



# Global Jewish Forum

## Haredim and the Jewish Collective:

*Engaging with Voices from the Field*

***Presented by Makom***

**27<sup>th</sup> February, 2012 - 4 Adar I, 5772**

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Israel. In Real Life.

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## Global Jewish Forum

A biennial event for deep consideration of the pressing issues of the Jewish People... Moving beyond the communal headlines to examine the deep issues that drive them... International Jewish leaders deliberately not taking decisions, but together deciding to deliberate... Young committed adults sit around the table with institutional leaders, sharing perspectives and gaining understanding.

*Welcome to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Jewish Forum.*

At the inaugural Forum last June the Makom team presented a day that explored the intra-communal challenges of the fight against delegitimation. “The Big Blue Tent and Jewish Dissent” was so successful that a shortened version was immediately invited to the GA, and is currently on tour throughout North America, including an upcoming presentation at Tribefest in late March.

Today, we address the Haredim and the Jewish Collective.

What are the complex issues beyond the headlines?  
How can we move towards a healthy future?  
In what way might the Diaspora contribute?

We look forward to a fruitful day of dialogue and learning!

*The Makom Team*

## GLOBAL JEWISH FORUM:

### *Haredim and the Jewish Collective: Engaging with voices from the field*

- 09 : 15 Opening, and introduction from Yonatan Ariel, Makom
- 09 : 30 Round tables - Introducing yourselves to your table
- 09 : 45 Dr Neri Horowitz: Haredim in Israel – the Overview  
The leading expert in strategy and policy concerning Haredim in the modern world, who consults both to the Israeli government and to Haredi leaders. His breadth of reach, depth of knowledge, and positive approach is inspiring. Questions and answers will follow.
- 10 : 45 Break
- 11 : 00 Round tables – any surprises? Any further questions?
- 11 : 15 VIDEO - What is to be done? Voices from the field  
Specially-prepared video featuring a range of voices: including R. Yehuda Meshi Zahav (ZAKA), Naomi Perl (Haredi track, Mandel Leadership Institute), Richard Peres (Education Portfolio, Bet Shemesh), R. Bezalel Cohen (advisor to Haredi army unit)
- These voices bring us inside the issues, into an engagement with the real work that is taking place. Who are the pragmatists? What are the principles? Should we stand on principle and insist on change, or look at what is possible and support gradual processes?  
Round table discussions – time to process responses.
- 12 : 15 Town Hall Meeting - Should this activate the Diaspora? If so, how?  
Activists and leaders throughout the Jewish world share their thoughts and plans on dialogue, education, hopefulness and urgency. Roving microphones allow for your voices to be heard!
- 13 : 15 Round tables – concluding thoughts
- 13 : 30 Onward to action  
Natan Sharansky and Shoel Silver draw the proceedings to their close, and point to the ongoing work of the Jewish Agency for Israel, and the Committee on the Unity of the Jewish People, taking place later in the day.

## What is Orthodoxy?

Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman, *The Haredim in Israel*

### THE HAREDIM IN ISRAEL

One of the more surprising results of the 1988 Israeli elections for the Twelfth Knesset was the success of the so-called "religious parties" (representing orthodox Jews), which won 18 seats of a total 120. This number seemed at first to constitute the crucial margin of victory that would enable one of the two major parties -- Labor or Likud -- to form a governing coalition. That the major parties would have to invite a religious party to join the government was no surprise; these parties had played a role in state politics since 1948. What was surprising -- at least to those who had not been following the evolution of Israeli orthodoxy -- was that the parties forming the majority of the religious bloc represented the most stringently orthodox. These are the so-called haredi (Hebrew for "God-fearing") Jews, men in black hats and caftans, with beards and earlocks, who question the very legitimacy of Zionism. They are not the modern orthodox Jews of the National Religious Party (NRP), the heirs of the religious Zionism of the Mizrahi movement, who recognize the validity of Zionism and have been from the start willing to join with the majority secular Zionist political parties in governing the state. This time, the NRP, although winning five seats, was outnumbered more than two to one by the ultraorthodox haredim. Suddenly, it seemed, a coalition with the orthodox would mean an association with Jews who questioned the entire Zionist enterprise, who did not serve in the Israel Defense Forces, who saw themselves as outsiders, and who acted as if they were still in exile. To many, it seemed, as a November 3, 1988, *Ma'ariv* headline boldly suggested: "The State is becoming haredi."

To get beyond the headlines and understand what really happened in this election, however, it is first necessary to briefly review the last two hundred years of Jewish history. Such a review will help identify the players in this drama and allow one to discern the roots of the various orthodox parties, which do not constitute a single body. Moreover, it will also explain why the religious parties were able to achieve their highest level of electoral strength -- numbers they had not seen since the first elections in 1949.

#### Who Are the Orthodox?

The question with which we begin is simple: Who are the orthodox? The beginnings of what today is called "orthodoxy," a strain of Judaism identified with a high degree of religious observance, attachment to tradition, and doctrinal devotion, may be traced to a period of Jewish history in Europe that began approximately two hundred years ago. After European Jewry went through the profound changes wrought by revolution, both political and industrial, and emerged as part of the mainstream of European society, some began to make moves to reform Judaism. To be sure, reform was not the only response to the changes; even more popular was assimilation, abandonment of Jewish life and what seemed to many "enlightened" Jews its parochial worldview.

Ashkenazim, who made up the bulk of European Jewry, passed through a period of political and intellectual ferment during which they entered into the main currents of the surrounding culture and into societies that had until then barely tolerated them. This process was given many names; among the most common for the political process was the term "emancipation" and, for the intellectual or ideological

change, "enlightenment" or *haskalah*.<sup>1</sup> At its outset, orthodoxy was a reaction against emancipation and enlightenment. Orthodox Jews were those who sought to preserve the traditional Jewish way of life.

What orthodoxy rejected was the idea that religious tradition and tribal ties had to be abandoned in order to fulfill the demands of emancipation and enlightenment. They saw increasing numbers of Jews forsake kashrut, the dietary laws, because it precluded fraternization and intermingling with those who did not keep those laws. Observing the Sabbath on Saturdays separated Jews from those who observed it on Sundays, and so many dropped this practice. Indigenous Jewish languages such as Hebrew and Yiddish hampered communication with the host cultures, and so more and more Jews spoke the local vernacular -- German, English, French, Polish, or Russian. Distinctive Jewish dress and grooming, a product of internal Jewish custom and externally enforced codes, made Jews stand out from the rest of society, so they cut their beards and earlocks, changed out of their characteristic clothes, and began to look like everyone else in the general culture around them. Even certain ideas had to be dropped, like the notions of a separate "chosen" people and its messianic redemption, for these emphasized the difference of Jews from others.<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, the process that led to emancipation and enlightenment did not occur all at once. The winds of change that began as light breezes in the eighteenth century and ended as tempests in the twentieth moved gradually and unevenly eastward across Europe, arriving relatively late in Poland and Russia, where the great bulk of Ashkenazi Jewry lived.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, these changes were met in different ways by different communities. The reactions may be grouped into three broad categories: *assimilation*, the process of deserting completely one's original identity and culture and adopting the culture of the larger society; *acculturation*, promoting cultured contact with the world outside the Jewish community but eschewing complete absorption; and *contra-acculturation*, turning away from the contemporary way of life altogether and preserving traditional ways.<sup>4</sup>

Those who chose assimilation ceased being Jews. Those who embraced acculturation sought to become hyphenate Jews (French Jews, German Jews, American Jews, British Jews, etc.), moving beyond exclusive attachment to the local Jewish community (for example, having non-Jewish friends or political concerns), sometimes getting a university education and pursuing a secular profession. They shared the values and some of the ethos of the non-Jewish world and aimed to participate in the host society without dissolving the Jewish one. Some acculturationists invented Zionism, a political ideology that merged Jewish nationalist aspirations with the modern secular notions of liberalism, socialism, and the nation-state. Not only could a Jew be like all other people, a citizen like all other citizens, yet remain a Jew; a Jewish state could be like all other states without losing its specific Jewish character. The basic premise of all these Jews was that cultural contact with the world beyond the Jewish one could be beneficial.

Generally, those who emerged as the most orthodox rejected the attractions of the host cultures. They chose not to change their dress, not to sever their tribal ties, and to accommodate themselves as little as possible to the world outside the Jewish one. And they were punctilious -- sometimes to the point of obsession -- about maintaining the integrity of ritual and Jewish law, halakhah. They were, in short, contra-acculturationist.

Others, those more moderately orthodox, sought to retard the movement outward by demonstrating the capacity of historic Judaism to harmonize its teachings with modern conditions. These orthodox Jews accepted the substance of their host cultures and tried inductively to create a synthesis of Judaism and contemporary civil society. They repudiated the contra-acculturation of stricter orthodoxy, avoiding the rejectionism and social insularity it fostered, wishing to be *of* as well as *in* the host culture rather than confined to a social and cultural ghetto. At the same time, they would not abandon the Jewish attachments embedded in orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup> They were very simply acculturationist.

For many years, however, "orthodox" was the term most often associated with the uncompromising

rejection of modern culture and Western life-styles. Overwhelmingly reactionary and negational in character, orthodoxy responded to the temptations of assimilation and acculturation in the same way that it did to much of non-Jewish culture: with profound contempt and "great stubbornness and resistance," a stance that became a badge of honor.<sup>6</sup> To many, including some who do not completely share their point of view, this sort of orthodoxy continues to "represent 'true Orthodoxy' in its purest form," and "all other forms are compromises and, therefore, less authentic."<sup>7</sup>

Those who chose contra-acculturation tended to look upon anyone who embraced or gave legitimacy to modern culture, which to them remained essentially anti-Jewish, as a potentially contaminating influence. They strived to separate themselves not only from every aspect of the outside culture but also from people or things that, having passed near or through that world, carried contaminating elements of it. This had ramifications in every aspect of life, instrumental and institutional, social and cultural -- not the least of which was the creation of dissension within the Jewish community between orthodox and nonorthodox Jews and even within orthodoxy itself as various groups argued over who was getting too close to the foreign ways of the Gentiles.

Yet foreign (modern) culture increasingly impinged upon even the most contra-acculturationist orthodox, and they found themselves increasingly dependent, economically and politically, upon the very world they were pledged ideologically to reject. This was particularly the case in Palestine, where the orthodox Jews of the old Yishuv (the pre-Zionist settlement) were increasingly dependent on the political and social power of the secular and socialist Zionists of the new Yishuv, those who would in time become the government of Israel.

Paradoxically, this situation fostered a constant concern (some would say an obsession) among the orthodox with maintaining an antagonistic stance vis-a-vis Jews different from themselves. Even as the orthodox became increasingly dependent upon those who had learned to navigate the rapids of mainstream culture, the most stringent among them had to prove to themselves and others that they were indeed different and still true to the traditions. Hence, in addition to the energy that they, like all people, had to invest in building a positive culture, these orthodox also had to devote additional energy to maintaining their separation from other cultures. Preserving a balance between ideological opposition and instrumental cooperation became a key concern of these stringently orthodox Jews.

To say that orthodoxy, even from its earliest days, was a movement that negated assimilation and reform and distrusted acculturation; and that it was more or less divided in two parts, those who were ideologically confirmed in their contra-acculturation and those who wished to engage in a kind of tempered or tentative acculturation, is not enough. It does not really convey fully the landscape that would be called "orthodox." There were other dividing lines, among them the divisions between hasidim and their Lithuanian opponents, the mitnagdim.

Both hasidim and Lithuanian-style yeshiva-oriented mitnagdim created separate communities that demanded the total allegiance of their followers. While hasidim looked upon their charismatic rebbes as *tzaddikim*, sources of ultimate authority, mediators with heaven, and spiritual wellheads, mitnagdim considered the yeshiva heads, their teachers and role models, as *their* ideals. In both cases, a new, voluntary, and somewhat separatist community, dedicated to a totalistic involvement in some form of Judaism and willing to subordinate itself to a rabbinic (and often charismatic) authority, evolved. This tradition of following the rabbinic leaders' dictates played an important part in the 1988 Knesset elections, when some of the lists of orthodox candidates were determined by councils of rabbinic sages who themselves remained outside the electoral process.

To be sure, hasidim were divided among themselves as to whose rebbe was superior, but the differences with the mitnagdim were even greater, for these people embodied a variance in worldview and ethos. While the mitnagdim remained attached to scholarship, the law, and the yeshiva head or *rav* who

best interpreted it, the early hasidim looked upon inflexible adherence to the letter of the law as an obstacle to true religiosity. For their part, the mitnagdim disdainfully looked upon hasidism as folk beliefs and practices carried on by the unschooled, a Judaism of often misplaced and wrong-headed piety. They further considered the hasidim to be perverters of Judaism who made their own emendations and deletions to a tradition that mitnagdim believed could be interpreted only by rabbinic authorities.<sup>8</sup>

Both groups shunned acculturation and viewed those who were not in their worlds as adversaries. While historians often focus on the differences between hasidim and mitnagdim -- differences that often erupted into bitter hostility -- both groups shared an even greater enemy than one another: the reforming acculturationists and apostate assimilationists. They might perceive differences between the acculturative, moderate orthodox and the more extreme reformers and assimilationists, but they did not regard these differences as significant. In some ways they saw moderate orthodoxy as a more insidious influence because it gave the false impression that there was a way to be true to both the contemporary and the traditional Jewish worlds -- something the contra-acculturative orthodox absolutely denied. Perhaps this is why these orthodox are sometimes called "ultra"-orthodox.

Pressed together by the circumstances of history, later hasidic rebbes and their followers began to act more like mitnagdim, emphasizing Torah study and yeshiva learning (especially to distinguish themselves from what they considered the boorishness and ignorance of nonorthodox Jewry). And in the process, mitnagdic yeshiva heads acquired some of the spirituality and charisma of hasidism.

For their part, the moderately orthodox found themselves torn between their interest in the non-Jewish world and their devotion to traditional orthodoxy. They valued the positive Jewish essence of the hasidim and the Lithuanian-type rabbis, venerating many of their leaders even as they dissented from their rejection of secular culture. This was as true of the modern orthodox in the Diaspora as it was of those who pursued religious Zionism in the land of Israel.

In political terms, this meant that alliances were made between erstwhile enemies. In the first Knesset elections, a coalition of many orthodox groups put up a single religious list (the "United Religious Front"). The coalition, however, proved fragile.

## Zionism and Judaism

*From The Jewish Political Tradition Volume 1 Authority (2000)*

### *Religious Significance of the State*

*Against the Rule of Priests*

#### 4. Theodore Herzl, "Theocracy"

*The Jewish State* (New York: American Zionist Emergency Council, 1946), pp. 146–47.

*In 1896, Herzl published his proposed solution to the "Jewish question," Der Judenstaat (best rendered as "The State of the Jews"), which soon became the manifesto of the Zionist movement. Herzl envisioned a secular aristocratic republic and anticipated later confrontations regarding the "Jewish" character of the state.*

Shall we end by having a theocracy? No, indeed. Faith unites us, knowledge gives us freedom. We shall therefore prevent any theocratic tendencies from coming to the fore on the part of our priesthood. We shall keep our priests within the confines of their temples in the same way as we shall keep our professional army within the confines of their barracks. Army and priesthood

shall receive honors high as their valuable functions deserve. But they must not interfere in the administration of the State which confers distinction upon them, else they will conjure up difficulties without and within.

Every man will be as free and undisturbed in his faith or his disbelief as he is in his nationality. And if it should occur that men of other creeds and different nationalities come to live amongst us, we should accord them honorable protection and equality before the law.

*The State of Israel as the Foundation of God's Throne*

5. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Kodesh*, The Morality of Holiness 136

*Orot ha-Kodesh*, edited by David Cohen (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1964; Hebrew), vol. 2, p. 191.

*Kook refers to the state of Israel by name decades before its creation. He adopts kabbalistic symbolism to construct his political theology, combining it with the Hegelian notion of the state as the supreme concretization of the Spirit.*

The state is not the supreme happiness of man. This [denial is true] of an ordinary state that amounts to no more than a large insurance company, where the myriad ideas that are the crown of human vitality remain hovering above, not touching it.

[But] this is not the case regarding a state that is ideal in its foundation, in whose being is engraved the . . . ideal content that is, truly, the greatest happiness of the individual. This state is truly supreme in the scale of happiness, and this state is our state, the state of Israel, the foundation of God's throne in the world.<sup>13</sup> Its entire aim is that "God be one and His name one" (Zech. 14:9). For this is, truly, the supreme happiness.

Of course, this sublime happiness is in need of extended elaboration so as to shine in [these] days of darkness. But it does not on that account fail to be the supreme happiness.

13. The ninth and tenth *sefirot* (divine emanations) are *yesod* (foundation) and *malkhut* (kingship).

*The Negative Significance of the State: Zionism Is Heresy*

6. Yerahmiel Domb, "Judaism and Zionism"

*Et Nisayon* (Jerusalem, 1972; Hebrew), pp. 4–5, 10–11.

*Domb's vehement attack on Zionism is an example of the ultraorthodox rejection of the Jewish return to statehood and involvement in this-worldly politics. Domb invokes the critiques of monarchy (see C<sub>3</sub>) that respond to the people's wish to have a king "like all the nations." He thus rejects the Zionist hope for normalcy and denies the legitimacy of the state of Israel.*

The heresy [*kefirah*]<sup>14</sup> of Zionism is greater than any that preceded it, [greater than that] of the various heretical sects that arose from time to time. The Sadducees denied the Rabbinic traditions from Mount Sinai but did not deny the entirety of our holy Torah. On the contrary, they were committed to their cause unto death. . . . The Karaites too did not deny the entirety of our holy Torah. So too all other heretical sects. . . . In no other time was there a sect in Israel that totally denied the holy Torah, whose heresy extended to its full scope and [reached down] to its roots, as does this Zionism standing before us. [Zionism] does not merely deny some part of our Torah, or some detail of our faith, but uproots everything. Furthermore, it is no longer a motivating force of some part of Israel but asserts its domination over all Israel, in all its locations, throughout the diaspora.

The total and deep heresy is that of Zionism in itself, which is more vile than any of the acts of the Zionists. The Zionists desecrate the holy Sabbath and transgress the entire Torah, but there are other sinners too who desecrate the holy Sabbath and commit transgressions. The conquest of the land, which derives specifically from Zionism—and in the course of which the Zionists committed severe transgressions— . . . is but the actualization and result of their will and ideas. . . . Zionism in itself, even before it succeeded in bringing about the establishment of the state and its attendant deeds, and before the Zionists became desecrators of the holy Sabbath and sinners, this Zionism that consists in nothing more than the aspiration that

14. The literal meaning of this Hebrew word is "denial"; the cognate verb *kafar* is translated as "deny" below.

Israel should have a state and a place of refuge in the Land of Israel— . . . this Zionist aspiration is founded on denial of all of the thirteen principles.<sup>15</sup> [It is] a general and fundamental heresy. Zionism in itself negates all faith in the holiness of Torah and in the holiness of Israel, in the coming of the Messiah and in the resurrection of the dead, in [divine] reward and punishment, and in all divine things granted us by God.

Zionism denies everything. [It denies] the entire idea of election, whereby God chose us from among all peoples, and the entire idea of exile on account of our sins, and of redemption by God through our righteous Messiah. Zionism—which means, that we should have a state, freedom, and independence—may appear to go against no explicit commandment . . . , and can even be made to seem attractive through various devious [arguments] and confusions, and through justifications appealing to particular circumstances. This Zionism is the [most] terrible heresy. The Zionist heresy [*minut*] . . . consists in a basic opposition to the entire system of faith, to all principles of our holy Torah on the theoretical [level], leading to desecration of the Torah in practice as well. . . .

It might be argued: What transgression is there in that Jews should live in the Land of Israel? What sin is it that they should relocate from the lands of the gentiles to our holy land? What evil is there in that there should be Jewish villages or cities [in the Land of Israel]; and that when the Arabs want to expel them it is necessary to establish a state in order to protect their lives? Thus argue those who observe certain of the practical *mitzvot*, who are at present known as religious (or “Torah”) Zionists. . . . They are drawn by the superficial and the convenient, [drawn] to follow their emotions and the popular trend, by the power of Satan embodied in that trend—by the deceptive reality of temporary success, by this-worldly allures and lusts. They adhere to all the ways that lead, directly or indirectly, to the ultimate and absolute evil that has in recent times come to have almost complete dominion.

15. The “thirteen principles of faith” were formulated and explicated by Maimonides in his commentary to the Mishnah (introduction to the tenth chapter of tractate Sanhedrin). They never gained universal endorsement, but come closest to an accepted formulation of Judaism’s articles of faith (see C15).

In truth, there is no halakhic issue of settling the Land of Israel at stake here, nor any [true] desire to observe any of the obligations that apply there . . . , nor anything with any trace of holiness . . . . What is at stake is the basic foundation of Judaism and the Torah in their entirety. . . . For this act of obtaining a settlement and a state in the Land of Israel implies our total destruction: it is no mere physical act. The great, basic question is: Are we—God forbid—a nation like all the nations of the world? Do we succeed and fail according to the same causes by which they succeed and fail? Are we in essence the same as the French, or English, or Russian nations, subject to the same order as they? [Will] the same faults that caused them failure and humiliation—such as military weakness, an enemy’s good plan, dispersal of [their own] forces—bring particular failures to us too? And [will] the same efforts and assets that brought advantage and success to the English or the French bring success and benefit to us as well? [Is it true that] progress and acquisition of knowledge in science and economics, which have improved the economic situation of other nations of the world, will bring us the self-same [improvement]? Will organizing a fighting force [of the sort] that has provided security to other nations of the world provide for us, too, security and strength in the land, national honor and respect in the world, retention of power and a secure future? Or are we something different from all other nations of the world, a chosen people whom God has elected from amongst all peoples, to be governed by manifest divine providence, under the divine order of the Torah’s commandments and warnings of reward and punishment, exile and redemption . . . ?

*Divine Sovereignty: A Jewish State Requires Torah Law*

7. Isaac Breuer, “Judaism and National Home”

*Concepts of Judaism*, edited by Jacob S. Levinger (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1974), pp. 89–92. The essay excerpted here was translated in 1946 by Jacob Bar-Or (Brener) for the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry.

*Breuer was trained as a lawyer, and his argument here on God’s sovereignty, and the state’s, reflects the European legal theory of his time. The following text, presented to*

## “The Status Quo” and David Ben Gurion

From the Jewish Agency for Israel to Agudat Yisrael 19th June, 1947

The Directorate of the Agency heard from the Chairman [David Ben Gurion] about your request for guarantees on the issues of marriage, the Sabbath, education and kashrut in the Jewish State when it is established.

As the Chairman told you, neither the Directorate of the Agency nor any other body in the country is authorized to predetermine the constitution of the Jewish State that is yet to be established. The creation of the State requires the permission of the UN, and this will not be forthcoming if we cannot promise freedom of conscience in a State of all its citizens, and if we are not clear that we have no intention of establishing a theocratic state.

In the Jewish State there will be non-Jewish citizens – Muslims and Christians, and it will clearly be crucial to ensure in advance full and equal rights to all citizens and a lack of coercion or discrimination on issues of religion or any other issue.

That being said, the directorate respects your demands... herein is the stand of the Agency in respect of your questions:

- a. Shabbat. Clearly the legal rest day of the Jewish State will be Saturday, while of course allowing Christians and those of other religions to rest on their weekly rest day.
- b. Kashrut. All necessary measure will be taken to ensure that every governmental kitchen serving Jews will have kosher food.
- c. Matrimony. All members of the Directorate appreciate the seriousness and size of the problem, and on behalf of all the bodies that the Directorate of the Agency represents, everything possible will be done to avoid the House of Israel being split in two.
- d. Education. Full autonomy will be granted to all streams of education... The State will, of course, establish an obligatory minimum studies, the Hebrew language, History, Science and so on, and will oversee the fulfillment of this minimum, but will give complete freedom to all streams to manage their education as they see fit, and will distance itself from harming religious conscience.

שדה-בוקר, 12.9.1963

אשכול יקר -

אין אני סבור שאהא זקוק לעצותי בעניני המסלה,  
ואין בדעתי כמובן לתת עצות, אבל השחוללות הקנאים עוברת כל גבול,  
ואני מרגיש שאני אחראי לכך במידה ידועה : -  
אני שתדתי בחורי ישיבה משרות צבאיים. אמנם עשיתי  
זאת כמספרים היה קטן, אבל הם הולכים ומהרבים. ובהתפרעותם הם מהווים  
סכנה לכבוד המדינה.

אין אנו יכולים להומיע בעולם כאלבמה או כדרום-  
צפריקה.

אני מציב שכל בחור ישיבה בגיל 18 ומעלה שיתמס  
בהתקלות בלתי חוקיות, בזריקת אבנים. ובהתפרעות נגד אזרחים זכאי מעשי-  
אלמה וברינות - נגזים מיד לבוא וישרת בכל צעיר בישראל - 30 חודש -  
לא במשרה דחית, אלא כחייל משוטט. בכלל יש אולי לבדוק כל שאלה  
בחורי ישיבה אם הם צריכים להינות משרות מחובת צבא, אבל אורעי חוק  
וודאי לא צריכים להינות מהמרוזולציה המוקפת זו.

בברכה שנה טובה,

ד. בן-גוריון

12.9.1963, Sde Boker

Dear Eshkol:

I am not of the opinion that you need my advice in government matters and it is not my intention to lend such advice - however the rioting by religious fanatics exceeds all limits and I feel that I bear the responsibility to some degree.

I exempted yeshiva students from doing military service. Indeed I did so when their numbers were small, but they have been steadily increasing and their lawlessness constitutes a danger to the state's honor.

We need not appear in the world as an Alabama or South Africa.

I propose that every yeshiva student of age 18 and over who is apprehended at an illegal gathering, throwing rocks, attacking citizens or other acts of violence and hooliganism, should be recruited immediately into the IDF to serve like any other young Israeli, for the term of thirty months, not in the Ministry of Religions, but as a plain soldier.

Generally, the entire question of yeshiva students should be examined and whether they should be exempt from military obligation; certainly law-breakers should not enjoy this dubious privilege.

With New Year's greetings,

D. Ben Gurion

## Israelis and Religion

Professor Michael Rosenak, from *The Land of Israel: Its contemporary meaning* (1992)

We suggest that there are six recognizable types of Jews who have a Jewish identity base that enables them to articulate Jewishness and to look for diverse meanings in the land of Israel today. All must relate to the three issues briefly discussed above, but they relate differently. As “pure types” we shall refer to them as ultratraditional, halakhic neotraditional, cultural, ideational, secular-national, and existential modes of Jewish identity and identification.

The ultratraditionalist lives in communities in which it is affirmed that nothing in the sacred system of Judaism should change or has changed. The defection of the majority from the truth testifies not to problems of the Jewish tradition vis-à-vis the world but to the sinfulness of Jews who have succumbed to “the world” (i.e., gentile culture). For this group, the meaning of the land is ostensibly what it has always been; thus Zionism and the meanings it

suggests are rank heresy, false messianism, perhaps even a cosmic catastrophe impeding the awaited Redemption. The issues of identity—tradition, the nations, inter-Jewish understanding—are concoctions of infidels. The tradition, in its pristine authority and clarity, determines how Jews should relate and who they are. In a sense, the ideological task is to hold the fort against the pseudo-meanings of the Zionist heretics and their admitted or disguised cohorts—all other modern Jews.

The halakhic neotraditional Jew is a modern person, who knows that participation in modern life requires encounter and negotiation with its cultural goods and even with its spiritual life. In the cognitive negotiation with modern culture these Jews have given up isolation in return for the right to maintain “Judaism in its essence,” which they define in halakhic terms of observance and adherence to those doctrines which make such observance feasible. They see the meaning of Eretz Yisrael, generally speaking, through a religious-Zionist perspective: they hope it will be a “Torah state” that will justify itself as the consummation of the traditional messianic hope to which they subscribe, though often with (unarticulated) reservations. Pluralism, which is acceptable and desirable in the diaspora, is problematic in Israel, for it militates against the meaning of Israel, yet the neotraditionalist is grudgingly committed to it in Israel too, though hard-pressed to find legitimation for it in the sources. The diaspora neotraditionalist, unlike most other Jews, feels ill at ease for having decided not to live in Israel, “the beginning of our redemption,” and, in principle, contemplates aliyah. Yet the paradoxes in his situation, especially his relationship to nontraditional Jews in a Jewish state (his relationship to gentile society is far less complex), often lead him or her in the opposite direction. In a sense, for this person, *because* of the abundance of Jewish meaning in Eretz Yisrael, “it is easier to be a Jew in *chutz l’aretz*.”

The third group believes, with Ahad Ha-am and his disciples, that Judaism is a national culture, possessed of a special moral and even “prophetic” character that is not inherently bound to religion and, for moderns, certainly need not be. They see in Eretz Yisrael the locale in which the real meaning of Judaism for contemporary Jews can be fully realized and in a contemporary idiom. Their motto is “Only in Israel.” Only in Israel is Hebrew the national language, the Bible a core subject in the school curriculum, the cal-

endar and festivals Jewish, the streets named for *our* great personalities and memories. Eretz Yisrael is not only the only habitat of Judaism, as interpreted by cultural Zionism, it is also the only place in which it can outgrow the authoritarian religious mode that preserved it in *Galut*. The cultural Jew may not live in Israel, but for his or her Judaism, Israel is home, to which he constantly returns and where his or her children, through courses and tours, will “catch” their Judaism. Climbing Massada, studying at an Israeli university, the Shabbat atmosphere of Jerusalem—these are the staples of contemporary Judaism and its pedagogy.

The ideational Jew is, as his or her name suggests, one for whom Judaism is primarily a worldview, a set of ideas, which has been translated by the Jewish people throughout its history into values and norms. Eretz Yisrael was, in the ancient past, and may be again today, the laboratory for the ideas of Judaism in action, a “light unto the nations,” demonstrating benign nationalism, building new social forms that reflect the idea of mankind in God’s image and the moral demands made on society by moral monotheism. The ideational Jew points with pride at the kibbutz, seeks evidence that the Israeli army is different from others, was happy about Israeli assistance to underdeveloped African states. He is also easily disillusioned. As an Israeli, he or she is likely to be in the ranks of social and political activists on the left of the political spectrum, yet in the diaspora ideational Jews may demand of Israel what they demand or expect from no other society, their own included. In such a case, the meaning of Israel may become negative, expressed with a “God-that-failed” enmity.

The secular-national Jews seek in Eretz Yisrael the same meaning that members of other nations find in their homelands. For all their land is the natural landscape in which people bound by history, a common language and culture, and mutual problems and challenges live, express themselves and solve their problems, even as they meet the challenges inherent in social and individual life. The traditional religious meaning of Eretz Yisrael is of historic interest, as is the religious past of all civilized groups, but at present, the persistence of religious-theological forces in Jewish-Israeli society is a vexing problem that threatens the proper development of modern Jewish national life. Metaphysical meanings, whether of the ultra-Orthodox, neotraditional, or culture species, are pretentious illusions. Normal, certainly liberal, nations do not expect

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their lands to “mean” anything: they are environments, often endearing or even beloved, but neither sacred nor intrinsically significant. The secular-national Jew lives “naturally” in Israel, though diaspora Jews who have adopted the consensual polity model of Jewish life are close relations.

Finally, there are the “existential” Jews, individuals whose basic relationship to Jewishness is that, on grounds of authenticity, *they will never deny it*. No anti-Semite will frighten them out of Jewish self-affirmation, though they are little interested in Jewish modes, national or religious, that provide others with avenues of Jewish identification. Their Jewishness is evident whenever they are asked, by Jew-hating thugs or by nine Jews seeking a tenth for a minyan, whether they are Jewish; their answer is yes. They refuse to be burdened with metaphysical or ideational assumptions or religious-national obligations. Jewish is what they were born, are, accept. Eretz Yisrael has no special meaning for them, except through *Medinat Yisrael*. For now and here, Israel means that they can say yes to their Jewishness simply by being Israelis, leaving them free to proceed to the exploration and cultivation of their own lives, in accordance with their own dispositions and desires. As Israelis, they have, once and for all, affirmed their Jewishness, and they need discuss it no further.

## A different approach

*Jeri Langer, from The Jew in the Modern World (1995)*

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JERI LANGER

### 20. From Prague to Belz<sup>1</sup>

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It is an impassable road to the empire of the Chassidim.<sup>2</sup> The traveller who pushes his way through the thick undergrowth of virgin forests, inexperienced and inadequately armed, is not more daring than the man who resolves to penetrate the world of the Chassidim, mean in appearance, even repellent in its eccentricity.

Only a few children of the West have accomplished this journey, hardly as many—when I come to think of it—as there are fingers on the hand that writes these lines.

One summer's day in 1913, a nineteen-year-old youth, brought up like all the youth of his time in the dying traditions of the

pre-war generation, left Prague inspired by a secret longing which even now after the passage of so many years he still cannot explain to himself, and set out for the east, for strange countries.

Had he a foreboding of what he was losing on that day?

European civilization with its comforts and achievements, its living successes called careers? Had he a foreboding that his soul would no longer be capable of feeling poetry which up to that time he had been so fond of quoting, that, from the first moment when he heard the rhythms of the Chassidic songs, all the magic charms of music would be

Source: Jeri Langer, *Nine Gates to the Chassidic Mysteries*, trans. Stephen Jolly (New York: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1961), pp. 3-5, 12ff., 18. Copyright © 1961 by James Clarke & Co. Ltd. and Stephen Bagster Jolly, trans. Reprinted by permission of James Clarke & Co. Ltd.

swamped once and for all, and all beautiful things which his eye had ever conceived would in the future be half hidden by the mystic veil of the knowledge of good and evil?

He hardly suspected that, at the very moment when he believed he had reached his goal, the most impassable part of his journey was only beginning. For the gate to the empire of the Chassidim never opens suddenly for anyone. It is closed by a long chain of physical and spiritual suffering. But he who has once looked inside will never forget the riches he has seen.

The rulers of this empire are hidden from the eyes of the world. Their miraculous deeds and all-powerful words are only, as it were, of secondary importance—they are merely the hem of the veil in which their being is wrapped, while their faces are turned away from us towards the distant calm of the Absolute. Only a faint reflection of their souls falls on our too material shadows. Yet, even today, years afterwards, these shapes haunt me one after the other. Not only those I knew personally but also those I have heard so much about and read about in the old Hebrew books; they rise again before me in all their greatness and strength. I feel overcome. Something compels me to take up my pen and faithfully write down everything as best I can.

It is a Friday afternoon. The small town of Belz, the Jewish Rome, is preparing to welcome the Sabbath.

Small towns in eastern Galicia have all had the same character for centuries. Misery and dirt are their characteristic outward signs. Poorly clad Ukrainian peasant men and women, Jews wearing side-whiskers, in torn caftans, rows of cattle and horses, geese and large pigs grazing undisturbed on the square. Belz is distinguished from other places only by its famous synagogue, its no less famous House of Study and the large house belonging to the town rabbi. These three buildings enclose the square on three sides. They are simply constructed. But in this poor, out-of-the-way region of the world they are truly

memorable. Belz has somewhat more than three thousand inhabitants, half of whom are Jews.

It is a long summer afternoon. There are still six or seven hours before dusk, when the Sabbath begins and even the lightest work is strictly forbidden. In spite of this, the shops are already shut, the tailors are putting away their needles, and the casual labourers—wearing side-whiskers like the rest—their hoes and spades. The housewives in the cottages are adding the last touches to their preparations for the festival.

The men hasten to the baths. After a steam bath we dive—always several of us at the same time—into a small muddy swimming-pool, a *mikve*, or special ritual bath. As though in mockery of all the rules of hygiene, a hundred bodies are “purged” from the spirit of the working day. The water, like all the water in Belz, smells of sulphur and petroleum. . . .

Although everybody is in a tearing hurry on this day, the whole community already knows that a *bocher*, or young lad, has come to Belz all the way from Prague. A hundred questions are fired at me from every side. I am embarrassed because I do not understand a single word. I have never heard “Yiddish” spoken before, that bizarre mixture of mediaeval German and Hebrew, Polish and Russian. It was only later that I gradually began to learn it. . . .

From the window of the [House of Study’s] entrance hall to the saint’s apartment one can see far out across the Ukrainian steppe. For miles round there is nothing but a flat plain, without a single tree or hill to be seen. It is a fen with a narrow path made of boards running across it. In the distance a small bridge leads into a barren little field; then the path leads on across the bog into the unknown. When I am weary of the House of Study, I cross this bridge and lie down in the little field. This is the only bit of nature where one can find spiritual refreshment in all this wilderness!

I can endure it no longer. This life of isolation from the rest of the world is intolerable. I

feel disgusted with this puritanism, this ignorance, this backwardness and dirt. I escape, I travel back to my parents in Prague. But not for long. I must perforce return to my Chassidim.

[In Prague] one night I cannot sleep. I am lying down, facing the kitchen door, which looks towards the East. I have left the door ajar. I have just been reading some holy Hebrew book in the kitchen. The kitchen windows are open, open towards the East, the East where Belz lies at the end of a train journey of a few hours more than a day and a night. . . . It is useless for me to close my eyes to induce sleep. Suddenly I am dazzled by a bright light penetrating into my dark bedroom through the half-open door. What is it?—I know that I have put out the lamp, and there is no one in the kitchen. I stare at the light, and in the middle of it a few steps in front of me, I can see quite clearly through the half-open door—*the saint of Belz!* He is sitting in his room at Belz looking fixedly at me. On his expressive countenance shines that barely recognizable, sublime smile of his, full of wisdom. I have no idea how long the apparition lasts, but it is long enough to shake me.

So I travel to Belz a second time, this time firmly resolved. I am no longer alone as on my first pilgrimage. This time I have a companion, a Prague lad like myself, who has also decided for Chassidism.

My vision of the saint of Belz that night was

a great favour. So the Chassidim said when I told them about it. To behold a living saint from far away and, moreover, while still awake, is not indeed an absolutely isolated phenomenon among the Chassidim, but it is a greater expression of God's favour than, for instance, a conversation with someone who is dead or with the prophet Elijah. . . .

I am still a foreigner. People are very polite and full of respect when they talk to me, but they are mistrustful. The mere fulfillment of religious injunctions, however precise and conscientious, is as little adequate to inspire confidence here as is the utmost zeal over one's study. Excessive religiosity is not welcomed. But now that my beard and side-whiskers are well grown, now that I am able to speak some Yiddish and have begun wearing a long *shipits* [an overcoat similar to a caftan] instead of a short coat, and ever since I have started wearing a black velvet hat on weekdays, as all the other Chassidim do, this ice-wall of mistrust has gradually begun to thaw. But why even now am I not completely like the others? For example, why am I not gay, all the time, as a true Chassid ought to be? . . .

At last, when my face is pallid from undernourishment and illness, and my emaciated body has acquired a stoop, it is clear to nearly all of them that "I am really in earnest." No longer will the gates of Chassidism be closed in front of the youth from Prague.

# Statistics and Policy

## Demography

Counting the Haredi population is complicated since it is difficult to clearly define who one is counting. The Central Bureau of Statistics gave competing evaluations that vary somewhere in between 750,000 to 900,000.

Due to the very high Haredi fertility rate (around eight children per woman), the younger the age cohort of Israel's overall population, the larger is the share of Haredim in it. The more young Haredim join the birth-giving cycle at a higher rate, the more influence they have on the Jewish birth rate at large. More than one-fourth (28.5 percent) of Jewish newborns in 2006 were of Haredi families.

After many years of increase, the Haredi fertility rate has been falling off in recent years (2002-2006). In two all-Haredi towns, Upper Betar and Upper Modi'in, the fertility rate fell from 8.9 in 2001 to 7.7 in 2006 and from 9.0 to 8.0, respectively (Ha'aretz, Jan. 14, 2008).

Even though these trends will slow the growth rate of the Haredi population, they will not change the upward trend in the share of Haredim in the Jewish and Israeli population in the years to come.

In new research, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics is predicting that the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community will make up nearly a third of the country's population within 50 years.

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## Education

[From Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel]

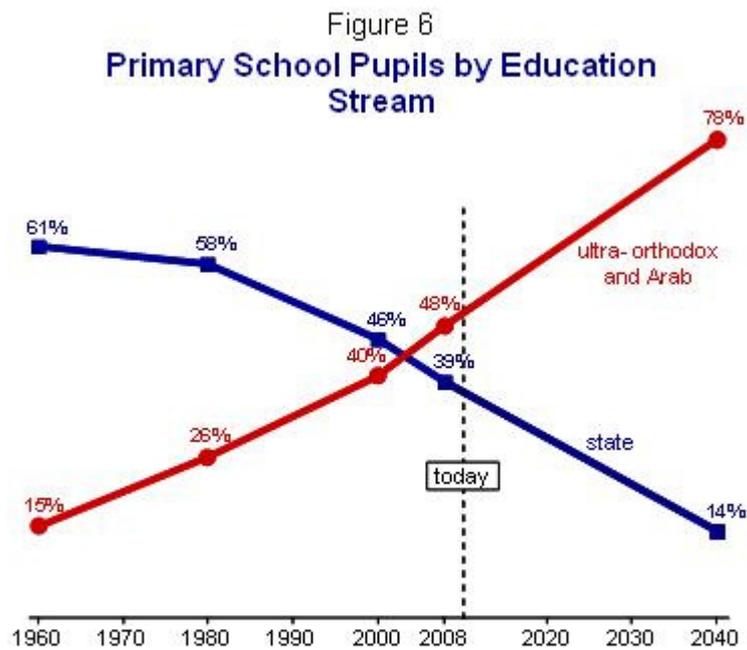
*In 30 years, 78% of Israel's primary school students will be Haredior Arabs, and only 14% will be in the non-religious State school system – if the trends of the past decade continue.*

In 1960, 15 percent of all primary school pupils were enrolled in either the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) or in the Israeli Arab school systems, while 61 percent were in the non-religious State school system (Figure 6). Two decades later, by 1980, the share of ultra-Orthodox and Israeli Arab pupils rose to 26 percent...

According to Nachum Blass from the Taub Center, during the first decade of the 2000s there was a decline of three percent in the number of pupils in the State school system, an eight percent increase in the State-Religious school system, a rise of 33 percent in the Israeli Arab school system, and 51 percent more pupils in the ultra-Orthodox school system.

As a result of changes over the past few decades, nearly half (48 percent) of primary school pupils in 2008 were ultra-Orthodox or Israeli Arabs.

If the changes of the past decade continue, then in 30 years, in 2040, the share of ultra-Orthodox and Israeli Arab pupils will be 78 percent of all pupils in Israel's primary schools, whereas the share of pupils in the State school system will fall to only 14 percent.



**Source:** Dan Ben-David, Taub Center and Tel-Aviv University.  
Data: Israel's CBS.

There are two main reasons why it is reasonable to assume that this situation will not materialize. If, as adults, these children will adopt their parent's current employment behavior, it will be difficult for the State of Israel to survive. Conversely, if as adults, they adopt employment rates close to Western norms, it is likely that future birth rates will also be different than today's.

## Army

The Tal Law passed a Knesset vote in July 2002 and cemented the army service exemption for yeshiva students.

According to the law, a yeshiva student could decide at the age of 22 whether to continue to study or enlist in the IDF for a reduced service. It was extended five years later by another five years. Five motions against it were filed with the High Court of Justice claiming it violates the principle of equality.

On Wednesday February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012, the Supreme Court cancelled the Tal Law, naming it unconstitutional.

President of the Supreme Court Dorit Beinisch:

"Can one say that with the passage of nine years the enlistment of 898 Haredim and the joining of another 1,122 for a short, undefined national service out of a group of 61,877 constitute fulfillment of the law's objectives?"

"The enlistment of only 530 Haredim to designated courses, nine years after the law's legislation indicates an implementation failure," she said. "The fact that there is a rise in the number of recruits is indeed positive but is not enough. Nine years after legislation one would have expected a more substantial number of recruits. The low rate of enlistees, coupled with the relative ease with which enlistment procedures are changed, illustrate a fundamental difficulty in the law itself."

Judge Elyakim Rubinstein quoted Moses from the Bible: "Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?" Numbers 32:6

1948 – 400 Haredi students received exemptions. Since then Israel's population has grown 1,200% while the number of exemptions has grown by 15,000%

2005 – 55,000 Haredim exempt from Army Service.

2009 – 57,800

2010 – 62,500

## Work

Among Haredi families where both parents work, just one family in 29 (3.4%) lives below the poverty line. Among families with one working parent, the number rises sharply to one in four (23%). Where neither parent works, two out of every three families (67%) are poor.

Employment among Haredi men rose from 33% in 2002 to 42% in 2010, and is expected to continue rising. Among women, too, employment rose from 48% to 55% in the same period.

[from Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel:]

The employment situation among Haredi men is considerably different than for the other population groups. Not only are their rates of employment very low, the Kimhi study shows those who work do so for considerably fewer hours per week than the other groups, seven percent less than Arab Israelis and 14 percent below non-Haredi Jews in 1998. In addition, the drop in Haredi hours of work per week, of five hours – a 12 percent fall – was sharpest among all groups. As a result, even among those relatively few Haredi men who are employed, they worked fewer hours a week in the past than the other groups, and they reduced their weekly work load by far more over the past decade.

Hence, not only has there been a widening gap in employment rates between Haredim and other men, this relative deterioration in employment is also evident in a large and increasing gap in hours worked. As a result of the diverging work norms among Haredim and others, it is not surprising that an increasing share of Haredi families are falling below the poverty line.

Image by Yoram Amir



# Israel 5772

## Risking One's Life on the Bus

*By Anat Tzruya*

Reprinted from "Eretz Acheret"

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While doing research for a new movie, Anat Tzruya learned the intimate details of a lynch that took place on a "mehadrin" (super-kosher, with separate seating for men and women) bus in Beit Shemesh against a young 18-year-old religious woman, Oriyah Ferdheim, whose heinous sin was sitting in the men's section of the bus. To this day, the perpetrators of the assault have not been brought to justice.

Ironically, it was supposed to have been a festive day for Oriya Ferdheim. It was her first day in the National Service. When she alighted the bus in her neighborhood in the town of Beit Shemesh, en route to Yahud, and sat down in one of the chairs, a chair astoundingly similar to the dozens of others surrounding it, she had no conception of what was about to happen.

She was sleepy and turned on her mp3 so that she wouldn't fall asleep and miss her bus. Oriyah was lost in her dreams with her music on when she was jolted by the first kick. The kick was a direct hit to her leg, and when she looked up to see the source of the pain, she saw her assailants facing her: four ultra-Orthodox men, and a woman who over time would come to be known as the "rebbetzin," and they screamed "shikseh" at her and tried to tear her from her seat, all the while spitting on her, kicking her, and pelting her with all manner of objects.

Nothing had prepared Oriyah for this attack. No detail in what had begun as a routine trip on an Egged bus in the heart of Israel foreshadowed the storm of rage and violence in which she would be caught. There were just five zealots, but they turned the routine trip of the passengers on Bus 497 from Beit Shemesh into a scene taken from some kind of zany action film, if one takes into account the ultra-Orthodox look of most of the bus's passengers. In the unbelievable end of the episode, five police cars and undercover police came to extricate the 18-year-old Oriyah and the soldier who tried to rescue her from the maddening crowd, i.e. from the majority of the bus passengers and from the residents of the Ramat Beit Shemesh suburb who came to their succor.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. At the beginning of the assault, the power relations were clear. Oriyah was one against five, and her five assailants screamed to the other passengers to help them drag her to the back of the bus. The entire time, the bus driver, an ultra-Orthodox man, did not heed Oriyah's cries and pleas for help. He ignored the violence and the jeered insults of "shikseh," "lewd," and "trespasser," and continued driving. At this stage of the tumult, Oriyah, who is from a religious home, succeeded in drawing the necessary conclusion. She understood why this was happening to her, what iniquity she had committed, of what sin she was guilty. She figured out that they were trying to harm her because she had mistakenly gotten onto a "mehadrin" bus, and situated herself in a

forbidden place, in the men's section. On a "mehadrin" bus, women sit in the back, and she, Oriyah, unaware of the matter, had violated the "halakha" forbidding a woman from sitting at the front of the bus. Most grave of all, she refused to move to the women's realm, and for this she was severely punished, and would continue to be punished, no holds barred, without limit, as if she had landed in another country.

## The Israeli Rosa Parks

I first met Oriyah, the Israeli Rosa Parks (Parks, an activist in the American Civil Rights Movement, was arrested in 1955 for sitting in a seat designated for "whites only" on a bus in Montgomery, the capital of Alabama; in response, a young preacher, Martin Luther King, boycotted the city bus company, and began his struggle for the achievement of equal rights for African Americans), in a café in Beit Shemesh, months after she was attacked. I had sought her out for a long time, and the meeting itself was made possible thanks to the detective work of Sigal Lansberg, the researcher and director of the new film I was working on, in which I examined the components of oppression that the religious / ultra-Orthodox modesty revolution imposes on religious women.

The lynching of Oriyah was carried out because she is a woman who refused to surrender to the ultra-Orthodox dictates of "modesty." The fact that an ultra-Orthodox crowd did not hesitate to so severely punish the anonymous young woman who publicly violated the rules of modesty aroused my curiosity regarding the nature of the event and her personality. What prompted the lynch? What does it symbolize? Could it be that the event, that left no impression on the Israeli public agenda, is also tied to the identity of its hero?

The process of locating Oriyah dragged on for a long time since the young woman was mistakenly described in the media as "an ultra-Orthodox woman" and because she refused to be exposed publicly. Almost a year passed and Oriyah still suffered from nightmares. She was afraid that the zealots of Beit Shemesh would locate her home and attack her again. Oriyah came to the first meeting accompanied by her mother. The two women, who appeared from their dress to belong to the right-wing-religious-Zionist stream, were amazingly different from one another. The mother, a gentle soul who had been through a complex divorce and "become more religious," herself had a difficult time understanding Oriyah's deed. She challenged Oriyah, trying to understand how it transpired that her intelligent and reasonable daughter had endangered herself in an impulsive manner, and for no ostensible reason. It was not clear to the mother for what value Oriyah had sacrificed herself, since the mother's worldview coincided with what is expected of a woman from Beit Shemesh. She herself identified with the position of those rabbis who stated that in the name of modesty, and because of the purity of the Jewish camp, women should be separated and excluded from the public space.

In Oriyah's biography there was therefore nothing that easily explained her behavior. She grew up in a religious home in Beit Shemesh and attended "Horev," a nearly ultra-Orthodox (Torani) girls' school in Jerusalem, known for its strict and oppressive approach. In her choice to leave the prestigious institution rather than remain there for high school, Oriyah exhibited a spark of natural rebellion. However, at the time our hero evinced no special feminist

awareness, certainly not an awareness that could explain her uncompromising act of resistance that morning on the 497 bus line.

I tried to understand what went through the head of this girl who endangered her life. "It was dangerous, but they attacked me for no reason and humiliated me without restraint; I simply knew that I would never get up and give in to them," she said, without interpreting it during her reconstitution of the trauma. I asked Oriyah to describe in detail the abuse to which she was subject on that trip through the streets of Beit Shemesh. To a great extent, the young woman, like the incident, remain a mystery.

I continued meeting with Oriyah, trying to elicit from her a fuller chronology. Only after a few meetings did the description of the lynch attempt begin to come together: her bag, her glasses and additional items were grabbed from her, she was rained on by a slew of objects, and many of the bus's passengers joined the quintet of attackers. The shouts and screams, the spitting and the curses continued to escalate. Oriyah succeeded in calling the police a moment before her phone was also snatched. One police car arrived and stopped the bus. The police naively stopped the bus on the main road of Beit Shemesh, between two large yeshivas, a misstep that cost them dearly. A policeman got onto the bus and tried to calm the crowd. At that point, the five zealots escaped the bus. The blasé policeman, convinced that the attack was behind him, let Oriyah stay on the bus in the eye of the storm, on a chair that had become a symbol. He made it clear to the inflamed and incensed passengers that it was Oriyah's right to sit wherever she wanted, but a moment before getting off the bus, he cast her a worried glance and suggested that "she vacate her seat just for this ride, just this once!" Oriyah did not move.

Did she understand where she was headed? It's hard to say. A moment after the policeman got off the bus, the struggle resumed. And this time, residents of the entire ultra-Orthodox street ganged up against Oriyah. As if in a planned performance, dozens of ultra-Orthodox began streaming into the bus, whose doors had been opened by the ultra-Orthodox Egged driver. The five zealous assailants had apparently spread the word that Oriyah was supposedly desecrating Heaven, and the masses that penetrated the bus tried to rip her off her seat. A young soldier, also from Beit Shemesh, tried to act as a human barrier to protect Oriyah from the mad and violent crowd, in the stifling bus suddenly jammed with over one hundred people. Outside, hundreds of rioters gathered across from the bus and the police car. The policeman, who had been on his way to leave the site, called up numerous troops. The goal was clear: to extricate Oriyah and the soldier who was protecting her with his body.

The policemen who arrived on scene had a hard time controlling the masses, and at one stage, were even forced to shoot into the air. Ultimately, thanks to the temporary shock from the shooting, Oriyah and the soldier were evacuated and transferred to a safe spot in one of the police cars.

"I sat in the police car and I felt like a monkey in the zoo," Oriyah recalls. "The surrounding raging ultra-Orthodox men photographed me from every direction, as if I was a criminal whose memory must be forever publicly disgraced. I remained strong, but when I arrived at the police [station] and called my mother, the tears burst forth and I couldn't speak."

## The Calm after the Storm

In all of my years working in film, I have never encountered such a case of violence, and therefore, I had a hard time believing that the responses to the event were so pathetic: the media made do with superficial coverage of the case, the politicians weren't concerned at all, the public did not protest, and the police left the assailants alone. While a description of the attack on Oriyah was published, along with inaccuracies, the various heroes of the story were not exposed.

No full testimony was taken from Oriyah Ferdheim; the testimony of the soldier who protected her with his body was not released to the public; no analysis of the lynch attempt was carried out, and its characteristics and implications for Israeli society were not investigated. The lynch attempt became just another incident in the wave of violent incidents associated with ultra-Orthodox extremists. It was as if the attack in Beit Shemesh melted into Israeli reality as a headline and brief news item, but not much more than that. The event took place in 2006 – today Oriyah is a law student. She has experienced a few more incidents of harassment in her travels on "mehadrin" buses, but none of them has come close to that of 2006. Oriyah's story was not documented, and her assailants were released; not long ago, she saw one of them roaming freely around Beit Shemesh.

What prevented the media from asking, documenting and investigating? Did the fact Oriyah was marked as ultra-Orthodox give the impression that the story was an internal ultra-Orthodox matter? Why are the police refraining from opening an investigation? And if the lynch attempt had occurred in a Druze village, would the assailants also not have been found?

Oriyah told me that at the Beit Shemesh police station, she was told that the assailants would never be located. She was exhausted but she spoke up. After all, she remembers their faces. Why, then, shouldn't they be punished? It was hinted to her that this is Israeli reality. That's the way things go. Even though I viewed Oriyah Ferdheim as an anonymous ultra-Orthodox hero, I ultimately chose not to include her testimony and additional testimonies of violence that take place in "mehadrin" busses precisely because she is not part of ultra-Orthodox society. In the movie "Shikseh," I chose to tell the story of violence perpetrated, uninhibited, within the ultra-Orthodox world and directed at "their" women; since there, behind the towering walls, the most extreme violence takes place, but, after all, it's an internal matter. In the multi-cultural Israeli atmosphere, who really cares about ultra-Orthodox women? Let the tribe take care of them in its own way, and based on the leadership of some Torah great, "without the High Court of Justice, and without B'Tselem."

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*Anat Tzuryah's movie, "Shikseh," will be released in the coming months.*

## A Civil War No One Wants

by Dr. Erica Brown JointMedia News Service

reprinted from EJewishPhilanthropy

“Sinning in the land of Israel is worse than sinning anywhere else... it is like a rebellion in the king’s own palace.”

*Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg*

I saw the recent photos of ultra-Orthodox Jews sending their children to a demonstration wearing yellow stars. We all saw those photos. I opened *The New York Times* with a silent prayer: “God, please don’t let one of those photos appear in these pages.”

But my prayer was not answered. What could be a greater sacrilege than those photos? Could my grandparents, Auschwitz survivors, ever, ever imagine that Jews would put these stars on themselves in their own country? Never.

The Haredi, ultra-Orthodox, population claims that it is “a target of persecution” in the Israeli town of Beit Shemesh, and that it is a victim of discrimination. The secularists and national-religious claim that they are targets of ultra-Orthodox hatred and disrespect. No one is backing down, and the rhetoric is becoming harsher. Prime Minister Netanyahu even suggested creating two separate cities for different types of Jews, our own self-made apartheid.

What is happening to us? At the end of the day, this does not hurt the secular, the religious, or the ultra-religious. It hurts Judaism, because anyone opening up a newspaper across the globe and seeing what is happening makes no fine distinctions. We are all just Jews, just Jews engaged in baseless hatred and misunderstanding. We’re hurting Judaism.

Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (1215-1293) was one of the great medieval community leaders and scholars in Germany. He had a fascinating life and told the story of his people’s suffering through responsa literature, legal questions he received and answered. Rabbi Meir, in protest to laws instituted by King Rudolph I that imperiled Jewish political freedoms, left Germany with his family and followers. He was imprisoned in what is France today and held for ransom. He begged his community not to pay that ransom, fearing that it would lead to future kidnappings. As a result, he died in prison seven years later. Fourteen years after his death, his body was ransomed, and a wealthy Jew who is now buried beside him bought his body back for a Jewish burial.

Rabbi Meir was never in the land of Israel, but he knew suffering intimately. He gave his life – literally – on behalf of the Jewish people. And although he had never visited Israel, he believed that on Israel’s holy soil, every transgression gets magnified. The king’s palace is a reference to God, of course. We are on holy soil without realizing that holy soil must be nurtured more carefully. A sin there somehow is amplified beyond what it would be elsewhere. We know that’s true in the media attention that Israel receives. We’re under the microscope. If you hold yourself up to a high standard, people will be watching.

And what are they seeing now? They are seeing the long-term bruises of a dysfunctional system that allowed a segment of the population to benefit from the taxes, welfare and army service of others while not having to make an identifiable contribution beyond narrow sectarian, internal interests. Is it a wonder that we have what looks like a civil war that we cannot afford? Does anyone need to fight Israel from the outside when this is what we are doing to ourselves on the inside? It is internal combustion of the highest order, and without ringing alarms we are unquestionably going to implode – unless the government takes drastic measures soon.

We need to pray, and get a hold of this madness before we are engulfed by it. Our very heart is being split in two. How can we allow it?

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*Dr. Erica Brown is scholar-in-residence for the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington and consults for the Jewish Agency and other Jewish organizations. She is the author of *In the Narrow Places* (OU Press/Maggid); *Inspired Jewish Leadership*, a National Jewish Book Award finalist; *Spiritual Boredom*; and *Confronting Scandal*.*

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## Statement from Agudath Israel of America

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Reports of recent events in the Israeli town of Beit Shemesh are deeply disturbing.

Violence of any sort, whether physical or verbal, by self-appointed “guardians” of modesty is reprehensible. Such conduct is beyond the bounds of decent, moral – Jewish! – behavior. We condemn these acts unconditionally.

Those who have taken pains to note that the small group of misguided individuals who have engaged in this conduct are not representative of the larger charedi community are to be commended. It is disturbing, though, that some Israeli politicians and secularists have been less responsible, portraying the actions of a very few as indicative of the feelings of the many. Quite the contrary, the extremist element is odious to, and rejected by, the vast majority of charedi Jews.

Lost in all the animus and ill will, unfortunately, is the concept ostensibly at the core of the controversy: the exalted nature of tzenius, or Jewish modesty.

Judaism considers human desires to constitute a sublime and important force, but one whose potential for harm is commensurate with its potential for holiness.

In a society like our own, where the mantra of many is, in effect, “anything goes,” many charedi Jews, men and women alike, see a need to take special steps – in their own lives and without seeking to coerce others – to counterbalance the pervasive atmosphere of licentiousness, so as to avoid the degradation of humanity to which it leads.

It would be tragic were the acts of violence to lead Jews to, G-d forbid, reject the culture of tzenius that has always been the hallmark of the Jewish nation, to regard Jewish modesty as something connected to violence and anger, rather than to refinement and holiness.

## Gender Trouble

*By Yehudah Mirsky*

*Reprinted from Jewish Ideas Daily*

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Suddenly, it seems, gender segregation is everywhere in Israel—buses, army bases, Jerusalem sidewalks, Beit Shemesh schoolyards and, above all, the front pages. What is going on here? Why is all this happening now?

Let's begin with the second question. "This"—that is, efforts by some sectors of Israeli Orthodoxy to set terms for the public presence of women that are very different from those of the secular majority—has been underway for years. Indeed, the better question is, what has taken mainstream Israel (if there still is such a thing) so long to take notice?

There are various trends at work here, but we can make one large assertion: The center no longer holds, and one of the most volatile seams along which the fault lines run is gender.

Let's start with the buses. In the late 1990s, at the request of some Haredim, the Transportation Ministry created bus lines, serving ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods and cities, on which women would enter from and sit in the back, on an officially "voluntary" basis. The lines were called "mehadrin" or "beautified," the talmudic term for religious practices combining special piety with an aesthetic touch. They were deemed legally permissible because Israeli law allows discrimination when it is necessary to provide access to public services and does not harm the common weal. All the fundamental questions (necessary? common weal?) were left wide open.

The lines grew to number around 50. Their biggest problem was the violence, verbal and sometimes physical, regularly meted out to religious and secular women who, for whatever reason, entered and sat in the front. In 2007 one victim—Naomi Ragen, a well-known Orthodox novelist who is, not coincidentally, American-born—went to court, represented by the Reform Movement's Center for Religious Pluralism. Under orders by Israel's High Court to issue a formal report, the Transportation Ministry concluded in October, 2009 that the segregated buses were illegal. The Transportation Minister tried to distance himself from the report and, for months, pleaded for more time. The Court finally ruled that the segregated lines could proceed—on an entirely voluntary basis, with clear signs to that effect. The lines still run, at times through force.

Next, Beit Shemesh. Situated near ultra-Orthodoxy's holy cities of Jerusalem and Bnei Brak, it has attracted growing numbers of Israeli Haredim. They have joined the traditional but religiously moderate Mizrahim who arrived when it was a hardscrabble development town and the American Modern Orthodox, who began arriving in the 1980s. Many Haredi arrivals were from Jerusalem's Meah Shearim, a venerable and veritable nuclear reactor of Haredi ideology, zealotry, and occasional violence. Ultra-Orthodox cities have been growing in Israel since the mid-1990s. But in Beit Shemesh, the ultra-Orthodox urban space abuts dissenting

populations, religious Zionists as well as American Haredim who are changing Israeli ultra-Orthodoxy, both anathema to the zealots.

Religious zealotry has a long history in Israel. In the 1920s and 1930s, Abraham Isaac Kook was dismembered in effigy, denounced as a Christian missionary, and doused with buckets of water in the streets. Rhetorical violence is a staple of Haredi discourse; indeed, it has become an art form. But the mounting violence against women, no doubt reflecting sincere conviction (not to mention the need for enemies and the bored young Haredim unsuited for yeshiva life), also seems to bespeak increasing internal tensions.

Israel's Haredim are increasing (some predict they will be in the majority by 2030) and are no longer an enclave. Though traditionalist, they have internalized modern aspirations to remake society and strategies of ideological mobilization. Far from monolithic, they have they have their own internal *kulturkampf*. Haredi singers perform before mixed audiences. Haredim serve in special military units—and often face community ostracism. Haredi women have made extraordinary educational and occupational strides. The response by some has been to send them, literally, to the back of the bus—and push them out of view elsewhere.

The Haredi-controlled Health Ministry has forbidden women to appear at ceremonies honoring these same women. Female community board members have been forced to sit behind *mehitzot* (partitions) at meetings. There have been attempts to enforce separate hours for men and women in government offices. It took a petition to the High Court to get women candidates' campaign posters onto Jerusalem's buses. Egged and its advertising firm were sued last week because of the onerous security deposit they require—a guarantee against likely vandalism, they say—from companies that use women's faces in bus advertising. Other lawsuits (including one co-filed by this writer) have challenged separate sidewalks for men and women. In conversation and on Haredi websites, many Haredim oppose forcible segregation and the accompanying violence. But they have almost no collective voice and no support from Haredi leadership.

The recent furors over women's singing in the Army come from a different, less obvious direction. Increasing numbers of IDF soldiers and officers are so-called "Hardali" (Haredi Dati Leumi). Unlike Haredim, they participate in the military and favor the idea of the Jewish state—but reject its integration into Western culture. One element of their program is sexual modesty, or *tsniut*—partially for Haredi-like aims of male-female separation and the repression of public expression of sexuality, but also as a marker of national identity and a means of channeling romanticism in the direction of the sacred.

Both Haredi and Hardali countercultures seek to maintain the crucial gender divide while dissolving Israeli society's boundaries between the religiously public and private, between religious and mundane. Indeed, the surrounding Israeli society has been a key, if silent, player here.

First, Haredim and Hardalim seeking an ideology and identity distinct from the surrounding society find in gender a powerful source of difference. Second, their excesses are in part a reaction to the freewheeling sexuality of secular Israel, whose socio-cultural norms are more European than American. Third, secular politicians and secular Israel at large have until just recently been thunderingly indifferent. These battles have been waged, in court and

elsewhere, by lonely groups of feminists, Reform Jews, and moderate religious Zionists. They have been met with incomprehension by journalists, politicians, and other secular elites who see the mehadrin bus lines simply as political spoils and who, from the Prime Minister on down, have buried their heads in the sand for the sake of coalition politics.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton changed all that when she talked about the situation at the Brookings Institution. The Prime Minister and the political class now understand that they have a problem. Yet they may not understand that it is more than a public relations problem. At stake here is the constitution of Israeli public space and civil society.

In Israel's early decades, for better or worse, the Mapai Labor Zionist establishment constituted both the state's ruling body and society's symbolic and civic-religious center. Mapai, with its flaws, offered a governing ethos and a plausible interpretation of Jewish history and identity. Its political eclipse beginning in the 1970s, then its fissile social and cultural collapse in the ensuing decades, left Israeli society increasingly fragmented. One casualty has been the idea of a public, civic space, open to and shared equally by all. Major political parties lay less claim than before to representing the entire public and avowedly sectoral parties are growing. The creation of entirely Haredi cities, largely in the territories, has further eroded the idea of neutral civic space.

In that respect, the public outcry galvanized by the broadcast of ultra-Orthodox thugs tormenting Naama Margolese is of a piece with last summer's economic protests. In both cases, many people, particularly in Israeli middle-class society, who could choose to live elsewhere but who serve in the army, pay taxes, and still feel Zionism in their bones, have shown that they feel the common weal has been sold off in pieces—and that they want it back.

Americans may be astonished that we need to debate whether women should sit in the back of the bus. But in Israel, this debate, unwelcome as it is, can still be a good thing. Proponents of Israeli civil society, religious and secular, must demonstrate that they can mount a principled defense of their core values and their conception of the public sphere.

In this brave new networked world, passively following MacWorld's dictates *du jour* is as demoralizing and useless as a return to an imagined Haredi idyll in the *shtetl* that never was. Faced by a flood of emails, images, videos, status updates, and tweets, which may reshape not only our communications but our inner worlds, we—not just Haredim or Hardalim—should renew the indispensable Jewish value of *tsniut*. It teaches that I must contain some of my own presence, not to erase the others but to let them, him or her, be and flourish.

## Haredi leaders must speak out against zealots

*Yehuda Meshi Zahav*

*Reprinted from The Times of Israel*

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The recent violence in Beit Shemesh and Jerusalem's Mea Shearim neighborhood has led me to speak out against the so-called "sikrikim" in the harshest possible terms, equating their actions to terrorism. Sikrikim is the name given to a fringe anti-Zionist vigilante group, loosely linked to Neturei Karta and said to have been at the head of many of the recent violent attacks against innocent Israelis.

In my mind, there is a dangerous similarity in their actions and those of Islamist terrorists. And I do not use this comparison lightly — as the founder of the ZAKA rescue and recovery organization, I understand only too well the horror of terror.

These haredi Orthodox hooligans have wreaked havoc through harassment and violence for far too long. It doesn't really matter how they justify their actions; often they are just bored and find excuses later. Whatever the reason, they cannot be allowed to go on like this at the expense of innocent bystanders, whose only crime is being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and at the expense of the haredi community, whose collective reputation and image are being tarred by their individual brush.

There would be communal outcry if terrorists dressed up as haredim, attacked a bus in Mea Shearim, broke its windows and injured innocent men, women and children. However, if haredim themselves do something similar in the name of religious zealotry, it is somehow condoned by a cloak of silence spread across the haredi community. This double standard has to end, and I call upon haredi community leaders who deplore their actions to make their voices heard.

The silence of the majority of our leaders has allowed a tiny fringe group of extremists to hijack the media into thinking they represent the entire haredi Orthodox community in Israel. This terrible generalization could not be further from the truth and is insulting to those of us who have worked for so many years to bridge the gaps of understanding with all sectors of Israeli society.

As a proud 11th-generation Jerusalemite from Mea Shearim, I know the anti-Zionist Neturei Karta all too well, having been raised in their midst and spoon-fed their ideology through my formative years. I was personally arrested no less than 34 times for organizing protests against what I then saw as the evil Zionist regime. As I grew older, I realized that unlike my traditional attire, not everything is black and white.

My abhorrent view of the “Zionists” came to a sudden and drastic halt on July 6, 1989, when I witnessed the aftermath of an Islamic Jihad terrorist attack on the No. 405 bus en route to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. Hearing the commotion, I ran from my yeshiva studies to witness a sobering image that would remain imprinted on my mind forever. Sixteen innocent Jews lay among the carnage, including young soldiers, elderly Jerusalemites, North American tourists and Israeli teenagers.

Suddenly it became clear in my mind that if terrorists do not discriminate between Jews, then neither should I. Instinctively I ran towards the mangled bus and began to help prepare the victims for burial. Unbeknown to me at the time, these were the humble beginnings of ZAKA.

I began to use my organizational skills and contacts to build a framework in which young haredi Orthodox men could volunteer and give back to society in a way that no other government body was prepared to do. We took responsibility for collecting the remains of terror victims for burial, attending one terror attack after another. Our volunteers received professional training and worked side by side with all of the other emergency services. Suddenly people began to associate haredi Jews, once viewed as outsiders who did not serve their country, as caring individuals fulfilling a critical role in society.

Today ZAKA has thousands of volunteers from all sectors in Israeli society — Jews, Christians, Druze and Muslims. Our work has progressed into that of a U.N.-recognized international rescue-and-recovery organization with branches across the globe, ready to deploy to any mass casualty situation.

Once I realized that the Jewish people were one, I began to understand our global role as a “light unto the nations.” What better light can we provide than saving lives and assisting others in their time of need, irrespective of race, color or creed? As our sages tell us, “All of mankind was created in the image of God” — not just Jews, and not certainly not just haredi Orthodox Jews.

Authentic Judaism is not about highlighting differences and attacking those who do not share your worldview. It is about bringing the world closer to perfection, tikkun olam, working together for the sake of the greater good. As a haredi leader, I felt the need to publicly distance myself from these fanatics who hide behind the legitimacy of religious garb and spend their time desecrating all that is holy. Through aggression and sick media gimmicks, they seek to bully society into capitulating to their every wish and paint all of Torah Judaism as xenophobic and intolerant.

The only way to fight their hate is to increase our love and understanding. We must continue to work together as human beings, irrelevant of race, color or creed to make this world a better place for generations to come.

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*(Yehuda Meshi-Zahav is the founder and chairman of the ZAKA Rescue and Recovery Organization, which has 1,650 volunteers in Israel and international rescue units around the world that have assisted at natural disasters in Japan and Haiti and terror attacks in Mumbai and Mombasa.)*

## Lessons From Beit Shemesh: Some Slow Progress

*Natan Sharansky*

*Reprinted from The Jewish Week*

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In recent weeks my head has been full of the angry voices of my friends and partners in the United States — leaders of the American Jewish community, allies and comrades-in-arms in the great task of strengthening the bonds between Israel and the Jewish people worldwide. They are angry about the same things I am angry about.

The cause is plain. To see, in the modern democratic state of Israel, a Jewish schoolgirl being shouted at and abused by ultra-Orthodox (haredi) extremists in the town of Beit Shemesh; to see publicly subsidized buses in Israel being turned into gender-segregated transportation — for me, as an Israeli, as a Jew, as the chairman of the Jewish Agency, all this is unbearable.

And so I understand perfectly why my American friends are outraged. I even understand when they wonder whether they should continue as partners in the Jewish Agency if events like these represent the new face of Israel, if Israel itself is becoming a place where people deigning to invoke the values of Judaism are allowed to conduct themselves in a manner that can only be characterized as anti-Semitic.

If the cause of the anger is plain, so is my answer, and it comes in two parts. The first is addressed to our friends abroad. The second is addressed to the government of Israel.

In order to grasp the significance of what is going on now in Israel's haredi population, it is necessary to know something basic: over the last 10 to 15 years, this community has been undergoing an amazing transformation — and in a direction that all friends of Israel must applaud.

In the last five years alone, the number of haredi young men volunteering for service in the Israel Defense Forces, though still lamentably low, has quadrupled. The numbers of haredim enrolled in commercial courses designed to prepare them for professional careers have increased dozens of times over. If in 2005 fewer than 500 were getting a higher education in universities and colleges, six years later the number tops 4,000. Ten years ago, only a handful of haredi households were connected to the Internet; today, almost a quarter are.

Walls are falling — and the Jewish Agency has made and continues to make its uniquely inclusive contribution to the process. One small example is our highly successful Youth Futures program, aimed at helping children from disadvantaged homes.

Among the thousand families affected by this program are religious and secular Jews alike, as well as Arabs and Druze. Only the ultra-Orthodox community refused our help, keeping us at arm's length from their troubled families. But in the last year this too has changed. Haredi leaders in Safed and Bnei Brak, acknowledging certain longstanding problems in their cloistered communities and appreciating the successes already achieved by the program, are competing for our help.

It is precisely for this reason — the gradual but inexorable integration of more and more haredim into Israeli society even while safeguarding their religious uniqueness — that those bent on keeping the ultra-Orthodox community hermetically sealed off have become increasingly virulent, and in some cases increasingly violent. All the recent provocations have been the work of these extremist elements, who in truth form a minority of a minority of a minority.

Let's leave it to the rule of law to deal with these extremists. Instead, let's focus our energies on advancing the integration of haredim into Israeli society. One of the ways to accomplish this is to strengthen our partnerships. The Jewish Agency facilitates 47 local partnerships between different Jewish communities around the world and Israeli towns and cities. Beit Shemesh, for example, is linked with the Jewish federations of Washington, D.C. and South Africa. In the wake of recent events, this partnership declared a contest, soliciting proposals for creating dialogue among the different groups in Beit Shemesh, from the ultra-Orthodox to the national religious to recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union and beyond.

More than two dozen proposals have been advanced; and in a few days, the three winners, whose proposals will be turned into programs, will be announced. In fact, a major agenda item at the forthcoming meeting of the Jewish Agency's board of governors will be the bolstering and expansion of our existing programs to accelerate the integration of Israel's ultra-Orthodox.

I do not wish to understate the complexity of the task. There is no denying that a whole series of issues has rocked not only the relations of secular and religious in Israel but the delicate balance of interests between Israel and the diaspora. Many of these issues center on the identity and status of Jews abroad, especially for purposes of marriage and divorce in Israel and/or standing under the Law of Return.

Who is a Jew, and who gets to decide? Why are increasing numbers of local municipal rabbis, all appointed and subsidized by the state, raising obstacles to conversions approved by other Orthodox rabbis? Why is the whole process of conversion being made into a machine for exclusion? How have so many other issues having to do with the use and abuse of public space in Israel been allowed to fall under the veto power of the ultra-Orthodox parties?

The answer is politics. And herein lies my second message, addressed to the government of Israel.

Let it be acknowledged that, for decades, secular Zionist political leaders in Israel have steadily ceded authority over the proper relation between religion and state to the political representatives of the country's ultra-Orthodox community. On both the left and the right, these leaders believed that there were issues — strategic issues — more important than who controls relations between religion and state and how public space is shared, and that in order to garner support for the former they could sacrifice their influence in the latter. The result has been a disaster.

To clarify the point, consider the history of the so-called Tal Law, which only recently re-emerged for discussion in the Knesset. Introduced as a legislative proposal a decade ago, it was aimed at stimulating young Israeli haredim to enter the workforce and thereby mitigate their exemption from military service.

Like all legislative proposals, the Tal Law required two rounds of readings in the Knesset. As circumstances developed, the first reading occurred during the short-lived premiership of Ehud Barak, when Ariel Sharon was the leader of the opposition. For partisan reasons, Barak endorsed the bill; for partisan reasons, Sharon spearheaded the fight against it. The second reading then occurred under Sharon's premiership, with Barak now at the head of the opposition. Sure enough, the positions were reversed.

At issue in these respective votes was not the merits of the Tal Law. At issue was only which party felt more in need of ultra-Orthodox support for its own political purposes. We are long since past the point at which this situation can continue to be ignored, and its corrosive consequences swept under the rug. To the contrary, history has shown that the allegedly secondary issues at stake are not merely of tactical significance but rather carry tremendous strategic weight, because they strongly influence the character of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

But here too it is a mistake to think nothing is being done, or that nothing can be done. And here too it is our partnership, the unique partnership between the Agency and the government of Israel that can make the difference.

Look at how the last round of the “Who Is a Jew” debate unfolded.

When a bill was introduced into the Knesset aimed at giving sole authority to the Chief Rabbinate for determining the validity of conversions, emotions rapidly became inflamed. As the one body where all the streams of the Jewish community, the representatives of world Jewry and Israeli political leaders convene together, the Agency was the first to warn the government about the brewing controversy. Then, when the controversy did explode, it was we who brought together the government of Israel and representatives of world Jewry to explore and exploit the interest of all sides in finding a solution. The dialogue continues to this very day, not with threats but with the understanding that all sides need and depend on one another. Today, even in the absence of any formal agreement, a “cease-fire” reigns — the bill in question has been blocked from reaching the Knesset — based on deep mutual understanding and a bold declaration by the prime minister that on these issues he represents not only his party but the interests of world Jewry.

The point is a general one. Unlike on matters of Israeli national security, critical decisions on matters of Jewish identity — of access to public space in Israel, of the just and equitable treatment of fellow Jews — are the rightful domain not only of Jews living in the Jewish state but of Jews throughout the world.

And this, once again, is why it is so crucially important for each and every one of us to work together, to break down the walls that different special interests are so persistently attempting to build between Jews and their fellow Jews. Appearances notwithstanding, theirs is a losing battle; but ours has still to be won.

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*Natan Sharansky is chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel.*

## The Remarkable Good News about the Haredim

Haviv Gur

Reprinted from *The Times of Israel*

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News reports from Israel suggest a society coming apart at the seams. Women pushed to the back of the bus; men spitting on “immodest” 8-year-old girls in Bet Shemesh. It’s enough to make you wonder about the future of the Jewish state.

### But this picture is wrong.

The reality is that the haredi extremists are becoming violent precisely because they are losing their battle against modernity.

Haredim are no longer content with their destitute existence. They are rushing headlong to work, to vocational training colleges, even to academia. Unprecedented numbers are choosing employment over welfare, modern education over luddism and – tentatively – military and national service over separation.

Here are the numbers, gleaned in part from an enlightening 2010 study by the National Economic Council in the Prime Minister’s Office:

### Work

Haredim make up the poorest segment of Israel’s Jewish population. A majority – 59% – live below the poverty line, compared to just 14% among the general Jewish population.

The cause is overwhelmingly the simple fact that most haredim don’t work. Among haredi families where both parents work, just one family in 29 (3.4%) lives below the poverty line. Among families with one working parent, the number rises sharply to one in four (23%). Where neither parent works, two out of every three families (67%) are poor.

The takeaway: Those who work are not poor.

That’s why increasing numbers are going to work. Employment among haredi men rose from 33% in 2002 to 42% in 2010, and is expected to continue rising. Among women, too, employment rose from 48% to 55% in the same period.

Even better: This rise in employment was accompanied by a steep rise in unemployment. Follow me here: unemployment does not mean those who don’t work – but those who are *looking for work*. Between 2002 and 2006, a period of economic growth during which unemployment figures for Jewish men generally dropped from 7.3% to 6%, unemployment rose among haredi men from 9.2% to 11.6%. In other words, the demand for jobs among

haredi men grew even faster than the increasing number who found jobs in an expanding job market.

More haredim now work, and more want to work, than at any time in the recent past. If I was a haredi extremist, I'd be worried too.

## Education

Perhaps this is why more haredim are turning to higher education than ever before. In recent years, three publicly-funded and several private institutions of higher education have opened in Israel that are run by haredim for haredim, including the Haredi College of Jerusalem, the Bnei Brak Haredi College and others. Where just a few hundred haredi students attended Israel's colleges and universities a decade ago, today some 6,000 are enrolled in recognized institutions of higher learning. More than 1,100 are studying to become engineers.

This desire for non-religious higher education is not the exception, it is increasingly the rule. A 2008 survey by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies found that almost 74% of haredim are interested in non-religious higher education.

More importantly, the number of *applicants* to haredi-friendly colleges probably vastly outstrips the number of *students*. For example, the Haredi College of Jerusalem is only budgeted to take on 500 new students each academic year, so it must reject 1,500 applications. (An additional 1,500 request information about enrollment but do not apply.) This suggests that if we can find the money, the phenomenal growth in haredi higher education could be accelerated even further.

Fortunately, the government has taken notice. Just yesterday, the Council for Higher Education – Israel's higher education regulator – approved a 180-million-shekel plan to open haredi-friendly tracks in colleges and universities near haredi population centers. (The link is in Hebrew. Strangely, I couldn't find any English coverage of this story.)

## National service

While military service is still anathema in the haredi street, the IDF has seen what it hopes and believes will be the beginning of a trend, from 200 active duty soldiers in 2000 to 800 today – a modest number, but moving in the right direction.

National service, too, has seen a marked increase. Compared to just a few dozen a few years ago, over 1,200 haredim now serve in some form of national service, mostly with disadvantaged youth in their communities.

The extremists are right to be worried

To be clear, I'm not saying that the struggle to integrate haredim into Israel's social fabric and economy has succeeded. I'm only saying that the extremists are right to be worried. While the media focuses automatically on the increasing audacity and violence of the extremists, it is largely failing to notice that all the relevant social trends in the haredi community point in the right direction.

Haredim are not cartoons. They are real people, as sophisticated and rational as the rest of Israeli society. So it's a shame to see them used as fodder to sell papers, when the reality – that they are modernizing and abandoning their self-imposed ghetto at breakneck speed – is being ignored.



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