

REACHING OUT TO THE NON-COMMITTED

by STEVEN RISKIN

IN the contemporary American Orthodox Jewish scene there have emerged two distinct attitudes towards the non-orthodox: the one may be called isolationist and the other expansionist. The former maintains that, like the Biblical Noah, we have neither the strength nor the resources to concern ourselves with the non-committed. All that we can hope to achieve is the establishment of our own ark, our own sectarian institutions and even communities, in the hope of rescuing ourselves and our families from the flood of secularism seeking to inundate us. The expansionists, on the other hand, seek to emulate our Patriarch Abraham by reaching out actively to the non-orthodox in an attempt to convince them of

our divine *Weltanschauung* and persuade them to adopt our way of life. It is the task of this article to demonstrate that the orthodox Jew is Halachically bound to explore the proper means by which he will be enabled to convince his co-religionists to return to their heritage.

Biblically we are commanded: "Thou shalt surely reprove thy neighbor and thou shalt not bear iniquity because of him." (Vayikra 19:17) Maimonides, in his Mishneh Torah, clarifies and codifies this obligation: "If one sees his friend transgressing or going in an evil direction it is obligatory to restore him to the good path and to inform him that he is transgressing against himself with his evil deeds, as it is written, 'Thou shalt

surely reprove thy neighbor'. . . And anyone who has it within his power to prevent (another's transgression) and does not prevent it, becomes himself involved in the transgression." (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchoth Deoth 6:7, 8) Nowhere do we find a clearer manifestation of the principle that "every Israelite is a co-signer one for the other." Not only must I instruct my neighbor as to his proper conduct, but I also share in his guilt if I refuse to carry out my obligation.* Jewish law explicitly denies the American golden rule of 'Mind your own business.'

TO be sure, it is necessary to admonish in such a way that your words will be respected and not ridiculed, accepted and not maligned. Although we are taught to instruct even if we must reiterate our message one hundred times, (Talmud, Bava Metzia, 31a) we are still cautioned: "Just as it is incumbent upon a man to speak that which will be accepted, so is it incumbent not to speak that which will not be accepted." (Yevamoth 65b, and Rashi ad loc.) It would be mere folly, therefore, to approach every Sabbath desecrater one meets and give him a tongue-lashing for it. We must first cultivate receptiv-

*Compare B.T. Shabbat 54b, in which a similar obligation is placed upon one who can prevent transgressions of his family, his city and the world. The very verse in Leviticus might well imply that by not re-proving one's friend, one bears his iniquity.

ity for our ideas by making available to our co-religionist the proper educational facilities and materials, by preaching by actions as well as by words. And once we have progressed to the stage of verbal admonition, we must do so with love and encouragement: "...who instructs his friend . . . must instruct him when he is alone. One should speak to him with calm sweetness and soft words, and inform him that one's words are for his own good and to bring him to the life of the world to come." (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchoth Deoth 6:7) Limitations are logically placed on our responsibility, so that if we are certain that our message will go unheeded and might even be resented, it is perhaps preferable to remain silent.

"Until what point is one to reprove?

Rav says, Until he is struck (by the one he is reproving).

Samuel says, Until he is cursed.

Rav Yochanon says, Until he is reviled." *

But this only intensifies that which we have been saying. As long as there is no active negative response on the part of the non-committed, it remains our duty to create the proper atmosphere which will allow for religious instruction and admonition.

There are those who will deny my entire assumption by maintaining that many if not all of the non-orthodox Jews of our generation have abro-

*Erchin 16b; Maimonides decides in accordance with Rav Yochanon.

gated themselves from being included in Klal Yisroel because of their heretical beliefs. After all, they will argue, does not Maimonides, after enumerating the thirteen essential Articles of Faith, exclude them by declaring: "And when an individual believes in all these essentials . . . he enters into the category of Israel and it is incumbent to love him. . . But when there becomes damaged for an individual an article of these articles, behold he is excluded from the category and has denied an essential." (Maimonides, Commentary to the Mishnah, Sanhedrin XI:I, Introduction)

I SHALL not attempt to discuss the validity of the Maimonidean Articles of Faith within the confines of this essay. However, even according to Maimonides himself the great majority of our Jewish brethren would still be included in K'lal Yisroel. For a clarification of the position of this great commentator and codifier, we must turn to his magnum opus in Jewish law, the Mishneh Torah:

Once it becomes publicly known that an individual has denied the validity of the Oral Law, behold he is considered like the rest of the heretics who deny the divinity of the Torah and the slanderers and the rebels, who are not in the category of Israel.

This statement applies, however, only to a man who initially denies the validity of the Oral Law in his mind . . . and goes after his paltry thoughts . . . like Zadok and Boethius and all of their followers. But the children of

these followers and their children's children, whose parents misled them — those who were born among the Karaites and were raised in their traditions — behold, they are as ones who were forced against their will . . . Therefore it is proper to bring them back in repentance and to encourage them with words of peace until they return to the complete power of the Torah. (Hilchoth Mamrim III: 2,3)

Thus Maimonides has reinterpreted the concept of *onus* (one who has been forced to commit a transgression against his will) to include those who have been reared in a non-orthodox environment and who have never received an opportunity to properly study and practice the tenets of Judaism. How correct was the Psalmist in declaring "Taste and see that G-d is good," and how tragic is the son of Israel who has never been warmed by the wine of Kiddush or inspired by the fragrance of Havdolah spice. How much greater is our obligation to turn these "youngsters who were captured by the pagans" and imbue them with the truths of our faith!

BUT what of the individual who has been trained in an orthodox home but has rejected his early education due to the almost overwhelming demands of the secular society in which he finds himself? What of the young man who so plagued and perplexed by intellectual doubts that he finds it impossible to honestly perform the religious precepts taught him by

parents and teachers? Are these individuals to be excluded from K'lal Yisroel? Is the orthodox Jew to be freed from the obligation of attempting in every possible way to restore for such Jews their historic religious perspective? I would submit that there might very well be room in Jewish law to further extend the category of *onus* to include even those who transgress due to emotional weakness or intellectual doubt.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kuk, in one of his most far-reaching responsa, writes to a father who is distraught over the apostasy of his son:

Yes, my dear friend, I understand well the sadness of your heart. But if you should concur with the majority of the scholars that it is seemly at this time to utterly reject those children who have swerved from the paths of Torah and faith because of the tumultuous current of the age, I must explicitly and emphatically declare that this is not the method which G-d desires. Just as the Tosafot in Tractate Sanhedrin (26b) maintains that it is logical not to invalidate one suspected of sexual immorality from giving testimony because he is considered an *onus* — since his instincts overwhelmed him — the Tosafot in Tractate Gittin (41b) maintains that since a maid-servant enticed them to immorality they are considered as having acted against their will, in a similar fashion (is to be judged) the 'Evil Maid-Servant' of the current of the age . . . entices many of our youngsters with all their wiles to commit adultery with her. They act completely against their will and far be it from us to judge a transgression

which one is forced to commit in the same manner as we judge a premeditated, wilful transgression. (Iggeroth HaRe'ayah I, Responsum 137, P. 171)

Therefore we have an indication that the concept of *onus* may very well be extended to include those who have rejected aspects of Jewish law and theology due to the emotional pressures of our age or even due to heterodox intellectual conviction.* If one would draw this concept to its logical conclusion it might mean a total rethinking of our category of culpability and punishment. At the very least it demands that we have neither the moral nor legal right to exclude the majority of American Jewry from our agonizing concern. We dare not build Noah's arks merely for

*Vide B.T. Shevuoth 26a, where the Talmud itself seems to exclude the person who is intellectually convinced of the rectitude of his action from the category of a wilful transgressor. In the case of a false oath, Jewish law removes all culpability from one who is forced to make such an oath against his will (*onus*) "what is an example of such an instance? It is as in the case of Rav Kahana and Rav Asi who had been standing before Rav. One took an oath that this was the statement of Rav and the other took an oath that that was the statement of Rav. When they came before Rav, he established his statement in accordance with one of them. The other said to him, 'I have therefore sworn falsely.' (Rav) replied to him, 'Your heart forced you!' And Tosafot in B.T. Gittin 35a explains that Rav removed any trace of culpability or obligation from his student by declaring that, in effect he hadn't even sworn falsely at all. See, too, Norman Lamm, "Faith and Doubt" Tradition, Spring-Summer '67.

the preservation of our orthodox colleagues. We dare not encourage an attitude of cynicism and disdain towards those Synagogue rabbis, educators, and laymen attempting to call back our wayward brethren. And most important, each and every orthodox Jew must awaken to his personal responsibility to enter into religious fields of endeavor and, at the very least, to attempt to reach out to those who are Jews in name only.

And there is no question in my mind that we can succeed.

We are living in an age of unprecedented religious interest and concern alongside of the radical theologians and secular city — situation ethic enthusiasts. The Yavneh organization which has successfully brought Torah Study and kosher kitchens to countless campuses. The Orthodox Union's NCSY movement and its events, and Yeshiva University's youth seminars, which have introduced so many youngsters to Torah-true Judaism, as well as the honest search for values and meaning which lies behind the hippie movement and many LSD trippers all point towards the opportunities which lie before us. First we must have the will and then we must create the vocabulary and the means to speak persuasively to those waiting for our message. The Halachic principle that "every Jew is a co-signer one for the

other," and which avers that my Kiddush is lacking as long as you have not made yours, resoundingly denies that we were ever meant to foster the *Neturey Karta* psychology. And the renaissance among Jews who have been subjected to religious influence — in America, Israel (especially through the Geshet movement), and even the Soviet Union — stands eloquent testimony to the eternity of the Jewish spirit, a spirit which will not only survive but which will prevail.

In our modern age of religious apathy and intellectual turmoil, we must contain every Jew — despite his avowed heresies and intemperate behavior — within the banner of K'lal Yisroel, and never yield our obligation and privilege to restore for him the vital teachings of his religion. As Rav Kuk so aptly wrote:

If we do not cast a stone after those who fall, but rather attempt to draw them closer in accordance with the opportunity, then, when the current of the age will turn back and they will recognize the great error . . . because of which they have rejected their eternal home, they will be prepared for repentance and improvement. The generations which follow them will be ready because of this to be most ennobled and exalted, and they will grasp onto the glory of Israel and the light of G-d which shines within it with their every strength and power.

Thou Shalt Not Destroy

by SAMUEL A. TURK

JUST as it is our sacred duty to study the Halachic and legal aspects of the Torah's commandments, we should not fail also to probe the philosophy and ethics of the Mitzvot. The Torah does not promulgate a systematic theology or a set of beliefs. Rather, its laws reflect and indirectly express concepts of life which collectively constitute a unique world outlook. The performance of Mitzvot is usually meant to translate abstract concepts and ideals into reality. Philosophy and theology become a mere game of words and an exercise in mental gymnastics if they are not utilized to help mold our personalities and behavior. The performance of the Mitzvah should, therefore, remain our primary concern. But it also behooves

us to ponder and perceive what tradition has termed the "Inner Light of the Torah." This will help us acquire the proper attitudes which the Mitzvah seeks to inculcate.

The 529th Mitzvah of the Torah seeks to develop within us an outlook upon the world which should be an important part of the spiritual armor of every Jew.

This Mitzvah reads as follows:

When you shall besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy the trees thereof by wielding an ax against them, but you shall not cut them down, for man is like the tree of the field. Only the trees which you know are not trees for food, them you may destroy and cut down, that you may build bulwarks against the city that



Shlomo Riskin

The Model Yeshiva: A Dream Awaiting Fulfillment

Seven years have passed since Pinchos Bak and I spent a day cruising on a boat from Vancouver to Victoria, British Columbia, formulating the image of a secondary school, a Mesivta, which we hoped would make a significant contribution to Jewish education. We spoke intensely, quickly, with the excitement of two people who had been thinking about an idea independently for many years and finally had the opportunity of expressing in words what until now had been locked in our minds. We often broke into each other's statements, surprised and elated that we could think so alike, that our separate dreams were really one dream, that an opportunity to realize that dream was at last beckoning.

Five years have passed since we opened a school of twenty students — twelve freshmen and eight sophomores — with a Shacharis service at the Riverdale Jewish Center. We smiled at each other tremulously, in happiness and trepidation, pleased that idea had shaped reality, dream had become vision, yet fully aware of the awesome challenge and responsibility these twenty Jewish souls placed before us.

And two years have passed since that fateful Purim night when we danced together to the music of our Mesivta band with more than one hundred students. I looked into Rav Bak's eyes as he surveyed his dancing *talmidim*, as he reflected upon how many had become *Bnai Torah* and how many had a way to go to develop their potential intellectually and religiously. He constantly strove to discover the right combination which would unlock the unique spiritual resources present in each student. He had enormous respect for each one's personal capacity, and he yearned to develop concepts and expressions of *menschlichkeit* even as he desired to nurture ability to conceptualize a dispute between the Rambam and the Ra'avad. He saw no fundamental conflict between the religious and secular: all of knowledge reflects Divine wisdom, and all of one's actions must be for the sake of Heaven. He himself gave a *gemara shiur* in the morning and a course in contemporary English literature in the afternoon, with a quick round of football with the *bochrim* during lunch, and an after-school photography session for those working on our first year-book. No human pursuit was alien to him, and every student was significant to him, each having a legitimate area in which to excel.

Every student was significant to him, each one feeling his legitimate area in which to excel.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, of Aish HaTorah's Lincoln Square Synagogue, is one of the most renowned successful educators and leaders in the American Orthodox community, having brought thousands of Jewish youth into the fold of Torah and Klal Yisrael.



He was much loved, respected, emulated; and he had good reason to be pleased with his disciples. It was, after all, his charisma, vitality, and effervescent spirit with which the Mesivta pulsated, especially on Purim night; reflected in the turbulence of the Purim mood was the turbulence of adolescence; in the upward jumping movement of the Purim dance was the idealistic striving, the inestimable potential of the adolescent youth; in the fervent words of the Purim song was the love of Torah and Israel.

And suddenly everything came to an abrupt halt. Songs of joy turned into cries of anguish, joyous laughter became agonized fear, "You shall rejoice in your festival" was transformed into "From the depths do I call unto G-d," and one-hundred youngsters were changed to mature, sober adults, as Rav Bak fell to the floor of the Beis Midrash, and an era came to a close in the history of Mesivta Ohr Torah.

What were the unique curricular elements which Rav Bak strove to inculcate within the Mesivta which caused it to attain almost instantaneous institutional success within the American Jewish scene? What was the special educational philosophy upon which Mesivta Ohr Torah was founded, the dream we dreamed together from Vancouver to Riverdale?

Talmud, *Torah She'ba'al Peh*, is the foundation of a Jewish studies curriculum. It is the Talmud, after all, which expresses the uniquely Jewish institutions which mark our singular lifestyle, from the *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* to employer-employee relationships. Since we are the heirs of Rabbinic Judaism, a proper understanding of Judaism is only possible if one attains the ability to swim easily in the sea of Talmud. But rarely is the student actually taught proper methodology by receiving the necessary linguistic and analytic tools to enable him to study a *blatt Gemara* and its commentaries by himself. Many a Rosh Mesivta tends to give a highly original *shiur* above the heads of his students, and, as a consequence, the *rebbe* is generally answering *his* questions in the text rather than those of his students. The yeshiva curriculum does not provide a logical and orderly system by means of which the student would gradually develop from skill to skill, and generally the student does not learn to trace a *Halachah* from the Talmud backwards to the *Chumash* and forward to the *Shulchan Aruch*. Thus the fact that the Talmud is the bridge between revelation and contemporary practice is never made clear, and the student is often confused as to the significance of his studies.

The ethical and religious principles underlying the vigorous analysis of our Sages, the philosophy behind the ritual which emanates from the Tractate *Shabbos*, the concepts of human sensitivity and sexual morality which are the basis of *Kiddushin*, the concern for the rights of the individual and the importance

of fair business practices which are the underlying assumptions of *Baba Metzia* — are rarely, if ever, expressed in the classroom. Most important of all, Talmud study is hardly ever taught as a search for closeness to G-d and an understanding of His Will. If, indeed, Torah is the revealed wisdom of the Almighty, and the Ineffable one and His wisdom are indissoluble, then all of Torah learning is an intellectual embrace of the Divine. Only by emphasizing each of these elements, and training *rabbeim* to impart these principles with skill, sensitivity, and understanding, can we inspire our students with the excitement and significance of *Gemara* learning.

And Talmud — although crucial for a proper understanding of the development of normative Judaism and the most effective key to continued self-study throughout one's life — is not the only significant branch of Torah study. *Mishnah* provides the breadth and scope of knowledge which is necessary background for more profound learning of *Gemara* and commentaries. The *Chumash*, especially with the commentaries of *Rashi* and *Ramban*, adds the intellectual and theological matrix from which all other learning as well as religious attitudes must develop. And the proper study of *Rashi* and *Ramban* requires as much training in methodology as does the study of *Tosafos* and other *Rishonim*.

Moreover, many of our young people are disappointed and frustrated by the parochial vision in many Yeshivos. Our most creative and poetic souls are defecting from the ranks because they do not discover in our yeshiva curriculum a proper vehicle for their emotional and religious expression. The Messianic sweep of Isaiah, the Divine love of *Song of Songs*, the moral indignation of Amos, the intellectual frustration and even skepticism of *Kohelles*, the pageantry and homiletic wisdom of the *Agadah*, are all closed books to most of our students. Indeed, to some, the Prophet Micah sounds like a Reform rabbi. A proper exposure to the Written Torah would provide a universal dimension as well as balm to the searching souls of many of our students. An understanding of the forces in Jewish history which gave rise to significant movements, a proper study of great Jewish personalities from Reb Yochanan ben Zakkai to the Chofetz Chaim, would give religious inspiration as well as intellectual understanding the the "finger of G-d" which directs the destiny of our people in each generation. Courses which expose the student to texts of *Mussar* and *Chassidus*, and to the poetry of religious ecstasy, will enable the student to glimpse the rich panoply of concerns which has comprised the traditional world of Torah throughout the generations.

And if the intellectual scope of the student is to be broadened and deepened, secular studies must be viewed as an extension of Torah learning, as a valid means of sharpening one's grasp

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of the Divine. The two blessings preceding the *Shema* — the acceptance of the yoke of Heavenly Kingship — prepare the individual by reminding him of the two accessible revelations: the natural world and the living Torah. Biology ought reinforce for the student the muscle of creation, and physics confirm the unity behind the universe. Meaningful literature which deals with the problem of the adolescent — especially the adolescent Jew — in contemporary American society ought be part of the English curriculum; and an advanced Biology elective which deals with problems relating to abortion, Tay Sacks, DNA, time of death, etc. would open a student's eyes to the interpenetration of science and *Halachah*. Despite the tension which may often be discerned between the Torah and secular worlds — and this should not be glibly disposed of with easy clichés — the student must be given the wherewithal to utilize his secular learning in the service of Torah wherever possible and to discard those secular values which are inimical to the Torah *weltanschauung*.

The most crucial element in the Yeshiva High School, however, goes beyond the area of curriculum. The crisis in secular education, so cogently expressed by contemporary educators, may be defined as the absence of purposeful direction despite academic attainment. If Viktor Frankel is correct in stating that the "will to meaning" is a far deeper drive in man than either the "will to pleasure" or the "will to power," then proper Torah education must provide purpose for a generation in search of meaning. Instead, the Yeshiva High School — even those which legitimately boast of winning contests in Torah and Merit Scholarships in scholastic competitions — imparts information but often fails to communicate values; emphasizes subject but sometimes neglects our religious goals and life-style; attempts to teach but rarely touch. Hence many of our graduates, when faced with the blandishments of an atheistic, hedonistic society either at a university or in a professional social milieu, are not quite certain, at best, why they ought maintain their religious commitment, and, at worst, become antagonistic and cynical towards it.

Ideally, the Yeshiva must be not only a center for learning but a center for living, as well. At this crucial stage in the youngster's development, when he is growing from child to adult, when he is searching for relationships outside of his family, each *rebbe* must serve as an additional parent to each student. Students, faculty and administration must form a cohesive community of Torah and *mitzvos*. They must pray together; and spend an occasional *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* together with *Zemirots*, and words of Torah which can give a spiritual uplift to student and *rebbe* alike. Sharing each other's joys and sorrows in halachic perspective; praying, learning, socializing

and questing together creates the atmosphere crucial to proper intellectual, religious and emotional development. A new *niggun* after davening or as part of a religious celebration can penetrate to the soul of many adolescents, and small *chavrusos* which work on individual personality traits can underscore the message of religious concern for sensitive ethical conduct. The family of each student must be made to feel a part of this process through special programs, inviting parents to study with their children and their children's educators topics of mutual and universal concern. In sum, the Yeshiva High School must become an extended family, an oasis of sanctity for each student, which will confirm and strengthen, by its unique intensity, the ideals he receives at home.

When the student begins to develop a sense of religious self-awareness and a relationship to his own Torah community, he can begin to reach-out to the larger community surrounding the yeshiva. *Chesed* must be an integral aspect of every Jew's religious development. And there is no greater antidote to cynicism than inculcating a desire to share one's commitment and bounty with others who are less fortunate. Thus every student must be involved in a personal *chesed* project: a weekly visit to a hospital or nursing home; leading an NCSY or local synagogue youth group for the non-committed; tutoring a peer or an elementary school student; or setting up for the next meal at the yeshiva. School projects involving problems of the Jewish poor and aged; local standards of *kashrus*, the community *mikveh* and *chevra kadishah*, and work for Soviet Jewry can all add a practical dimension to academic studies. More important: it will inculcate within the consciousness of the student a sense of communal responsibility and religious activism which has been the glory of our tradition throughout the ages. Only such an educational philosophy and program can inspire the kind of religious leadership for the next generation which is so sorely lacking in our own.

And finally, the Yeshiva High School student must develop ties with Eretz Yisrael, and the Torah institutions within it. After a two-thousand year long diaspora, and from the very depths of Auschwitz and Treblinka, a Jewish State has been reborn pregnant with the promise of Divine Redemption. The heroism and commitment displayed by the students — contemporaries of many of our High School seniors — of Yeshivot Hesder; the anti-materialism of the religious *kibbutzim*; the rich variety and unprecedented growth of Israeli yeshivos catering to developing Torah scholars as well as *baalei-tshuvah*, can only serve to enhance the potential idealism in our students.

Exposing students to Judaism outside of New York and throughout America and the budding Torah institutions

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developing in such unlikely places as Santa Clara, California and Phoenix, Arizona; taking students to the once great Jewish Centers of Europe and showing them visually the destruction wrought; planning a visit to the Soviet Union where heroic acts of self sacrifice are daily occurrences for countless Jews; spending a summer in Israel with learning, working and guided touring, can all be creative alternatives to the humdrum, non-productive summer camp excursion which has become so commonplace for the average yeshiva high school student. Such summer experiences can significantly contribute to the intellectual and religious growth of the individual students, and may help ignite the spark which will commit him to Torah and Israel for the rest of his life. In sum, we must plumb the depths of our creative resources in order to develop inspired young people who are committed to Torah study and the future of the Jewish people. It is they who hold the key to the quality of our survival.

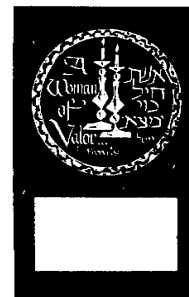
Such was the dream, the purpose for the creation of Mesivta Ohr Torah. As yet, it is only an ideal, and the vision has yet to be realized. And perhaps the essence of any ideal in this world of imperfection is the very striving for fulfillment, the attempt to overcome each obstacle. But despite the hardships — and the most tragic hardship of all, the loss of the great architect of the dream “who is not, for he was taken by the Lord” — Rav Bak’s greatest legacy remains the large number of students who were touched, and students who will be touched, by his educational vision.

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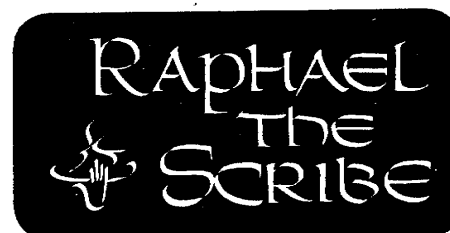


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Shlomo Riskin

Where Modern Orthodoxy Is At— And Where It Is Going

"Modern Orthodoxy" is a rubric which has been utilized to encompass institutions, organizations, and practicing Jews in twentieth century American Jewish life based on a synthesis of the worlds of Torah and secular learning. For many decades of this century a university-trained person who maintained a commitment to Torah beliefs and Torah practices was a rare phenomenon. The growing number of such Jews is a reality, and it is further attested to by the existence of such groups as the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists, the Commission on Law and Public Affairs (COLPA), and the growth of Yeshiva University.

At the same time, American Orthodoxy is experiencing a shift to the "right," which is also a reality, and which is attested to by the vigorous leadership of the non-university oriented *Roshei Yeshiva* and *Chassidic Rebbeim*. Charles Liebman, one of the few modern sociologists who has seriously studied American Orthodoxy, made note of this trend in his pioneering study "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life," which appeared in the 1965 issue of the *American Jewish Yearbook*. In the past decade many of the new Yeshiva High Schools founded in such diverse communities as Philadelphia, Scranton, Denver, Long Beach, and St. Louis, have been organized and lead by musmachim of the Beth Midrash Govoha of Lakewood, itself a living monument to the sainted Rav Ahron Kotler. Surprisingly—or perhaps not so surprisingly—many parents themselves trained in Yeshiva University and other modern yeshivos, are sending their sons to these schools. Obviously, students in these yeshivos are taught the primacy of Torah learning to the exclusion of college studies, and their approach to the State of Israel and to secular culture differs considerably from that of the Yeshiva University High Schools, the Yeshiva of Flatbush, and Ramaz.

In addition, the expansionist philosophy of the Lubavitcher movement has made significant inroads in almost every major Jewish community, often giving spirited competition to already existing day schools which have prided themselves on their modern approach, and on their heterogeneous parent body.

The *Shitbel* and the *Hashkama Minyan* have drawn off from the modern Orthodox shul many of the young yeshiva graduates, much to the chagrin of the local Rav who has tailored his sermons and rabbinic style to the tastes of "the young people." How do we account for this radical change in direction? Is it due to inherent weaknesses in modern Orthodoxy?—or to a combination of the two factors?

Changes in American Life

It is indisputable that today's America is radically different from the America of the forties and the fifties. A general consensus on morality

The following article was adapted from a sermon delivered by Rabbi Riskin at his Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York City.

In the past decade many of the new Yeshiva High Schools founded in such diverse communities as Philadelphia, Scranton, Denver, Long Beach, and St. Louis, have been organized and lead by musmachim of the Beth Midrash Govoha of Lakewood, itself a living monument to the sainted Rav Ahron Kotler. Surprisingly—or perhaps not so surprisingly—many parents themselves trained in Yeshiva University and other modern yeshivos, are sending their sons to these schools.

In addition to his pulpit activities, where he has been highly successful in reaching young unaffiliated Jews, Rabbi Riskin is Professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University. He recently founded the Mesivta Ohr Torah in Riverdale, New York, a Yeshiva high school which has been acclaimed by Torah educators and may well become a prototype for future secondary yeshiva education in America.

It is indisputable that today's America is radically different from the America of the forties and the fifties. A general consensus on morality subscribed to by the religious and secular alike is no longer subscribed to in our society. Sexual conduct is no longer governed by moral standards, having given way to the "consenting adults" thesis. Pre-marital chastity is smiled at as a relic of a by-gone day, and it has even been declared by some to be "unhealthy." Objective ethical norms have given way to "situational ethics," which make ethical decisions a subjective matter governed by statistically-determined common practice. Deviations from normal sexual behavior are now alternative "life-styles," and the institutions of marriage and family are no longer viable. Removal of reference to the Divinity in the Pledge of Allegiance, has been followed by the removal of the "postulate of G-d" from civilized and intelligent discourse. Even Freud's acceptance of the need for restraint as a prerequisite for a moral society—expounded in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, has been superseded by Brown's *Eros and Civilization*, which insists upon incontinent behavior as the ultimate ideal for human society. Restraints are rapidly disappearing from the printed word, the theater, and the tv screen. It becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a synthesis of Torah values with contemporary values, with the radical changes in contemporary values and their imminent total obliteration.

Torah Attitudes and Inverted Marranoes

There is yet another factor operating here. Torah Judaism draws its strength from *Mitzvos Ma'asiyos*, from action imperatives. But these actions must be supported by *Mitzvos She'b'lev*, Torah attitudes which give meaning to our behavior. America has spawned inverted Marranoes: Jews who act out the rituals, but have the inner responses of the secularist.

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Emunah and Kedushah

Many of our synagogue "services" are sterile and noisy, devoid of the straining for Kavannah, for direction, which characterize the authentic effort to achieve an awareness of the Divine Presence. The closing prices on the New York Stock Exchange have a greater impact on the worshipper at the Shabbos morning service than the cry of *Shm'a Yisrael* climaxing with the emphatic "ECHAD." The siddurim, once stained by tears, are now marked with lipstick. The man or woman who musters tears during prayer—even on the

Emunah and *Kedushah*, Faith and Sanctity, are not easily achieved. Their temporal absence are understandable. But the absence of a striving after *Emunah* and *Kedushah*, which is widespread within the modern Orthodox community, is symptomatic of spiritual failure, and goes to the heart of many of the practical shortcomings that are more visible to the eye. Many of our synagogue "services" are sterile and noisy, devoid of the straining for *Kavannah*, for direction, which characterize the authentic effort to achieve an awareness of the Divine Presence. The closing prices on the New York Stock Exchange have a greater impact on the worshipper at the Shabbos morning service than the cry of *Shm'a Yisrael* climaxing with the emphatic "ECHAD." The siddurim, once stained by tears, are now marked with lipstick. The man or woman who musters tears during prayer—even on the

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Days of Awe—is looked upon as strange. Having lost our talent for the art of prayer, it is not surprising that many congregants arrive in the middle of the Torah reading on Shabbos morning, and begin to show signs of boredom after the *Mussaf Kedushah*. And despite all of the *kippot* at Grossingers, how many have the commitment to attend daily minyan?

A person shows his true mettle by how he spends his "spare time"—if one can properly speak of time, the very essence of our lives, as being superfluous. How many of us spend our evening hours with a *seifer*?—and how many of us spend our evening hours watching Johnny Carson? The plethora of kosher eating places in New York City offering Chinese, Italian, and French cooking may well be a legitimate sign of a more sophisticated American Orthodoxy but is a nightclub, replete with all the trappings of modern-day hedonism, a proper environment for an Orthodox Jew—even though the meat served is Glatt Kosher?

How many modern Orthodox Jews pride themselves on their children's "early admission" to an Ivy-League school, and aspire to their becoming scientists, attorneys, or physicians?—and how many look forward to a son who is a *talmid chochom*, a Torah educator, or a Rosh Yeshiva? Do we really believe that sitting in Grossinger's night club, or at the pool while wearing a *kippah* will inspire our children to be vibrant and committed Jews who will passionately accept their Jewish heritage and reject the valueless world of secularism? And is it any wonder that with all of our yeshivos American Orthodoxy has produced so few genuine Talmidei Chachemim? Producing authentic Torah scholars requires the single-minded intensity of purpose, and total devotion to G-d and his Torah, which modern Orthodoxy hardly reflects.

The Brighter Side

Having said all this is not to say that modern Orthodoxy must be declared bankrupt. Many of its teachings are indeed responsible for the strengths of Orthodox Judaism today. Secular learning in a university has become accepted by many yeshivas to the right of Yeshiva University. After all, most professions, with their opportunities for growth and fulfillment exclude the Orthodox Jew without university training. But beyond this: Torah scholars throughout the ages have noted that secular studies often make possible a deeper understanding of Torah. Many sections of the Talmud are closed to those not having a considerable grasp of mathematics. Many observations of the Sages of the Talmud become more understandable when viewed with the insights of modern advances in the dynamics of human behavior. And surely the Talmud (B.T. Shabbos, 75a) had no question about the inherent value of the physical sciences when it records the observation of Reb Shimon ben Pazi who said in the name of Reb Yehoshua ben Levi: *Regarding those who are equipped to make astronomical calculations, but choose not to do so, the Torah declares: "The work of G-d they fail to scrutinize, and the work of his hand they fail to see."* Hence secular knowledge, and especially the sciences, can provide valuable insights into the glories of the Almighty. Through biology one can perceive the wonders of the human organism and through physics the unity behind all of creation. Our challenge must be to insure the fact that our youth

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derive its axiological standards from Torah, and to adequately prepare them to extract the religious principles from the secular studies they pursue. This is especially crucial on the secondary level—where a high school diploma is mandatory—and must be maintained throughout the college and university level for those who are so directed. And if we attempt to seriously provide Torah study and Torah atmosphere for all of our youth on campus, commitment to such study may well become the pattern of life for many more of our Jewish scientists and professionals, who may come to see a more profound connection between the work they do by day and the Torah they study by night.

The Challenge of the State of Israel

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The establishment and existence of the State of Israel poses many fundamental religious questions for our generation. We dare not be too quick to embrace all the excesses of misguided patriotism to the neglect of the religious paradoxes. Certainly we deplore the religious indifference of some Israeli leaders—not to speak of open hostility to Torah. Our two-thousand-year-old dream was not for us to become a nation like all others, replete with crime, corruption, and pornography. Yet, what happened in 1948 was more significant than the establishment of a mammoth-size “Camp Massad” in the Middle East. The miraculous rebirth of a people from the very ashes of Auschwitz and Treblinka, the ingathering of exiles, the return of Jerusalem, all provide a dazzling confirmation of the visions of the prophets and the eternal Covenant of our People. Perhaps the debate over whether it was or was not the beginning of our redemption is moot—to be resolved only by the speed and the intensity of Klal Yisrael’s return to G-d and His Torah. However, the hand of G-d in contemporary Jewish affairs must be recognized by both the right and the left.

There is yet one more area in which modern Orthodoxy may be able to make a unique contribution. We have all neglected the ethical standards with which we relate to non-Jews and governmental agencies. The government of the United States, as well as those of other modern democracies, is based on *Chesed*, seeking to provide the largest good for the largest number of people. It is far different from the European states which did violence to human rights in their treatment of Jews, taking them out of the category of governments of whom the Talmud declared that “their law becomes in effect Torah Law.” No sin is more abhorrent than that of *Chilul Ha’Shem*, the desecration of the Divine Name, for which there is no atonement. If we wish to merit the respect of our fellow citizens, and their support of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, our conduct in the realm of human relations and financial affairs, must be above reproach. The Talmud records that Shimon ben Shetach made extraordinary efforts to return a lost gem to its non-Jewish owner, to cause him to praise G-d. So too must we rear a generation of Jews to whom ethical misconduct will be as abhorrent as the desecration of the Shabbos.

Some Conclusions

Modern Orthodoxy can make a major contribution to the mainstream of

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Torah life. Unfortunately, its strength is being lost because it has failed to provide an environment for the commitment to Torah study and Torah living as an absolute, without which Torah Judaism of any variety cannot survive. Living in two worlds, and hopping between two disparate value systems produces "parve" Jews, at best, and schizophrenic Jews, at worst.

"Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto G-d that which is G-d's," is a christological concept expressed in the Gospels.

"Be a Jew in your tents and a man in the marketplace," is a slogan of the Haskalah.

Neither of these concepts are compatible with Jewish survival. They must both be rejected in whatever modern-day dress they present themselves.

"Let all that you do be for the sake of Heaven." This monothesis must displace "synthesis" as the common ideal of a united Torah Jewry. Only when we join spiritual and scientific endeavor and our professional and personal lives to the service of the Almighty only when we strive to pursue Kedushah and Emunah in our daily lives, will we produce in American Orthodoxy the fiery commitment which will enable us to endure, and ultimately to prevail.

"Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto G-d that which is G-d's," is a christological concept expressed in the Gospels. "Be a Jew in your tents and a man in the marketplace," is a slogan of the Haskalah. Neither of these are compatible with Jewish survival. They must both be rejected in whatever modern-day dress they present themselves.

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