclined to ignore the central status of the rabbi in traditional society, and instead paint a grossly misleading picture of his function. If these researchers are to be believed, the traditional rabbi was concerned mainly with checking cows' lungs and other ritual matters; only occasionally did he involve himself in leading the community. Yet as scholars such as Haym Soloveitchik and Benjamin Brown have argued, this is far from the whole truth. Brown is particularly decisive in his rejection of the opinion current among his colleagues, insisting that the academic preoccupation with the halachic-practical aspect of *daat tora* completely ignores its theological dimension, which is far older and is bound up in the notion of *dekula ba* ("everything is in it"). This phrase, taken from the maxim of Ben Bag-Bag

in the Mishna, “Turn its pages and turn them again, for everything is in it,”¹² was over time incorporated into the classic talmudic and midrashic literature, according to which God concealed in the Tora light (*or ganuz*) by which one can see “from one end of the universe to the other.”¹³ According to this tradition, the Tora encapsulates all knowledge, and therefore holds the answers to all questions. True, it may be the case that as a vehicle for the expansion of rabbinic authority, it is a new thing. Yet it is at the same time an effort to preserve and develop a classical belief in the infinite reach of the Tora’s wisdom, and as such, it cannot be seen as an invention out of whole cloth. As Brown explains:

Daat tora is one of the phenomena used to demonstrate the theory of ‘Orthodoxy as a reaction’ that originated with Professor Jacob Katz. This theory, in its various applications, frequently presents the gaping divide between traditionalist, pre-modern society and an Orthodox society ‘tradition-bound’ (as Katz describes it), which is a kind of ‘mutation of the former’ (in the words of Moshe Samet)... It does sometimes appear that the description of the gap is too deep and too dramatic. The new tiers that Orthodoxy is building frequently rest on sources that are deeply rooted in tradition and the addition of these tiers on top of the old floors only testifies to the dynamism and fertility of a society that is sometimes regarded as stagnant and lacking vitality.¹⁴

The doctrine of *daat tora* is but one example of an aspect of Haredi life cited in academic research as pure innovation in response to modernity.¹⁵ Similar arguments have also been made with regard to the Haredi community in Israel. Menachem Friedman, one of the leading researchers into Haredi life and a former student of Katz, attributes the makeup of today’s Israeli Haredim to their ability to exploit the resources of the welfare state toward the creation of a “community of learners” in which it is customary to engage in full-time yeshiva study before marriage, as well as for several years thereafter. He points to the figure of Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, known as the Hazon Ish, the leader of the Haredi community in Israel in the

early years of the state, as the person most responsible for the development of the contemporary idea of Tora study as the fulfillment of religious perfection. This idea has served to alienate the Haredi community even further from Israel's secular public. It is clear, for example, how the ethos of the community of learners would result in significant educational gaps between Haredi youth, who study only in yeshivot and lack any experience with secular education, and non-Haredi youth. So, too, is it clear how these gaps would then oblige the Haredim to spend their entire lives in the confines of a community of learners, as their chances of success outside this community are slim. When military exemptions on account of full-time yeshiva study are then added to the mix, the result is even less contact between the Haredi and non-Haredi worlds, and more opportunities for misunderstanding and misconceptions between the two groups.¹⁶

The historian Joseph Dan also sees in the practice of lifelong yeshiva study a phenomenon unlike anything else in Jewish history. He points to a number of additional characteristics that differentiate today's Haredi society from traditional Judaism: Reliance on government transfer payments as opposed to charitable contributions; clannish discrimination; aggressive public behavior; and strict dress codes, among others. In light of these new characteristics, Dan argues, there are no grounds for "the belief of the Haredim that the community they established in Israel is one link in a continuous chain of the history of the Jewish community throughout the generations." Today's Israeli Haredi, he concludes, is "a unique Israeli phenomenon that has no equal in the entire history of the Jews in the scores of countries of their dispersal."¹⁷

This bold statement, however, rests on shaky foundations. Like many historians, Dan does not seem aware that in many cases, the innovations of the Haredi world are the result of a kind of operational flexibility aimed at preserving the same rigid theological principles that continue to guide them as they did generations of Jews in the past. 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. Yet they will also insist that one cannot ascribe the same degree of importance to this duty as to the founding principles of Haredi belief: Strict adherence to halacha and the mitzvot; the acceptance of rabbinic authority; and the rejection of fashionable values out of loyalty to the belief in Tora as divine revelation. It is *these* principles that express the Haredim's profound and uncompromising commitment to tradition, and not the fact of their full-time study in yeshiva. The latter, rather, is an effort to uphold the former under extreme historical conditions. Moreover, it is misleading to ascribe any profound meaning to displays of aggressive public behavior and clannish discrimination in the Haredi world today. These are not values or beliefs, and to the extent that they actually take place, they are circumstantial rather than a fixed or intrinsic component of the Haredi identity. (On Dan's complaint concerning the central place that dress occupies in the Haredi community, it can only be remarked that in a culture in which nudity is used to a rapidly increasing degree to sell everything from cars to ice cream, it is perhaps understandable that a minority community, trying to defend itself with limited resources, overreacts to a degree in its notions of modest dress.)

Now, no one disputes that in the struggle to preserve tradition, the Haredi community has employed a variety of methods, some of which are clearly innovative. These include, for example, creating Haredi political parties and publishing Haredi newspapers. Yet those scholars inclined to consider almost every aspect of the Orthodox lifestyle a reaction to modernity, and not an authentic expression of loyalty to something that preceded it, frequently ignore the very real element of continuity—that is, the vast and profound common ground between today's Haredi way of life and the tradition it seeks to preserve.¹⁸ This continuity is expressed primarily in the sphere of principles and values, and less so in praxis.¹⁹ This, as we will see, is a pivotal distinction.

It is easy to see how the academic understanding of today's Haredi society as a mere "reaction" to the threat posed by modern society has led many scholars to conclude that the same processes that enabled the Haredi community to gain strength will eventually lead to its decline. But these predictions, like the assumptions on which they are based, are flawed.

Menachem Friedman, for instance, believes that the Haredi community of learners has an umbilical link with the State of Israel.²⁰ By forcing even the most untalented of its students to devote themselves to full-time study, he explains, Haredi society has created a situation of economic dependency on the secular public: The community relies on the willingness of the Israeli taxpayer to fund its full-time study, and on the ability of the Israeli economy to absorb yeshiva graduates with few or no practical skills into the workforce. As a result, writes Friedman, "the large natural increase [in the size of the community of learners] calls into question its future."²¹ Indeed, the economic needs of this group are growing, and will, it stands to reason, eventually outpace Israeli society's ability to fund it. Furthermore, yeshiva graduates seeking to enter the workforce will eventually face a lack of available positions. Already in 1991, Friedman concluded:

Is it possible for a community of learners to survive in the long term when it forces all its adults to study in yeshivot and to complete their studies over many years in *kollels* [post-marriage seminaries] while avoiding a general and professional education? Will the Haredi community not have to make a choice in the near future between those who will be accepted into its yeshivot and those who will be forced to integrate in one way or another into the socialization process customary in the Western world? When this happens, will Haredi society be able to maintain the same degree of supervision over its adults in order to ensure its continuity? Will this society be a Haredi society?²²

There is undoubtedly much merit to Friedman's arguments, but his position relies too heavily on an economic-materialistic analysis of Haredi society, without even venturing a spiritual-conceptual one. It was this methodological slant, in fact, that led him to describe Haredi participation in the Israeli government coalition in 1977 as a step aimed solely at securing funding for its community of learners—a cause for which the Haredim were willing to pay the ultimate ideological price: Abandoning the principle of separation between Haredi and modern society.²³ Yet any argument that assumes that Haredi society's success in ensuring continuity is absolutely conditional on its existence as a community of learners ignores the flourishing of Hasidic life in communities throughout the world. There are, for example, Hasidic communities in New York, London, and Antwerp, in which Haredim figure prominently in a wide range of professions, from selling electrical products to trading in diamonds. The success of these communities in preserving their identity demonstrates that the economic integration of Haredim into modern Israeli society does not necessarily spell the end of Haredi society, or even presage its radical alteration in any way. Research on professional training institutes for Haredim that opened in Israel over the course of the last decade provide further evidence of the resilience of this way of life: The identity of young Haredim and yeshiva students who study at these institutes has not, according to these studies, weakened in accordance with researchers' expectations.²⁴

Nonetheless, despite the shortcomings of Friedman's approach, there are many who share his view that the Haredi community will eventually succumb in the battle against modern culture. An example is the book *The New Religious Jews* (2000) by Yair Sheleg.²⁵ Sheleg purports to give his readers an up-to-date look at the process of Haredi Jews' integration into Israeli life, what he calls "the Israelification of the religious community."²⁶ According to Sheleg, the tremendous growth in the Haredi community has resulted in an increased self-confidence among its members, along with a kind of internal diversity. This combination, Sheleg explains, has caused serious cracks to form in the community's ideological backbone. In a chapter

entitled “The New Haredi: Changes in Haredi Society,” Sheleg enumerates the various indicators of what he sees as a new “openness” among Haredim as a result of the influence of the modern-secular world: Haredi “yuppies” who adopt modern dress and recreational pursuits; the independent Haredi media, which show an increasing degree of ideological flexibility; institutes for professional training that make it possible for Haredi students to join the workforce; an increased sympathy for Zionism, even at times expressed as extreme nationalism; and a lowering of the status of rabbinic sages. Here Sheleg quotes Eliezer Schweid of the Hebrew University, who claims that “it is impossible to escape from modernity. If Haredi society insists on turning its back on the higher elements of the modern world, it will end up connecting with its lower elements.”²⁷

Similarly the anthropologist Tamar Elor, who researched trends in leisure and consumerism among the Haredim, concluded that the Haredi community is slowly succumbing to that very force—Western consumer culture—that it once considered a no-less-insidious threat than the Haskala, the Holocaust, and Zionism.²⁸ Watching Haredi families strolling in shopping malls, she writes: “This is it, this is the end, they have joined everyone else... a Hasidic couple drinking cappuccino? Haredim sitting on a platform for all to see, relishing fettucini Alfredo?”²⁹

Like Sheleg, Elor points to displays of “hedonism” among Haredim as evidence of an overall trend of disintegrating values. Yet what both Sheleg and Elor miss is the fundamental difference between the way ideals are perceived by a traditional-conservative society and the way they are understood by a modern-liberal one. Haredi values—from the requirement to contemplate the Tora day and night to the prohibition on gossip—cannot, by their very nature, be upheld fully, at least by most people. Nonetheless, Haredim choose to *try* to adhere to these strict demands (believing, as they do, that they emanate from heaven) rather than content themselves with the more lenient human norms that are insufficient to urge a man towards perfection. The traditional society, as a result, has room for those human weaknesses that lead to inconsistency and hypocrisy—so long as these do not become

in themselves an ideal toward which one aspires. The Hazon Ish explained this approach in what became known as “the extremist epistle”:

In the same way as simplicity and greatness are different, so too are extremism and greatness. Extremism is the perfecting of the subject. Whoever countenances mediocrity and despises extremism belongs with the fabricators, with the dimwitted. If there is no extremism—there is no perfection, and if there is no perfection—there is no beginning.... The mediocrity that has a right to exist is the mediocrity of those who love extremism and aspire to it as their heart’s desire, and educate their offspring to the heights of extremism. But how pitiful is noisy mediocrity’s scorn of extremism.³⁰

This striving for the absolute is perhaps *the* key factor that distinguishes Haredi Jews from modern secular society, which adapts its principles to man’s capabilities. Thus Sheleg is mistaken in seeing the penetration of modern forms of leisure into Haredi society as evidence of the diminishing status of the rabbis, who vehemently oppose these trends.³¹ Rather, the strength of *daat tora* lies in the fact that from the outset it is nearly impossible to achieve.

For the same reason, the analysis offered by Sheleg and Elor fails to recognize the crucial distinction in Haredi society between center and periphery, between what is understood by the Haredim to be the core of their community and the numerous outer or fringe elements that have attached themselves to it in the last generation. Indeed, most of the evidence Sheleg evinces to show the “profound changes” in Haredi society, from the *shababnikim* (Haredi youth who remain officially enrolled in a yeshiva to maintain their army deferments, but are in truth wandering the streets) to purely recreational jaunts at shopping malls, in fact occurs primarily on the periphery of Haredi society. For this reason, Elor does not tell us what percentage of the Haredi population the mall-goers represent (in fact, a very small one), or their status in the Haredi community.³² It is this failure to distinguish between center and periphery that accounts for endless newspaper coverage of the new “openness” among the Haredi community, such as education for

democracy and Haredi artists who paint nudes. A closer look will reveal, in most cases, that a connection to the mainstream Haredi community is ephemeral at best. The mere fact of someone identifying as Haredi does not make him in any way reflective of the Haredi community. Thus the fanfare that accompanied the purported success of Nahal Haredi, a special unit of the Israel Defense Forces designed for ultra-Orthodox Jews, and the eagerness to see it as an indicator of social change in the Haredi community, is a perfect case study in jumping to conclusions. Although I personally served in Nahal Haredi and would not dream of disparaging it, it is a fact that of the more than 1,000 men who have served in Nahal Haredi since its inception just over six years ago, no more than about 50 came from the core of the Haredi community. The majority, rather, came from a wide range of peripheral groups—semi-Haredi Zionists, followers of the Lubavitcher and Breslaver Hasidic groups, and *hozrim bitsbuva*.

There is little value, therefore, in predicting the decline of Haredi society if such forecasts are based on the behavior of those who have never been central to that society's vitality. On the contrary, the fact that such exceptional cases are nonetheless so eager to identify themselves as Haredim may itself be proof of the movement's growing appeal. Indeed, researchers have repeatedly had to revise their doomsday prophecies in view of the Haredi community's uncanny ability to survive and prosper. Friedman, for instance, postulated in 1988 that the exposure of the Haredi woman to modern culture, along with the pressure she faces to provide sole financial support for her family, would eventually force her to break from the old ways. She would, he wrote, inevitably internalize the values of modernization and import them into Haredi society.³³ This prediction is logical: Why, indeed, should the Haredi woman, who receives an education with more secular content than that of her husband (including English, mathematics, history, and geography) continue to sacrifice her own ambitions so that the men in her life may study Tora? Time, however, has proven Friedman wrong. Today, the insistence among Haredi women on marrying a *ben tora*, or full-time yeshiva student, is one of the primary factors motivating men

to remain in yeshiva—otherwise, they fear, their prospects of marrying well are significantly diminished. Friedman revised his position eleven years later, admitting that “it is a fact that the women who graduate from the Beit Ya’akov [Haredi women’s] seminary have become the center of gravity of the community of learners.”³⁴ This time, Friedman took into account the spiritual elements driving the Haredi community:

Whereas in the past, the secular-modern world offered hope not only for a solution to the problem of poverty, but also for the construction of a better and more just society, now it no longer offers a meaningful life, warmth, and social involvement. Secular society does not help in times of need. On the other hand, Haredi society excels in its charitable enterprises, in the spirit of volunteering that pervades it, and the feeling of belonging of those who identify with its goals.³⁵

This is a crucial development in Friedman’s thought, and it reflects a possible awakening to the profound errors in the academic research: Friedman now acknowledges the importance of the “spirit of volunteering” and the “feeling of belonging” to understanding the ability of the Haredi community to resist the lure of modern culture. Indeed, when the spiritual elements of Haredi society are placed in their proper context, predictions of its wane seem entirely off the mark. We can only hope that both academic research and popular writing about the Haredim will, in the future, pay closer attention to those elements that simply cannot be understood with the limited tools of economics and demography. For it is *those* elements which contain the secret of the Haredi renaissance.

If we truly wish to understand the vitality of contemporary Haredi society, we must look at the way that society views itself and its specific role within Jewish history. Where the academic scholars have insisted on presenting Haredi society as a modern contrivance, the Haredim see themselves as indentured to a specific heritage, one that has a divine source. This,

according to the Haredim, is the core value of their existence, and the reason they resist so fiercely the siren call of modernity.

Modern thinking, built on a belief in the inexorable progress of human civilization, insists on the superiority of the present over the past, and pins its hopes on a better future.³⁶ Haredim, because of their total devotion to tradition, cannot accept this notion of progress. As Eliezer Schweid writes, Haredi society is a “blatant and bold demonstration of the preference for the past over the present.”³⁷ The “past” that the Haredim prefer, however, is a very specific one: It is the time of the revelation on Mount Sinai, and the days of the biblical prophets and the Temple. As opposed to the idea of progress, the Haredim put forth an opposite idea, that of the *yeridat hadorot* (“descent of the generations”), in which every successive generation is further away from the original revelation, and thus the spiritual stature of the Jewish people only diminishes with time.³⁸ It follows that the lowly present must subject itself to the only remnants of that glorious past that remain with us today: The sacred texts, legal rulings, and traditions passed down by previous generations. Indeed, if the modern concept of progress has the effect of eroding the authority of parents and teachers, the “descent of the generations” has the opposite effect: It confirms and enhances the authority of both, and in turn strengthens traditional societal frameworks.

The principle of *yeridat hadorot* fills such an important role in Haredi society that it is worth taking time to understand the intensity of the experience that accompanies it. The Holocaust that destroyed the great yeshivot and Hasidic courts illuminated this principle in a tragic light: The few who survived the destruction saw themselves as far less worthy of survival than those who perished. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, one of the greatest thinkers of the Lithuanian community, described this feeling in his famous sermon, “And It Came to Pass After the Destruction”:

Our generation is not like other generations. It is a *generation of destruction*—for our sins. Do we understand what a generation of destruction means? No, we can neither understand nor grasp it; we cannot even

believe that it is possible; but... it is the truth. The riches we once had are destroyed and gone. The picture of that rich past is still vivid before our eyes—but it is nothing but a past which is ever receding from us. In the present it does not exist.... The present is a void! That spiritual wealth, that unique yeshiva atmosphere, that yearning for truth, that intellectual brilliance, that fear of God, that warmth—all these are no longer with us.... Divine Presence has gone from amongst us.... Our children will not see it with us.³⁹

The idea of *yeridat hadorot* imbues Haredi life with both an awareness of the existence of better alternatives to the current reality, and a continuous self-criticism that demands ever greater devotion to God. Life in the present will always be accompanied by a sense of malaise, since we are unable to perpetuate the past in all its completeness; therefore, certain concessions must at times be made in this life, such as the transition in many yeshivot from traditional Yiddish to modern Hebrew. Nonetheless, the Slonimer Rebbe laments the fact that the quantitative flourishing of Tora study today is accompanied by a qualitative decline: “When we look at the general map of Haredi society, the central problem is that greatness is missing and the commonplace is rampant.”⁴⁰ Since the older generations are dwindling away, he explains, a new stringency needs to be applied, above and beyond what was practiced in the past. He offers a similar account of the Haredi insistence on full-time yeshiva study for adult men, which the Haredim adopted after the Holocaust. Relying on a passage from the seventeenth-century sage Rabbi Yeshayahu Halevi Horowitz, which dwells on the increasing prevalence of impurity in the world,⁴¹ the Slonimer Rebbe concludes that our generation needs reforming by the power of the Tora:

And we see, accordingly, that there is no place for the assertion that a man should be stricter than his fathers in the previous generation, because then they should not really have behaved as they did. But in this generation, where the impurity is growing ever stronger, it is the will of God that the Jew be more strict and fence himself in with new barriers of asceticism.... In this generation, therefore, the sanctity must also be on a completely

different level, so that in these times, for the yeshiva student to be able to act properly in holiness and purity, he must sit and toil over the Tora.⁴²

In sum, the principle of *yeridat hadorot* is critical to an understanding of why the Haredim reject the notion of progress. At the root of their opposition is the fact that in many ways, the Haredim simply view the passage of time differently. They see themselves as a link in an eternal chain, and view their historical role as ensuring its continuation. This “obsession with eternity” is powerfully felt throughout Haredi discourse, according to which every event is measured and judged. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, a historical consciousness that prides itself on such a long heritage tends to react to innovations with suspicion at best. This attitude is reflected in the words of Rabbi Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam, one of the greatest Hasidic leaders of the last generation, who sought in his sermons to convince Hasidic girls to preserve the modesty of traditional attire and not to be tempted to adopt new fashions:

In light of the recognition that we are an eternal people, as it said, “The Eternal of Israel will not deceive” (I Samuel 15:29), it must be instilled in the hearts of our young ones that our Tora is eternal. We have a special way of measuring what is success and what is failure, what is a gain and what is a loss. With us it is impossible to call something a “success” that is sweet for ten years or tens of years and so forth, after which it loses its taste and it has a bitter smell. This meaning of “success” is reserved only for things that are good for eternity and are beneficial forever.⁴³

Elsewhere he made the point more colorfully:

There is nothing that emphasizes more the falsity and worthlessness of impurity than that which is called “fashion,” which is entirely built on vanity and impermanence, and the “fashion designer” who one day promises that his new fashion is the embodiment of all the grace and beauty in the world and that we should reject our entire heritage and let down all our moral guards for it—but who wakes up the next day with a new creation

and discards with his own hands that which only yesterday he created with such enthusiastic fervor.... The Sages taught us that a fool is never content with one piece of nonsense. And simple-minded, tasteless people are swept away in a sickly circle of magic and with them most of the simple-minded people in the world. But “the portion of Jacob is not like them” (Jeremiah 10:16), and that is not the way of Israel, a holy people.... With us, the concepts of honor and insult, beauty and revulsion, have not changed since the giving of the law at Mount Sinai.⁴⁴

This obligation to the eternal manifests itself in the premium placed by Haredi society on the education of children. In the Haredi world, both the family and the community act as normative centers of activity that serve a single, united purpose: The continuation of Jewish life and values. The test of successfully transmitting Jewish values, then, becomes the main criterion in determining the extent to which you are Jewish. On the basis of this principle, Haredi ideology is critical of every Jewish phenomenon or idea, whatever its intellectual pretensions, that does not contribute to the continuity of the tradition—or worse, undermines it. Thus did Rabbi Eliezer Schach, the revered leader of the non-Hasidic Haredi community in Israel until his death in 2001, frequently make reference in his speeches to the testimony of an exile from Spain, the Hasid Yabetz, who described the behavior of the Jewish intelligentsia: “And the majority who boasted of their wisdom were eradicated and were not exiled. Only the women and the simple, uneducated folk sacrificed themselves.”⁴⁵ The tremendous importance the Haredim place on the transmission of values forms, for instance, the basis of their critique of the religious-Zionist community in Israel. Whereas this latter community takes issue with the ambivalent Haredi attitude toward Israel and the refusal of yeshiva students to enlist in the army, Haredi criticism of religious Zionism focuses not so much on its nationalistic inclinations as on the perceived frailty of its religious backbone: The lack of diligence the Haredim perceive in the community’s observance of the commandments, as well as the large number of children who “go off the path,” abandoning the religious life altogether.⁴⁶

Even the study of Tora is not perceived as merely a way of satisfying intellectual curiosity or as a means of accumulating knowledge as much as proof of one's ongoing commitment to Judaism's holy texts, and a recognition of their primacy in one's life. Tora study is seen as a way of connecting to previous generations and forming an eternal bond with them. "When the holy Tora is ingrained in the Jewish heart," said Rabbi Schach, "then he, the Jew, is an eternal creature."⁴⁷ The Holy Scriptures that protected the Jewish nation in exile are seen as the bridge between past and present. The Yiddish novelist Chaim Grade, who himself left the religious fold, describes in his famous novel *The Yeshiva* the experience of a student—reminiscent, not coincidentally, of his former teacher the Hazon Ish—immersed in Tora study:

The Talmud says: If you encounter that blackguard, drag him to the beth medresh! When one studies the Tora, one's mind fuses with that of Moses on Mount Sinai. Studying the Mishna, one unites with the Sages of Yavneh and converses with them as if they were alive. A youngster pores over his Talmud in Vilna and muses that he is in Babylonia, sitting in the great talmudic academy of Nahardea, in the beth medresh of Rashi and his scholarly descendants. Whoever carries so many eras of Tora and wisdom in his heart and mind considers the world and all its pleasures only a pauper's hospice.⁴⁸

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the value of education in the Haredi community. Anyone strolling through a Haredi neighborhood is bound to notice this. Here, educating one's children is a ceaseless occupation—the intent, in fact, behind conspicuous posters plastered on every wall, preaching: "Do not sin against the child,"⁴⁹ or "Touch not my anointed ones."⁵⁰ Lectures on educational matters are common in the Haredi world, and there is not a single Haredi newspaper that does not devote a large section to them. Furthermore, in striking contrast to the diminishing status of teachers in the secular community, the rabbis and educators in Haredi yeshivot are held in the highest regard.⁵¹ This is because the Haredim believe

that every generation is obligated to raise its children in the light of certain beliefs and norms, as Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, scion of the Lithuanian Musar movement and one of the greatest Haredi philosophers of our generation, writes, citing Maimonides: “If a little child can hold his father’s hand and go up from Jerusalem to the Temple Mount, it is his father’s duty to take him up and show it to him, so as to educate him in the commandments.”⁵² Moreover, Wolbe argues that the true purpose of the commandments concerned with education is the transmission of the father’s Jewish understanding to his child:

If education were only about putting sons on the path of Tora and reverence—the gravity of this work would be enough. The father’s real strength is truly revealed in the education of his son. The father himself, with all the commandments he has performed and the Tora he has studied, is still considered ‘potential’ until he raises sons who themselves follow God’s path. The father’s nature and the true aspiration of his life are actually revealed—in his sons. And that is the point of education: The father confirms himself in it. Therefore, educating the sons is an awesome responsibility on which depends the success of the fathers in their own life. But if the fathers conform for the most part to Tora and commandments, but fail, God forbid, in educating their sons, then they generally pass judgment on themselves and on their teaching.⁵³

The survival of the Haredi community is not dependent solely on the process of transmitting values, however. There are many other unique social characteristics that contribute to its cohesiveness, beginning with a communal structure organized around circles of commitment—the family, the community, Haredi society as a whole, and the eternal Jewish people. Consequently, the Haredi individual lives inside a tightly packed system of connections and identifications. In times of need, this system is readily available for both material and spiritual support. So, too, does a network of volunteer organizations—offering everything from interest-free loans to rental of medical equipment to the supply of basic goods—dedicate itself to

the physical well-being of every member of the community. No Haredi will ever, in time of need, be left to fend for himself.

Obviously, the preservation of such an intense, close-knit community involves the suppression of a certain measure of personal freedom. And indeed, the Haredi is not free to think, to doubt, and to act as a secular person does. He is committed to his community's tradition and to the authority of his community's leaders, and lives in a social and cultural ghetto. No doubt, this is a heavy price to pay—for many, it is simply too heavy. But to the extent that the Haredi community demands the forfeiture of the individual's personal liberties for the sake of the whole, the individual is rewarded with a life imbued with meaning, and an almost unparalleled feeling of belonging and of continuity, and of certainty as to his place in this transient world and beyond—indeed, in all of Jewish eternity.

Some years ago, I began my journey from the Haredi society in which I grew up—the world of the Belz Yeshiva and a generations-old Hasidic family—to the “outside world.” In the world I had left behind, I was filled with questions; in my new life, I searched for answers. This journey led me, among other places, to the pages of the research to which I have referred above. For the first time, I looked to academic books on the history of Orthodoxy and Hasidism to serve as my guides to the society of which I was once a part. Through them, I was able to look at the Haredi community from a new, critical perspective. I found, however, that along with penetrating insights, these books contained much flawed analysis. Often, these flaws stemmed from sheer intolerance and a not-inconsiderable level of hostility.

This attitude toward Haredi society, common among the secular public, is to me not entirely surprising. I am all too familiar with the stringencies of Haredi life that are often construed by outside observers as “repressive” or “fundamentalist.” And indeed, I concede that there are negative aspects to the Haredi way of life, whether its suppression of individuality or its own hostility towards those streams of Judaism opposed to it. Yet, at the same

time, I cannot ignore the secret of its power—an uncompromising devotion to a long and glorious tradition that embodies the continuous striving for the supreme good. The religious idealism of the Haredi society could well be construed, from the outside, as rigid and oppressive. Yet at the same time, this religious idealism creates an intense form of human existence based on the values of communalism, the sanctity of the family, and the obligation of study. We who are on the outside should ask ourselves: Are these values really such a bad foundation on which to build one's life?

They are not. And it is just possible that beneath the hostility directed by much of secular society toward the Haredi community lies a fear of the challenge the Haredim pose, through their unremitting resistance to the modern, liberal worldview. And the strength of the Haredi alternative is all the more evident precisely *when* it is set against the weakness of the open, permissive society that surrounds it. If Haredi society is nothing if not certain of its own values, what is to be said for a liberal culture that is constant wracked by doubts as to its own value in this world?⁵⁴

It would seem, then, that rather than deliberately distancing himself, the modern Jew can learn something from the Haredim. He may not be able—or want—to accept the Haredi dictum that “the Tora prohibits innovation,” but neither should he succumb to the facile, modern dismissal of the past: “Never look back.” For as the Haredim make clear, there is much to be learned from our past. Haredi society is characterized by vitality and moral strength precisely because it wholeheartedly believes in its holy mission—the preservation of Jewish existence—and is willing to sacrifice many things that the “enlightened” man views as crucial to daily life. The Haredi's eyes are directed at eternity, and away from the fleeting idols of fashion. Surely this sacrifice is itself worthy of admiration—and perhaps even inspiration.

In the end, it is certainly difficult to imagine an ideological compromise between Haredi Judaism and other sectors of the Jewish public that have adopted a more “progressive” worldview. After all, there exists between them an unbridgeable chasm: Modern Jewish trends are founded on the view that

Judaism will survive only if it succeeds in incorporating certain aspects of contemporary Western liberal culture, whereas the Haredim believe that only their entrenchment behind the walls of tradition can guarantee the continuation of Judaism in future generations. Surely, however, the modern Jew cannot deny that there is something comforting about the knowledge that there exists a community dedicated to the preservation of Jewish identity in its maximalist version, even during periods of far-reaching social and cultural change.⁵⁵

Once, during a heated debate on the question of whether the Haredi community helps or hinders the future of the Jewish people, my teacher and rabbi Professor Shalom Rosenberg, a researcher of Jewish history, claimed that the Haredim are the “savings account” of the Jewish people. In contrast, the modern Jewish movement may be compared to “venture capital,” used to invest in bold political and ideological ventures. Surely, we can see the value in both. Indeed, there may come a time when the modern Jewish community will need to dip into its reserves. The resilience of the Haredi community assures us that these reserves will always be there.

Aharon Rose is an undergraduate in the department of Israeli history at the Hebrew University. This essay, originally composed in Hebrew, won first prize in AZURE's Hebrew Essay Contest for Young Writers in 2005.

Notes

1. Shalom Noah Brozofsky, Tractate *The Slain is Upon You: Articles about the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Machon Emuna Vedaat, 1988), p. 28. [Hebrew] In this context, Eliezer Schweid coined the expression “the truth comforts” as a means of explaining Haredi philosophy’s efforts to cope with the Holocaust. See Eliezer Schweid, *From Ruin to Salvation: Responses of Haredi*

Philosophy to the Holocaust in Its Time (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1994), p. 12. [Hebrew]

2. See the definition provided by Haredi social researcher Kimmy Caplan, who characterizes Haredi society as a combination of ideological and theological opinions as well as of a unique lifestyle. Kimmy Caplan, "Research into the Haredi Community in Israel: Achievements and Challenges," in *Israeli Haredim: Integration without Assimilation?* eds. Emmanuel Sivan and Kimmy Caplan (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute, 2004), p. 227. [Hebrew] See there his discussion on the ruling of the High Court when asked, in order to resolve an argument over the government budget in 1993, to answer the question: Who Is a Haredi? See Caplan, "Research into the Haredi Community in Israel," pp. 226-227.

3. This is only the briefest of sketches of Katz's and his students' research into Orthodoxy. For a bibliographical survey of the subject, see Caplan, "Research into the Haredi Community in Israel," mainly pp. 231-234. For research that deals with Katz's historiography, see Immanuel Etkes' introduction to Moshe Samet, *The Tora Prohibits Innovation: Chapters in the History of Orthodoxy* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2004), pp. 7-9. [Hebrew]

4. Jacob Katz, "Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective," in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, part 2, ed. Peter Y. Medding (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1986), p. 4. Katz published his collected articles on Jewish Orthodoxy in his book *Halacha in Distress: Obstacles on the Way to Orthodoxy in Formation* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992). [Hebrew]

5. Katz, "Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective," p. 4. For a discussion of the question of whether Orthodoxy is the only possible reaction to modernity (in the context of an analysis of Jews of Middle Eastern origin), see the fascinating polemic between Zvi Zohar and Benjamin Brown, "Eastern Sages and Religious Fanaticism: Points for a Renewed Examination," *Akdamos* 10 (2001), pp. 289-324 [Hebrew]; Zvi Zohar, "Orthodoxy Is Not the Only Authentic Halachic Reaction to Modernity," *Akdamos* 11 (2002), pp. 139-151 [Hebrew]; Benjamin Brown, "European' Modernity, Orthodox Reaction, and the Causal Connection," *Akdamos* 11 (2002), pp. 153-160. [Hebrew]

6. Michael K. Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), p. 24.

7. Israel Bartal, "Responses to Modernity: Haskala, Orthodoxy, and Nationalism in Eastern Europe," in *Zionism and Religion*, eds. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira (Hanover: Brandeis, 1998), p. 18.

8. The influence of the doctrine of *daat tora* and its transformation from Haredi into religious-Zionist society provoked a stormy debate, and increased the

interest of both researchers and the general public in its theological and halachic roots. See Benjamin Brown, “*Daat Tora* in Religious Judaism in Israel: The Background, the Positions, and Their Implications,” in *Religious Zionism: An Era of Changes—Studies in Memory of Zvulun Hammer*, ed. Asher Cohen (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2004), pp. 422-474. [Hebrew] Discussions on the *daat tora* principle are based on articles by my teacher, Rabbi Dr. Benjamin Brown, and on the course he taught at the Hebrew University in 2004, “The Hafez Haim—Faith, Halacha, and Public Leadership.” My debt to Brown does not end with those notes referring to his articles. It is customary for the writer, after he has thanked his teachers, to add that they are not responsible for his errors. In my case, Brown told me that he does not agree with my conclusions. It is therefore my duty, not only as a matter of course, to say here that the errors—if there are any—are mine alone.

9. Ze’ev Safrai and Avi Saguy, eds., *Between Authority and Autonomy in Jewish Tradition* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1997). [Hebrew]

10. Jacob Katz, “*Daat Tora*: The Unqualified Authority Claimed by Halachists,” in Safrai and Saguy, *Between Authority and Autonomy in Jewish Tradition*, pp. 95-104. [Hebrew] Although this is a research anthology, Katz did not refrain from expressing his personal opinion, as he writes at the end of his article: “It [the emergence of the phenomenon of *daat tora*] is a result of special historical circumstances, and though a historian should never try to prophesy, he is not prevented from hoping that what has emerged in the course of history may also disappear in the course of time.” Katz, “*Daat Tora*,” p. 103.

11. Lawrence Kaplan, “*Daat Tora*—A Modern Conception of Rabbinic Authority,” in *Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy*, ed. Moshe Sokol (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1992), pp. 1-60. Kaplan even anticipated that the ideology of *daat Tora*, as a result of a proliferation of contradictory authorities, would become a victim of its own success: “As a result of the proliferation of conflicting *daat tora* viewpoints, of conflicting *de’ot tora*... the concept of *daat tora* as the expression of the sole legitimate, authentic Tora viewpoint would seem to be in trouble.” Kaplan, “*Daat Tora*,” p. 53.

12. Mishna Avot 5:22.

13. Hagiga 12a.

14. Benjamin Brown, “The Doctrine of ‘*Daat Tora*’: Three Stages,” in *Way of the Spirit: Book on the Jubilee of Eliezer Schweid*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies, 2004), p. 594. [Hebrew]

15. Thus Jacob Katz also refers to the phenomenon of the Musar (“moral”) movement of Rabbi Israel Salanter in the mid-nineteenth century as a kind of reaction to modernism. Katz, “Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective,” p. 6. Lawrence Kaplan claims that the attempts of the Hazon Ish (Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz), the leader of the Haredi community in Israel, to neutralize the effect

of the Musar movement are also reactions to modernity. Lawrence Kaplan, "The Hazon Ish: Haredi Critic of Traditional Orthodoxy," in *The Uses of Tradition*, pp. 145-173. Moreover, Menachem Friedman and Haym Soloveitchik regard the strictness imposed by the Hazon Ish as a result of a literary tradition that developed in yeshivot that were not tied to any particular Haredi community, and had thus cut themselves off from the communal tradition and its customs. Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition* 28 (1994), pp. 64-130; Menachem Friedman, "The Lost Tradition: How the Written Word Defeated the Living Tradition—A Perspective on the Lessons Debate," in *The Quest for Halacha: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Jewish Law*, ed. Amichai Berholz (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2003), pp. 196-218. [Hebrew]

16. Menachem Friedman, *The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Society: Sources, Trends, and Processes* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1991), p. 77. [Hebrew]

17. Joseph Dan, "Prevailing Haredi Society: A Product of a Secular Israel," *Alpayim* 15 (1998), p. 241.

18. It is interesting to note that those researchers and intellectuals who are not experts in the history of the Jewish people are more respectful of the Haredi experience of continuity. Thus, for example, Emmanuel Sivan wrote: "This 'highlighted' past is experienced with utmost contemporaneity, spoken about in the same way one talks about figures and events appearing in the major text, the product of the revelation, which carries authority in the enclave. Chronological distance is abolished, as is clear to any observer watching Haredim on the ninth of Av as they lament the 70 c.e. destruction of the Temple and the onset of Exile, or Shi'ites weeping in self-flagellation for the murder of Imam Husayn, 'Ali's grandson, on the tenth of Ramadan ('Ashura)." Emmanuel Sivan, "The Enclave Culture," in *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, eds. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), p. 38. As a result of a trip he took to the Geula and Mea Shearim districts in Jerusalem, the author Amos Oz also writes: "Here in northwestern Jerusalem everything remains almost as it was. Enlightenment and assimilation, the return to Zion, the murder of Europe's Jews, and the establishment of the State of Israel seem swallowed up, covered over by the growth of this Judaism, fierce and tropical, like some primeval jungle." Amos Oz, *In the Land of Israel*, trans. Maurie Goldberg-Bartura (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), p. 7.

19. As Benjamin Brown points out: "Some would try to attribute the success of the Haredi world in Israel to the Zionist state whose existence it opposed and to the democratic government... but this claim, even if it is correct, cannot diminish the extent of the achievement of the Haredi community, because every achievement is built, among other things, by using the conditions created by the opponent. The very ability of this society to adapt its course to a changing reality without significantly straying from its fundamental values demonstrates the power of its existence."

In order to succeed it is not enough to open the window of opportunity; you have to know how to use it properly.” See Benjamin Brown, “Rabbi Schach: Admiring the Spirit, Critique of Nationalism, and Political Decision Making in the State of Israel,” in *Religion and Nationalism in Israel and the Middle East*, ed. Neri Horowitz (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2003), p. 318. [Hebrew]

20. Throughout his book, Friedman emphasizes the existentialist crisis facing Haredi society. See, for example, Friedman, *The Haredi Society*, pp. 4, 75-77, 129, 190-191.

21. Friedman, *The Haredi Society*, p. 191.

22. Friedman, *The Haredi Society*, p. 192.

23. Friedman, *The Haredi Society*, p. 188. It should be emphasized that other researchers proposed a more complex analysis than Friedman’s narrow economic one. Many of them maintained that research into Haredi society must take into consideration its ideological elements, as well. Charles Liebman, for example, argues that Rabbi Schach’s decision not to join the government’s leftist coalition despite the economic incentives shows that the political behavior of the Haredim cannot be explained in purely economic terms. Charles Liebman, “Joining the Government Coalition in Light of the Haredi Reaction to the Yom Kippur War,” *Perspectives on the Revival of Israel* 3 (1993), pp. 380-398. [Hebrew] For Liebman, Haredi society is based first and foremost on an obligation to religious-ideological principles, in the name of which it demands material sacrifices from its adherents. Moreover, “its religious leaders, as distinct from its political ones, provide an example of simple life if not actual poverty in their private lives.” Liebman, “Joining the Government Coalition,” p. 384. As Liebman states, the Haredi sense of moral responsibility for the Jewishness of Israeli society has increased since the Yom Kippur War. In his view, the trauma of Yom Kippur aroused the feeling that Israeli society was part of the rhythm of Jewish history, “a feeling that stems from the fact that the pain, suffering, and humiliation Israel endured during that war are consistent, as far as the Haredim are concerned, with the Jewish nation’s bitter experience since the destruction of the Temple.” Liebman, “Joining the Government Coalition,” p. 387.

24. Studies of this professional training provided a wealth of insight into Haredi society, from anthropological fieldwork to philosophical and historical reviews of changes in Haredi attitudes toward work. The reader will find a good summary in Joel Reibibo, “The Road Back from Utopia,” *AZURE* 11 (Summer 2001), pp. 131-167. For the latest literature: Yohai Hakak, *Between Sanctity and Tachles: Haredi Men Learn a Trade* (Jerusalem: Florsheim Institute for Political Research, 2004). [Hebrew]

25. Yair Sheleg, *The New Religious Jews: Recent Developments Among Observant Jews in Israel* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2000). [Hebrew]

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26. Sheleg, *The New Religious Jews*, p. 13.
27. Sheleg, *The New Religious Jews*, p. 145.
28. Tamar Elor and Eran Neria, "The Wandering Haredi: Time and Space Consumption among the Haredi Community in Jerusalem," in *Israeli Haredim*, pp. 171-195.
29. Elor and Neria, "The Wandering Haredi," p. 195.
30. Cited in Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, *Splendor of Our Generation: Selections from the Life and Writings of Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, the "Hazon Ish,"* ed. Shlomo Cohen, part 1 (Bnei Brak: Netzah, 1969), pp. 292-293. [Hebrew]
31. Sheleg, *The New Religious Jews*, p. 164. Yet another example of a baseless prediction on the future of Haredi society is Sheleg's pronouncement that the death of Rabbi Schach would lead to a lessening of the status of the rabbinic leadership in the Haredi world, and a rise in the status of its politicians. In truth, four years have passed since the death of Rabbi Schach, and there is no discernible change on the horizon. Sheleg also claims that the rightist tendencies of the Haredi community will lead it into conflict with the authority of *daat tora*. Yet the support of the United Tora Judaism party for Sharon's disengagement coalition is obvious proof, if any were needed, of the ability of *daat tora* to prevail over rightist tendencies among the Haredim.
32. For the Haredi slant, see the apologia of prominent Haredi author and journalist Moshe Grylak, *The Haredim: Who Are We Really?* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002), pp. 24-27. [Hebrew]
33. Menachem Friedman, *The Haredi Woman* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1988). [Hebrew] The article was also published with minor changes as "The Haredi Woman," in *A Window on the Lives of Women in Jewish Societies*, ed. Yael Atzmon (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1995), pp. 273-290. [Hebrew]
34. Menachem Friedman, "The King's Daughter Is All Glorious Without," in *Blessed Be He Who Made Me a Woman? Women in Judaism: From Biblical to Present Times*, eds. David Joel Ariel, Maya Leibowitz, and Yoram Mazor (Tel Aviv: Miskal, 1999), p. 193. [Hebrew]
35. Friedman, "The King's Daughter," p. 205.
36. Leo Strauss describes the idea of progress as one composed of several rudiments: A parallelism between intellectual progress and social progress; the determination that human thought is a developing process, and that modern thinking from the seventeenth century on is an example of a type of progress that cannot be reversed; and the possibility of infinite progress. See Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return?" in Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism:*
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An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss: Essays and Lectures, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), p. 238. The idea of progress in modern culture is expressed mainly through the charm that the “new” holds for consumers. A member of the Musar movement, Rabbi Moshe Rosenstein (1880-1941), who was active in Lithuania between the wars, compares “the lust for change” with the quest for truth. In his efforts to discourage his students from yearning after the trappings of modernity, he blamed the philosophers of his time: “For their view that if they follow the path trod by all the Sages of past generations, they will be unable to do much to bring about changes that will shake up the entire world.... They found no other way, except to cause a revolution in the spiritual world and to choose a new path for themselves and leave the one that the great of the world trod for thousands of years.” See Moshe Rosenstein, *Ahavat Meisharim*, vol. 1, second ed. (Petah Tikva: Gnuzot, 1995), p. 47. At the peak of the ideological age, Rabbi Rosenstein warns that just as it is impossible to bring about a revolution in the physical world and “destroy the civilization enjoyed by the world’s peoples until now,” so, too, in the spiritual world “a man would be crazy to have the arrogance to pull down what previous generations have built.” He wonders at those of his own generation who are led astray in search of novelty, “who will be quick to be attracted by the new opinion of any crazy and deceitful man and place the crown of wisdom upon his head without much scrutiny of his veracity.” Rosenstein, *Ahavat Meisharim*, pp. 48, 49. In contrast to others in the Musar movement, who view the attraction of men to the new as a simple lust for anarchy, Rabbi Rosenstein argues that most people are miserable because they are distracted by the new *as opposed to being engaged* in the search for truth: “So when they hear a new opinion from some crazy and misguided person, they grab it with both hands, thinking, perhaps, to find something helpful in this opinion that will improve their lives.” Rosenstein, *Ahavat Meisharim*, pp. 49-50.

37. Schweid, *From Ruin to Salvation*, p. 9.

38. Much has been written on the topic of “first” and “last” in Jewish tradition, but as yet there have been no exhaustive studies on *yeridat hadorot* in Haredi philosophy. On first and last in Hasidut, see Mendel Piekartz, *Hasidic Leadership: Authority and Faith in Tzadikim as Reflected in the Hasidic Literature* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1999), pp. 60-77. [Hebrew] See there the references in notes 1-7. Benjamin Brown says that *yeridat hadorot* and *daat tora* are the final two of the fifteen essential principles of Haredi society. If I were bold enough I might say that they are principles 1 and 2 and only after them come the other thirteen principles of Maimonides.

39. Eliyahu E. Dessler, *Strive for Truth! Michtav Me-Eliyahu: The Selected Writings of Rabbi Eliyahu E. Dessler*, part 1, trans. Aryeh Carmell (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2002), p. 205.

40. Shalom Noah Brozofsky, *Paths of Peace: An Anthology of Discussions for the First Watch* (Jerusalem: Machon Emuna Vadaat, 1990), p. 60. [Hebrew]

41. Yeshayahu Halevi Horowitz, *The Two Tablets of the Covenant* (Jerusalem, 1963), introduction, *Beit Hochma*, p. 18. [Hebrew]

42. Shalom Noah Brozofsky, *Paths of Peace*, p. 94.

43. Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam, *Way of Life: Chapters on Education, Guidance, and the Foundations of Judaism According to Tora and Hasidut* (Union City, N.J.: R.M.L. Goldman, 1997), pp. 180-181. [Hebrew]

44. Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam, *Way of Life*, pp. 190-191.

45. It should be emphasized that the great historian of the Jewish dispersal in Christian Spain, Yitzhak Baer, accepts the authority of the testimony of the Hasid Yabetz (Rabbi Joseph Yabetz). See Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 2, *From the Fourteenth Century to the Expulsion*, trans. Louis Schoffman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), p. 443. Other historians have disagreed with Baer. See Israel M. Ta-Shma, *Studies in Medieval Rabbinic Literature*, vol. 2, *Spain* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2004), pp. 279-296. [Hebrew] See the discussion of Avishai Ben Haim, *Man of Vision: The Ultra-Orthodox Ideology of Rabbi Schach* (Jerusalem: Mozaika, 2004), pp. 149-159. [Hebrew] For the citation by Rabbi Schach see Eliezer Menachem Schach, *Letters and Articles*, part 4 (Bnei Brak, 1980), p. 154. [Hebrew]

46. This was recently brought into sharp focus by the way Haredi newspapers (non-affiliated) covered the disengagement process. The Haredi newspapers were unable to remain indifferent when faced with a settlement without television like Atzmona, or the Torat Haim yeshiva in Neve Dekalim, whose principal, Rabbi Shmuel Tal, is closer to the Haredi Tora sages than to the religious Zionist community. In the most popular Haredi chat site on the Internet, *Behadrei Haredim* ("In the Haredi inner sanctum"), part of the Israel-based Hyde Park general forum, some visitors claimed that the Haredim have no right to be arrogant after "the *mizrahnikim* [religious Zionists] took devotion to the mitzvot away from them."

47. Schach, *Letters and Articles*, part 1, p. 31.

48. Chaim Grade, *The Yeshiva*, trans. Curt Leviant (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), pp. 384-385. On the historical importance of Grade's theories, see the evidence of one of the greatest Talmud researchers, Saul Lieberman: "When I read *The Yeshiva* I was filled with amazement at the accuracy of the historical-literary descriptions.... I knew personally almost all the people in Grade's novel about the yeshiva." Saul Lieberman, "On Chaim Grade the Storyteller," *Bitzaron* 3 (April 1981), p. 29. [Hebrew]

49. Exodus 42:21-22.

50. Psalms 105:15.

51. For a fascinating and sensitive description of Haredi education see Samuel Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry* (New York: Schocken, 1992), especially pp. 168-177, but also in the chapters describing the *heder* (elementary school) and the *yeshiva*. And see also the references to Haredi educational literature.

52. Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*, Laws of Festival Offerings 2:3.

53. Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Beit Hamusar, 1998), p. 259. (The book was originally published anonymously.)

54. An assertion to this effect is also made by Eliezer Schweid, who sees the revival of Haredi society as one of the most amazing paradoxes of our time. The reason is, according to him, that Haredi society represents not only a nostalgic past but “a real advantage that makes it relevant to extremely pressing current problems.” In Schweid’s opinion, in contrast with the “emptiness of the non-religious community” the Haredi community offers “an overall religious attitude to life and a rich family and communal lifestyle, and above all it gives a man a definite direction in his life, a personal and social purpose, and meaning. Once more Haredi society has been found to provide answers to questions raised by the tensions, risks, and superficiality of post-modern societies.” But Schweid indicates not only the advantages of the Haredi community but also the moral price it pays for its success: A relationship of lack of responsibility towards the society and the culture thanks to which and in which it exists; narrowness of horizons and a restriction on the extent of its creativity; behavior according to the standards of a dual morality, one directed internally and the other externally; repression of natural urges; and an accumulation of mental and social tensions. See Eliezer Schweid, “Haredi Society as a Product of Post-Modern Culture,” *Nativ* 1 (1988), pp. 27-32. [Hebrew]

55. On this point it is worth referring to the book by the scholar of contemporary Judaism Charles S. Liebman and the political scientist Bernard Susser, *Choosing Survival: Strategies for a Jewish Future* (New York: Oxford, 1999). These two researchers, who do not describe themselves as Orthodox, took upon themselves a task that is beyond narrow academic endeavor: To propose ways of preserving Jewish existence—cultural, not physical—in Israel and worldwide. To do this the authors have to define Jewish survival and non-survival, which they believe ends with assimilation. Susser and Liebman, *Choosing Survival*, p. 135. The authors are severely critical of the liberal Jewish streams in the United States that identify liberalism with Judaism, or more accurately, the identification between “being Jewish” and the lifestyle mapped out according to the liberal worldview. Susser and Liebman, *Choosing Survival*, p. 77. They claim that Judaism and the liberal culture represent two opposing cultures. Susser and Liebman ask a rhetorical question: “Is there a single assumption, implication, or conclusion

adopted by the privatizers that runs against the grain of an urban, upper-middle-class American consensus?” Susser and Liebman, *Choosing Survival*, p. 87. Therefore, when Judaism is redesigned in the liberal style, both the American and Jewish cultures will come out losers—the former because the independent critical voice of Jewish civilization has been denied it, and the latter—because it has lost its Jewish identity: “A Jewish community claiming personalism, universalism, and so on, as its content will quickly learn that its members are adept at finding their personalism, universalism, and so on, elsewhere.” Susser and Liebman, *Choosing Survival*, p. 88. Susser and Liebman see the flowering of Haredi society as a rebuttal of Spinoza’s famous observation: “As to their continued existence for so many years when scattered and stateless, this is in no way surprising, since they have separated themselves from other nations to such a degree as to incur the hatred of all.... That they are preserved largely through the hatred of other nations is demonstrated by historical fact.” See Benedict de Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley, second ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), p. 45. Against this, the two researchers assert that Judaism does survive not because of hatred and persecution by the surrounding society but as a result of the power of a religious idea, a cultural richness, persistence, and commitment. Susser and Liebman, *Choosing Survival*, p. 171. They propose that we learn several principles from Orthodoxy: The return of the traditional study ideal to the center of Jewish life; preservation of communal unity accompanied by a selective acceptance of Western values; renunciation of the cosmopolitan mentality and legitimization of open discussion on the subject of Jewish uniqueness; condemnation of mixed marriages despite the demographic price, i.e., the qualitative criterion over the quantitative one; commitment to Jewish identity as an historical responsibility and not as an attractive market alternative. Susser and Liebman, *Choosing Survival*, pp. 145-151. However, as is the way with liberals, Liebman and Susser want to have their cake and eat it, too: They accept without a trace of criticism the ideals of universalism and liberal individualism, but admit that these values are in direct contradiction to the commitment to Jewish uniqueness. If so, why should the modern Jew restrict his individual liberty, the holy of holies of liberalism, for the sake of the continued existence of the Jewish people? How will we oblige our children to study Jewish texts? Moreover, the authors do not even mention the million-dollar question: Why is there such a furore about Judaism’s continued existence? Liebman and Susser are forgetting that the Orthodox, at least the Haredim among them, reject liberal values while clinging stubbornly to traditional values. Therefore, the success of the Haredi community cannot be understood except through an examination of the criticism that Haredi philosophy levels at the Western liberal culture.