CHAPTER 7

Life Tradition and Book Tradition in the Development of Ultraorthodox Judaism*

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Rabbbi Simha Elberg is the editor of *Ha-Pardes*, the oldest established orthodox rabbinic journal in America. In the course of the mid-1960s, Rabbi Elberg twice called to his readers' attention a new religious phenomenon which he at first called *Bnei Braqism.*[1] The initial discussion appeared in a 1963 issue of *Ha-Pardes;* the second was in a 1965 issue of *Digleinu*,[2] the organ of the ultraorthodox Ze'irei (Young) Agudat Israel. He defined the phenomenon of Bnei Braqism as "the world of *ḥumrot*," that is, stringent interpretations.

"The Bnei Braq concept," wrote Rabbi Elberg, "embodies a *major revolution* (emphasis added) in the very structure of religious life. Bnei Braq is looking for increased rather than decreased stringency. Generally speaking, everyone, even within the religious world, is leaning toward greater permissiveness and lesser restrictivenes . . . not so Bnei Braq. A young yeshiva student under the spiritual influence of the Hazon Ish will, when approaching the Shulḥan Arukh [Caro's code of *halakhah*], search out that opinion which forbids, which restricts, which is more stringent. He will not look for the phrase, 'and there are those who are more lenient' nor will he abide by that sort of decision but will be on the watch for the words: 'there are those who are stricter.'"

Elberg, a very perceptive observer, thus graphically describes the new religious type who makes an all-out effort to discover whether one

of the commentators tends toward greater stringency, and when he succeeds in finding one who does, it fills his being with delight (*meḥayeh et nafsho*). He then adopts this stringent interpretation, putting it into practice in his home and in his daily life. This testimony fits in well with other evidence attesting to a major revolution in the total system of religious life. What characterizes this revolution is the readiness of the young to criticize the standards generally accepted within the religious community, in the realms of both custom and halakhah, and to institutionalize within their own lives precisely those alternatives which reflect a more stringent approach.

Elberg attributes this phenomenon specifically to those *avreikhim* (young yeshiva students) who live "under the spiritual influence of the Hazon Ish,"[3] Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karlitz, who had died approximately ten years earlier (1953)—a designation which, as shall be shown, is essentially correct. Elberg's description of the strictness-oriented *avreikh* (sing.), as one who "makes an all-out effort toward stringency," is undoubtedly highly ironic, especially when he says that "[the student's] very soul is refreshed" when he succeeds in finding a new *humrah* (sing.). Elberg, whose mother tongue is Yiddish, makes use here of a familiar expression taken from the folk idiom, *"er iz zekh mekhaye neifesh,"* (he refreshes his own soul). The use of this phrase, normally appropriate to physical satisfaction (for example, after a hungry person has been satiated) is not only ironic but also suggestive of an amused bystander. It is clear that Elberg could allow himself to relate to the world of humrot in this manner as it was then only in the first stages of its development. Since then, however, it has become one of the foremost phenomena at work in shaping the life style of all of orthodox Jewry. The tendency to criticize accepted halakhic standards and to prefer, for the most part, the more stringent alternatives is not limited to the modern religious camp. This development within the *ḥaredi* camp, however, arouses special interest from the sociological point of view.

Later on in this paper ḥaredi will be defined, but it is clear that one of the outstanding characteristics of that society is its greater commitment to the traditional, Eastern European Jewish way of life. This being the case, it would seem that significant self-conscious changes in halakhah and tradition, even if in the direction of greater stringency, would create tension, since such changes must in some way reflect a certain criticism of the religious leadership of one's forebears.[4] The rhetorical question: "Should we find fault with our predecessors?"[5] is

typically used by the watchdogs of the tradition when faced with change and innovation, even when it is in the direction of greater stringency. But this protest is not being voiced as the world of humrot, with its far-reaching changes in central areas of life, expands and conquers by the establishment of halakhic norms consciously different from those prevalent within the homes and the communal world of the previous generation.

Elberg believes that this is due to the influence of the Hazon Ish, and there is much truth in this assertion. As a case study, one halakhic area has been chosen for study—the *shi'urim* (standard measurements minimally required in the performance of a religious commandment)—in which the Hazon Ish developed norms which, while distinctly different from those generally accepted in the traditional camp, have nonetheless been adopted by almost all sectors of the ḥaredi community in a relatively short time. Briefly, a number of the *halakhot* (pl.) involve size, weight, volume, and the like. The most obvious example relates to the consumption of *matzah* (unleavened bread) at the Passover *seder* meal. Halakhically speaking, at the seder, one must eat a quantity of matzah at least "equivalent to an olive" in order to have fulfilled the religious obligation of eating matzah on Passover. But what is the exact size of an olive, technically speaking? According to the Shulḥan Arukh, an olive is slightly less than half an egg.[6] At first glance, these are two measurable items, the average size of which is unmistakable, being as they are both things found in nature. However, as early as the eighteenth century, one of the foremost halakhic sages, Rabbi Ezekiel ben Judah Landau, raises the possibility that "the nature of things has changed" (*nishtanu ha-teva'im*) that is, the sizes of olives eggs have actually changed over the centuries and are not the same today as they had been in the past.[7] When these ideas were first put forth, these legalistic ruminations had virtually no practical impact on the Jewish community.[8] However, once the possibility of natural things changing was raised and granted legitimacy, it created a potential for change. The Hazon Ish utilized this concept as a basis for a reevaluation of the major shi'urim in the halakhah,[9] and his conclusions represent a revolution in certain basic areas of religious life. He concluded, for example, that the present-day olive and egg are in fact significantly smaller in size than their counterparts in the mishnaic and talmudic periods. Therefore, in order to fulfill the commandment (*mitzvah*) of eating an olive's worth of matzah at the seder, one must actually eat significantly more than the generally accepted amount.[10] The fact is

that the shi'urim of the Hazon Ish have become an accepted halakhic concept, these new measurements having become normative for a large segment of the ḥaredi community.

This particular example has been chosen because it has more critical religious-halakhic significance than the ordinary humrot, for two reasons:

1. The change is a conspicuous one, relating to visible and enduring objects in ceremonies which are central to Jewish life. The strict interpretation generally requires the replacement of a ceremonial object (the *kiddush* cup, that is, the wine goblet used in inaugurating the Sabbath or festivals), or ceremonial clothing (*tallit qatan*),[11] in order to meet the new standards of the shi'urim.
2. The change is not seen in the framework of a preferred alternative, in which the previously accepted norm retains its legitimacy, but as an absolute norm implying negation of other alternatives.

It is not normally expected that such a change would take place within the framework of a conservative society in which the living tradition, including ceremonial objects, is passed on from father to son in an orderly fashion. The fact that the shi'urim of the Hazon Ish became the established norm within such a short period, and with regard to such a broad segment of the ḥaredi community, shows that the latter is indeed different in a number of respects from the traditional religious community as it had developed in Eastern Europe up until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The Concept of Haredi (Ultraorthodox)

The term *haredi* Jewry denotes a Jewish religious community with certain defining characteristics. It has occasionally been described as "traditionalist," committed to halakhah in its traditional interpretation, and also committed to a living, vital tradition (specifically that of Eastern Europe), expressed in dress, language, and the like.[12] This definition is only partially satisfactory because the Eastern European commitment is not equally strong in all areas, nor on the part of all segments of the

community. For example, even the most casual observation will reveal, that in those circles known as "Lithuanian" and connected with the *yeshivot gedolot* (advanced yeshivot), there is relatively greater flexibility with regard to the commitment to traditional garb and external appearance. In fact, it could well be argued that within these circles there is a conspicuous, self-conscious trend toward adopting Western European dress and outer appearance. Even if these differences are ignored, however, describing ḥaredi Jewry solely in terms of its traditionalism is inadequate because it overlooks the dynamic element of ongoing change so characteristic of this particular society in the last generation.

A statement, made in the name of Rabbi Israel Meir Ha-Cohen (the Hafetz Haim), provides a starting point for the understanding of the ḥaredi approach: "'Happy is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed' (Ps. 112:1–2). The man who truly and completely fears God and greatly desires his 'mitzvot' *does not look for ways to free himself from the mitzvot nor does he seek out* 'qulot' [leniencies, the opposite of humrot] and 'heteirim' [relaxations of restrictions], *but rather fulfills the halakhah as it is, without consideration,* and because of this he is assured that his seed shall be mighty upon earth."[13] This statement must be viewed against the reality of Jewish life in Eastern Europe from the second half of the nineteeth century onward. It was characterized by (1) the increasing erosion of religion and tradition which in turn created a rift between the religious and those who no longer considered themselves bound by religious law (secularists); and (2) a schism within the very community desirous of remaining faithful to halakhah, which developed against a background of growing modernization and secularization, leading to a gradual disintegration of traditional religiosity.

The situation can be described generally, if somewhat simplistically, where, on the one hand, there is a group which consciously aspires to adapt itself in one way or another to the technical, social, and political changes taking place around it (within the context of an overall process of secularization and modernization), while maintaining an essential loyalty to halakhah. This results in tension between the accepted halakhic norms and traditional practices, and the changing social, political, and technological reality; this tension is frequently resolved by means of a compromise granting legitimacy to the modern, up to the limits of halakhic possibility. Concurrently, a second group

develops which denies the legitimacy of this trend, not only because it deviates by definition from the established norms, but also because the very capitulation to changing reality, regardless of its formal legitimacy from the halakhic point of view, is seen as a first step in the erosion process which will undoubtedly end (so it is claimed) in the complete abandonment of halakhah as an obligatory norm.

It is in this context that we must relate to the words of the Hafetz Haim, one of the protagonists of the latter group, who accuses the opposite camp of looking for gimmicks by which to free itself from the mitzvot and for *qulot* and *heteirim*. His group is seen as aspiring to fulfill the halakhah as it stands, without consideration, that is, without taking the changing reality into consideration. By definition, this is a select group, an elite, whose heroic ideal is to carry out the mitzvot without consideration. It is paradoxical indeed that this ultraorthodox trend is able to develop and to establish itself precisely against the background of the disintegration of the traditional community as an organic society, bound together by a life style based on halakhah and the traditional practices of the community.

As a community which considers itself responsible for the provision of religious leadership to its members, seeing in this the primary expression of its independent identity, traditional society finds it difficult to cope with uncontrolled organization on the basis of the institutionalization of more stringent halakhic norms, as such organization is a threat to its own cohesion.[14] The formation of an elite based on the delegitimization of those who seek qulot and heteirim on the one hand, and the aspiration to fulfill the halakhah without consideration, on the other hand, leads to the creation of a new religious framework, which may be described as a "voluntary community," insofar as it cannot indiscriminately encompass within its bounds everyone living within a defined geographic area as does the traditional community.

Let us return to the statement of the Hafetz Haim. The religious type described as "one who fears God truly and completely" stands above the usual commonplace religious type. The term *yare'* (fearing), when used to denote this special religious type, is synonymous with the more widespread current term—*ḥaredi*, implying "precision without compromise."[15] The concept of ḥaredi is in fact a dynamic rather than a static one; it also has a psychological dimension, for it is precisely within these religious circles that emphasis is laid on the basic weaknesses of man as a human creature in constant struggle with his basic inclinations, a struggle which only ends with death. Thus, fulfilling the halakhah without considerations should be understood as a goal to which one constantly aspires, but whose attainment on a day-to-day basis is extremely difficult. Nevertheless, it is the obligation of the ḥaredi Jew to view this ultimate goal as the legitimate expression of Judaism in its entirety and to attempt to put it into practice.

Having said this, it must also be noted that ḥaredi Jewry considers itself by definition as bound to tradition. This means that there is an inherent tension between the obligatory attachment to tradition and its own inherent dynamism that encourages the breaching of the framework of tradition in the name of fulfillment of the halakhah without considerations and without qulot and heteirim.

Traditionalism in Eastern Europe, as carried within the family and the community, did not disappear but rather disintegrated, more quickly in the cities and less quickly in the small towns where change was relatively gradual. The living tradition, expressed in relationships and common memories extending back for several generations, and embodied in (1) the lives of individuals whose very existence testified to the validity of that tradition; (2) written testimony; and (3) the actual objects (both apparel and ritual artifacts), which were passed on from generation to generation, inhibited the dynamic potential for religious change inherent in the ḥaredi approach. However, against a background of the erosion of traditional life and of existential crisis within part of the Jewish community, ḥaredi organizational frameworks did develop in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland/Lithuania. These then formed the base for the future development of haredi Judaism.

The Yeshiva Gedolah

The yeshiva gedolah of the kind typified by the Volozhin Yeshiva,[16] has long been recognized as one of the most important internal developments to take place within the traditional Jewish framework. From the standpoint of the present discussion, this organizational/cultural structure provides the type of voluntary community ideally suited to the needs of ultraorthodoxy. Organizationally speaking, this type of yeshiva incorporates two innovations relative to the traditional Ashkenazi yeshivot:

1. It is not an institution of the community, but rather an economically independent organization supported by the contributions of individuals from many regions.
2. The vast majority of the yeshiva students are not from the community but come from near and far for the purpose of studying there.

This has two further implications.

1. The yeshiva is a total-like institution whose students are, for the most part, alienated from their surroundings and cut off from their families for most of the year, as a result of which they are united amongst themselves, especially around the figure of the *rosh yeshiva* (head of the yeshiva) and his family. (It is not surprising that the relationships created within this framework are often quasifamiliar.)[17]
2. The students are for the most part young bachelors, economically marginal, who devote most of their time to the study of Torah.

In this sense, the yeshiva is a moratorium institution, and can be defined as a quasimonastic community. Its members are, as has been noted, young men cut off from their families and from direct contact with the halakhic norms and customs which crystallized and became formalized within the local, familial tradition. They spend most of their time in the study of halakhic texts and codes.[18] The system of study employed in the yeshiva tends to develop the students' critical sense; the customs and traditions which they bring with them from home are also exposed to criticism. The seclusion of the yeshiva and the religious tension fostered within it combine to create a situation conducive to the systematic re-examination of family and community traditions through a confrontation with what might be referred to as the "tradition as it finds expression in the codes." The clash between the latter and the tradition anchored in the daily life of a traditional community is, as has been noted, a recognized phenomenon in Jewish history.[19] At times the rabbis succeeded in rooting out a practice which they considered to be misguided; at other times, they were forced to give in to reality and to sanctify that very practice.

Within the quasimonastic community, however, the confrontation was a totally different one. From the outset, the tradition embodied in the codes had the advantage: in the face of the truth emanating from the codes, there was simply no social framework that could be marshalled to come to the support of the ancestral tradition. In the traditional community, if a young man reached the conclusion that this custom or that halakhic norm did not measure up to the standard set by the codes, or if he wished to adopt the more stringent alternative, he would have immediately found himself in conflict with other members of his family and with his surroundings. Within the confines of the yeshiva, however, both the familial framework and the community experience became insignificant and unreal. The yeshiva, as a quasimonastic community alienated from its environment and from economic and social reality, knowingly nurtured the ongoing re-examination of behavior on the basis of a confrontation with the codes and supported the choice of the more stringent alternative.

As has been said, ḥaredi Judaism is consciously committed to the formulation of an elitist self-image. It is relatively simple to develop such an image within the closed groups of students devoted to the study of Torah. Indeed, one of the blatant characteristics of the world of the yeshiva students immersed in Torah learning is the image which they have of themselves as an elite with respect to everyone else, the masses, the *balebatim*.[20] A clear example of this is the saying that "the opinion of the *balebatim* is the reverse of the opinion of the Torah,"[21] which reflects an intellectually elitist self-image, contemptuous of all who are not a part of it. This is also the source of the inverted conception of *merkaz* (center) and *s'vivah* (surroundings, or periphery), which places the yeshivot at the *merkaz*, the true center of existence, in contrast to everything else, which is seen as simply the *s'vivah* in which everything is imaginary, and whose sole raison d'etre is to make possible the existence of the center.[22] The refrain of a Yiddish song,[23] popular among yeshiva students, expresses this clearly and unequivocally:

> When the world will be
> full of yeshivot
> Many centers
> and few peripheries
> They will learn Torah then
> without limit.
> Lord of the Universe, when will it be granted to us?

In such an atmosphere, no importance is assigned to practices and traditions that are seen to oppose the halakhic norms of the learned elite. The ḥaredi ideal of "fearing God truly and completely, without searching for gimmicks by which to avoid fulfilling the mitzvot," thus finds a fertile soil, well suited to its development, in the quasimonastic community exemplified by the Volozhin-type yeshiva.

Within the Jewish world of Eastern Europe, faced with extreme economic hardship, and with the very basis of Jewish existence being challenged and the erosion of religion and tradition on the increase, the world of the yeshivot was in a defensive position. Whereas such yeshivot had been open to general currents within the Jewish world at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by the end of the century they had become strongholds of the ḥaredi outlook, reinforced by the Musar movement.[24] Ḥaredism was concentrated in one part of the Jewish world (the Lithuanian/Polish sector), alongside the traditional community found in Hasidic Poland and in other areas with heavy Jewish populations. Paradoxically, it was the destruction of Eastern European Jewry in the twentieth century that created the conditions which enabled the spread of ultraorthodoxy.

New Social Bases of the Growth of Ultraorthodoxy

World War II and the Holocaust created new conditions conducive to the further development of the ḥaredi ideal. First was the changing geographic base or the transition to the West. World War II was the tragic climax to the process of migration, which had already started in the 1880s, in which the center of life and creative religious Judaism was transferred from Eastern Europe to the metropolitan centers of the West. This process, which enhanced the erosion of traditional society, eventually created a situation which was conducive as well to the development of ḥaredi society.

The geographic change caused a break in the direct personal relationships which had characterized the traditional community. In the western countries to which the migrants came, voluntary communities developed. The conditions for membership in voluntary communities are determined by the members themselves, thus replacing the traditional, geographically determined community.[25] The process of migration to the West, at least until World War II, was accompanied by secularization and the weakening of tradition, which naturally had an

affect on the character of the vast majority of voluntary communities, including those which consider themselves Orthodox. The latter have been pressured to adopt an attitude of tolerance toward deviation from religion and tradition, and even to find halakhic legitmacy for these trends. They aspired to create a harmonious relationship between halakhah and the values and norms of modern western society, and to minimize the points of conflict between them, based on the assumption that there is no essential contradiction between halakhah and modernity. At the same time, a similar process was under way in Eretz Yisrael; the development of the Zionist Yishuv (community) was also affected by the processes of modernization and secularization. Religious Zionism was also involved in this process, not only in that it had to grant legitimacy to the actions and omissions of militantly secular groups, but primarily in creating experimental social frameworks within which they sought to harmonize, in some way, halakhah and modernity. This experiment entailed what can only be called "concessions" relative to various elements of both tradition and halakhah. This author has previously defined this religious approach as "diminished religiosity" (Friedman 1984). Due to the fact that the process was realized within the framework of the creation of a new Zionist Jewish society in Eretz Yisrael, and in conjunction with the autonomous community groupings of the Yishuv under the authority of a local chief rabbinate, it led to an identification and overlapping between this diminished religiosity and religious Zionism.

Paradoxically, these very same processes formed the background for the development of stringency, that is, ḥaredism. Migration broke the direct connection with the traditional community and this was followed by the Holocaust which involved tremendous human loss and the destruction of the sociocultural milieu in which traditional religion had developed. Practically speaking, it also entailed a loss of household items and religious artifacts that had been passed down through the generations, and in which tradition and custom were embodied. When the tradition-minded groups who had survived the Holocaust came together in the sociocultural reality of the West and of Eretz Yisrael, they found that the living tradition, which they had cherished, had been totally broken; their aim was therefore to rebuild the society which had been and to enlist new members, given the existence of a diminished orthodox Jewish community in the background. Three main factors determined the direction which the renewal was to take:

1. The rupture of the living tradition, which had been transmitted directly from generation to generation, naturally created a sense of a lack of confidence, the remedy for which was found in the strengthening of the attachment to the tradition of the book, written halakhah.
2. With the disappearance of the traditional Jewish world of Eastern Europe in the smoke of the concentration camp furnaces, there developed within the general Jewish world a romantic nostalgic attitude toward the culture which had been. Within the confines of the Jewish society which remained faithful to halakhah, and especially among those elements desirous of reconstructing that which had been, this expressed itself in a clearcut tendency to see the society that was as having been composed of righteous people, a society in which daily life and the tradition of the book were in full harmony with each other.
3. The experience of diminished religiosity constituted a negative reference norm to those attempting to reconstruct the society that had been. The primary basis for the delegitimization of diminished religiosity was its deviation from the norms of halakhah and tradition as found in halakhic literature, based on an unequivocal commitment to the latter as the determinant of life's norms.[26]

These developments found expression within the framework of the voluntary community, an associational framework based on individual choice and not related in any essential way to a geographic determinant. The voluntary community reflects what Berger (1969, 137–49) calls "the market situation," which is characterized by the believer who is free to choose for himself the form of ritual to espouse within a community of believers that he chooses to join. Clearly, in a market situation, great importance is attached to the recruitment of new members to a given community, both for ideological and for straightforward economic reasons. It is this need to grow numerically that underlies the relative pluralism within the Jewish community, even that part of the community which considers itself bound to halakhah in its traditional sense (orthodoxy), and accepts the establishment of communities on the basis of the lowest common denominator in respect to halakhic obligation. At the same time, this

situation also allows for the creation of an exclusive voluntary community, based on an elite which tries to fufill the halakhah by choosing the more stringent alternatives. Moreover, the existence of diminished communities, characterized among other things by deviation from tradition and organized on a voluntary basis, frees the more strictly oriented community from its obligation to those who do not want, or are not able, to meet the criteria of a stringent ḥaredi religious approach.

It can therefore be said that it is precisely against the background of the disintegration of the traditional geographically defined community, and the development of voluntary communities, that the way was opened for an institutionalized expression of stringency as reflected in halakhic and Musar literature. Actually, this opened the way for individuals and groups to compete, as it were, among themselves on the degree of stringency and intransigency, within the range of alternatives found in the halakhic literature.

The stringent voluntary communities are in fact selective communities reflecting an elitist approach and are reminiscent of the quasimonastic communities described; the development of the former (ḥaredi) is surely related to the renewal and development of the quasimonastic yeshivot in the West.

The history of the yeshivot gedolot in the West and in Eretz Yisrael is both interesting and important, but cannot be discussed here. Briefly, it should be noted that, until World War II, these institutions were part of the Jewish religious culture of Poland/Lithuania, and, to some extent, of Hungary as well. In the West, they were seen as an essential antidote to the life style of the lands of immigration. A few attempts were made to establish institutions of this sort in Germany and Eretz Yisrael but their influence was at first marginal in the extreme. It was only after World War II that Volozhin-type yeshivot began to flourish there.

Several reasons can be given for this development. Among these are the development of the modern welfare state, economic growth, and the adaptation of traditional religious Judaism to the contemporary metropolis, allowing the recruitment of young people to the yeshivot communities for the entire period of socialization, until marriage and even afterward (in *kollel*-s).[27] Whatever the reasons for the growth of the Volozhin-type yeshiva in the West after World War II, there is no doubt that this development signals one of the most decisive changes within orthodox Jewry in the West and in Eretz Yisrael. The fact that, since the second half of the 1950s, the vast majority of the young men

who identify with the ḥaredi camp spent the most important part of their formative years—as human beings and as Jews—in a total-like institution has decisive implications for the image of present-day ḥaredi society.

A number of the relevant consequences of experiencing life within these quasimonastic communities have been discussed. To summarize, the removal of young people from their family circle during a period so crucial to the formation of their world view, and their placement in a totalizing framework in which they come face-to-face with the rich book tradition of the Jewish people, coupled with the crystallization of an elitist self-image and the concept of a center, are experiences which must lead to criticism of the parental religious tradition.

The fact that, beginning with the 1950s, the vast majority of ḥaredi young men spent all their time learning Torah within a Volozhin-type yeshiva (the dominant prototype today among Hasidic groups as well), reflects a most significant social change. The voluntary communities established by the graduates of these yeshivot, or in which they are the dominant element, are known as *kehillot lomdim* (communities of scholars). They are communities whose members are able to come to grips with halakhic questions by means of direct confrontation with the multifaceted legal literature of the codes, whether they continue to immerse themselves in the study of Torah or whether they direct their energies toward making a living. In the majority of cases the level of Torah knowledge of these young men is much greater that that of their parents.[28] This situation lays the foundation for the delegitimization of the traditions and practices of the families from which they came, the latter generally being put in the category of *'amei ha-aretz* (ignoramuses of the Torah).[29] If that same family is in any way identified with diminished religiosity, then the process of family rejection is greatly enhanced, since the only basis on which to recreate a completely religious/halakhic world is the corpus of legal decisions embodied in the codes.

Legal literature, like the rest of halakhic literature, is to be found throughout the ḥaredi community. There is hardly a ḥaredi family today that does not possess an extensive Torah halakhah library. This is particularly true of the middle generation which was educated in the yeshivot. In addition to the classics, one also finds more recent summaries of the codes, adapted to the strict approach. These are composed by *talmidei hakhamim* (scholars), primarily from the kollels; they relate to actual issues, are understood easily, and can be put into practice

directly. Most instructive is the fact that, prior to every holiday or out-of-the-ordinary halakhic/religious event, the book market is flooded with legal-type literature intended to guide the reader through the thicket of halakhot related specifically to the festival or event. The streets of ultraorthodox neighborhoods, such as Me'a She'arim in Jerusalem, or Bnei Braq, are covered with posters advertising the availability of this literature. Under these circumstances, the triumph of the legal tradition over the life tradition, as represented by the natural families, is assured.

One must not disassociate these changes from the reality of economics and technology. The rise in the standard of living of ḥaredi families living in the metropolitan centers of the West and of Eretz Yisrael, makes possible, for the first time in Jewish history, a Jewish existence in which one can live by the Torah and carry out the mitzvot in comfort; it is now economically feasible to meet the demands imposed by the stricter interpretation. The increased standard of living, combined with the modern welfare state, allows the vast majority of young men growing up in the ḥaredi community to achieve an advanced halakhic education. Technological changes also create new realities which make it possible to choose a stringent alternative, without that choice creating insurmountable difficulties. All of this undoubtedly influences the world of humrot.

Summary

This analysis has emphasized the background processes of secularization and modernization on the one hand, and the uprooting of Eastern European Jewry and its migration to the West on the other. The disintegration of the traditional Jewish community, the rise of the monastic community and a voluntarily based ḥaredi society are the factors which make the dialectic process of rebellion and continuity—as represented in the world of humrot—possible.

The importance of these factors in preparing the ground for the growth of ultraorthodoxy is highlighted by reference to the shi'urim of the Hazon Ish. The ability of Rabbi Karlitz to institutionalize these significant changes in ritual expresses, more than anything else, the rupture within the living tradition. Is it conceivable that within a geographically and historically continuous society, characterized by direct contacts between several generations, in which ritual objects are

handed down from generation to generation, that one person (as great a scholar as he might be) could arise and state that the accepted practices, relating to central ceremonies, must be significantly changed, without causing a reaction that would rock the society? The establishment of revised norms can only be understood against the background of a breakdown in tradition, on the one hand, and the emergence of a new generation, educated in total-like institutions and directly involved with halakhic literature, on the other. This almost complete commitment to halakhic literature, as the sole foundation for a fully religious way of life, makes it possible to create a religious experience and a new reality linked to past generations not through direct contact with their life style but through their books.

Notes

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1. Bnei Braq is a city near Tel Aviv in which there is a concentration of ultraorthodox groups.

2. *Ha-Pardes* (The Orchard), Kislev 5724 (New York), and *Digleinu* (Our Banner), Kislev-Tevet 5725 (Tel Aviv).

3. It is common practice to refer to famous rabbis by the name of one of their major works. The Hazon Ish immigrated to Palestine from Vilna, settling in Bnei Braq in 1935.

4. This problem has dogged traditional halakhic literature whenever halakhists have attempted to question a local custom which, while having been in practice for generations, has appeared to go against the halakhah. The technical phrase used by those who try to protect the tradition against the innovators is that the change would imply *la'az al ha-'avot* (slander of the progenitors). One well-known example took place in Perpignan, in the Provence, as the result of the arrival of disciples of Nachmanides, from Gerona, in the middle of the thirteenth century, and their questioning of local practice. In his treatise, *Magen Aboth* (1909), R. Menahem Meiri strongly resisted this attack, attempting to protect the honor and religious status of previous generations which had been indirectly undermined by the disciples of Nachmanides: "It behooves all those who would challenge, to consider the fact that the practices of our ancient forebears and the early sages, whose fingernails were superior to our bellies, were not devoid of reason. It is preferable to attribute it to one's own lack of knowledge than to the lack of knowledge on the part of our forefathers and the ancient sages."

5. This phrase is taken from a letter written in 1784 by R. Abraham Katzenelbogen to R. Isaac Levi of Berdichev in which he speaks out against changes in the ancestral tradition introduced by the Hasidim, changes expressing a pietistic trend toward greater stringency (see Dubnow 1962, 31).

6. *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Haim*, cap. 486. Another example is that of the size of the *revi'it* which, in regard to the wine drunk for *kiddush* (the blessing sanctifying the Sabbath) on Friday night, is "an egg and a half."

7. This has been discussed in the book on Tractate *Pesahim* by R. Y. Landau (1876, 109). The concept that "nature has changed" since talmudic times is already found in early halakhic literature. In every case, the concept is used to explain away contradictions between medical remedies or physiological knowledge in the Talmud, and the practical, everyday experience of the halakhists of a later period. For example: (a) The Talmud (BT *'Avodah Zarah* 24b) states that a cow less than three years of age is incapable of calving, which contradicted the experience of the Tosafists (twelfth to fourteenth centuries) who knew that a two-year-old cow could already do so. Therefore, the latter determined that "it is certain that the time period is different now from what it was in former times;" and (b) The Talmud (BT *Mo'ed Qatan* 11a) recommends the eating of fish close to the time when it begins to stink. To this the Tosafists commented that "in our time, those who [go to] the [fish] barrel near the time when it begins to stink are in danger." They explain away the contradiction between that which was medically accepted in their time and in talmudic times with the possibility that "it may have changed, like the medical remedies found in the Mishnah which are not appropriate to our time." However, the comments of R. Landau are essentially different as the reference is not to a contradiction between daily experience and the early sources, but to a new idea relating to central areas of religious life.

8. This arises out of the text itself which is exegetical rather than legal, as well as from the words of R. Landau's most distinguished disciple, R. Eleazer Flekeles (1809, *Yoreh De'ah*, cap. 324).

9. See *Kuntras ha-Shi'urim* in the commentary of the Hazon Ish on the *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Haim, Hilkhot Shabbat* (Bnei Braq, 1957). R. Karlitz was indeed preceded in this respect by the *Hafetz Haim*, R. Yisrael Meir Ha-Cohen (1896–197, *Hilkhot Shabbat*, cap. 271c), but he does not reach a definitive decision (like Karlitz), and his opinion is only a matter of good advice. See Ha-Cohen's commentary *Be'ur Halakhah*, there, to sub-cap. 13.

10. From the very beginning, the conclusions drawn by the Hazon Ish created a halakhic controversy. See Avraham Hai Noeh (1943) and Yaakov Kanevsky (1948). Kanevsky (Steipler), who was the brother-in-law of the Hazon Ish, attempts to come to grips with two issues: (1) the problem of changing that which had been accepted in the past; and (2) the extent to which the acceptance of the basic principle that the measures set by the Torah are relative rather than absolute ("when the shi'urim were given at Sinai, they were given in approximation"), would adversely affect the structure of traditional orthodox society.

This notwithstanding, he claims, it does not reflect any attempt to ascribe either truth or error to the views of various authorities. The legal decisions of the great sages of the generation, such as R. Landau, and those who came after him, are binding on all because these sages have been given the right to determine halakhah. See Kanevsky (1966, 15–17).

11. Many orthodox Jews of Eastern Europe provenance will wear a garment (usually between their undergarments and outer clothing), with ritual fringes attached. This is considered a fuller observance of the law (Num. 15:38) than just wearing the prayer shawl (*talllit*) during morning prayers. This special garment is known as the *tallit qatan*.

12. In my opinion the Eastern European, Ashkenazi character of ḥaredi Jewry remains unquestionable to this day. There are recent signs of similar developments within some segments of Middle Eastern Jewry but this is largely a self-conscious imitation of the ḥaredi (Ashkenazi) structure. The vast majority of the Middle Eastern ḥaredi Jews have studied either in Ashkenazi haredi institutions or in those modeled after them.

13. Meir Hai Yoshor (1959, 2:481n). See also "Hafetz Haim" (1838–1933), in *EJ*, 9:1068–70.

14. A good example of this is the incident cited by R. Jacob Reischer (1719, *Yoreh De'ah*, cap. 58). In one of the communities, the rabbis ruled that meat brought from the smaller communities of the surrounding villages was not kosher because the slaughterers in those places were thought not to know enough and/or not to be careful enough, by the stricter standards of the Jewish community in the large city. R. Reischer unequivocally rejects this approach, but not because he considered those slaughterers to be outstanding scholars. He admits that his position might be considered "lenient," but he defends it on the basis of the principle of the cohesion of the traditionally religious community, which might be adversely affected by the disqualification of village slaughterers. "It is proper for all Israel to be as one man in matters of eating and drinking, and not to distinguish, as Israel is distinguished from them (the nations); we should not multiply separate groups." There is no doubt that R. Reischer's approach represents a deeply rooted Jewish tradition.

15. See Avraham Wolf, one of the major ideologists of ḥaredi Jewry in the present generation, in the local periodical *Le-Hoshvei Shemo* (Bnei Braq), Tammuz 1979,21), wherein he describes the ḥaredi woman as "one who does not eat anything regarding which a scholar has made a ruling," that is, she is stricter for herself even with regard to something which a rabbi ruled as permissible for consumption because some doubt had been raised concerning it.

16. Volozhin, a town in Lithuania, was the site of a major yeshiva, founded at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which attracted students from many countries. Like other yeshivot gedolot, it emphasized the study of Talmud. See Stampfer (1981).

17. Almost every description of the rosh yeshiva (head of the yeshiva) by students emphasizes the fatherly image and the fact that his relations with them were oftentimes at the expense of his family. See, for example, Rabiner (1968, 37, 55).

18. Rabbinic literature which codified the halakhah in a brief, understandable, fashion, as opposed to the literature which discussed the various sides of halakhic questions.

19. See above, note 4.

20. Literally: home-owners. Those who (successfully) spend their time making a living rather than studying Torah.

21. See Meir Hai Yoshor (1958, 1:165n). Another example comes from the exegetic commentary of R. Elhanan Wasserman, one of the outstanding personalities of ḥaredi Jewry of the generation preceding World War II, on Hosea 4:12: "Anyone who rules (leniently) receives the support of the masses." See Aharon Sorsky (1970, 300n). This approach is the keystone of the overall attitude of the Hazon Ish and his disciples. Another example: "Most of the masses follow their base desires and, in any case, we know that the truth is the opposite of what is believed by the masses." See Shlomo Cohen (1966-1973, part 4, 242).

22. Moshe Sheinfeld, an outstanding ideologist of ḥaredi Jewry, wrote in the name of the Hazon Ish: "The Maharam from Lublin [sixteenth century] uses the expression the world asks very frequently and yet, if we go out into the streets of the city we will discover that 'the world' does not ask such questions at all. But we should learn from this that only those who are deeply engrossed in the questions and problems of the Holy Torah are called "the *true* world." See A. Rater (1978).

In haredi legends, the following story, which also reflects this attitude, is told in the name of R. Yehezkiel Loewenstein. "The Soviet authorities laid a long rail line in a remote district which was not economically viable (the Trans-Siberian Railroad), and no one could explain why the line had been laid and why it continued to operate. Only during World War II, when the line was used for the transfer of the Yeshiva of Mir from Lithuania to Japan, thus saving its students from annihilation, did the matter become clear. The railroad had been built and operated in order that, when the time came, it could be used to save the yeshiva." See *Kol be-Ramah*, local newspaper of the Ramat Aharon neighborhood of Bnei Braq, no 49, 1984.

23. Based on a song I learned in my youth as a yeshiva student. Its authenticity is vouched for by the rhyming which accords with Lithuanian Yiddish pronunciation.

24. The Musar movement developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century and stressed moral self-criticism. Musar literature became influential in yeshiva circles after it was viewed as a defense against secular influence.

25. Certain aspects of this process have been dealt with in Friedman (1982).

26. The following description of the changes which took place within the community of Gur Hasidim under the influence of R. Yisrael Alter, when their center moved from Poland to Jerusalem, is a typical reflection of this process: "On new/old foundations did R. Alter build his new house, the Building of the old House of Gur ... to adapt the ways of Hasidism to the halakhah and to every letter in the halakhah" (Levine 1977, 150).

27. An institution of advanced talmudic study in which married men spend their time when not engaged in making a livelihood. The Kollel in late nineteenth century Eastern Europe was associated with the Musar movement (note 24).

28. Moshe Sheinfeld attempts to explain this change as follows: "Only in the environment of the Jewish villages [in Europe], which was steeped in Torah and the fear of God, could one find simple Jewish folk who, despite their ignorance, were respectful of their rabbis and truly believed in God and in his Torah. Within the secular environment of the Yishuv [in Israel] there is no possibility of an exception to the rule: 'an ignorant person is not fearful of sin.'" *Digleinu*, Iyyar 5715 (1955).

29. This reality often creates tension within ḥaredi society. For example, the American R. Haim Poupko has stated: "Those who continue the tradition of their ancestors, and live by the rules of halakhah and behave according to what they have seen at home, are not sufficiently ḥaredi; there are even those who are ashamed of the splendid past of their forebears," *Tsohar* (Jerusalem), Nisan 1983. A graphic reflection of this situation can be found in the following vignette which appeared in *Ha-Modi'a*, January 29, 1982, the newspaper of Agudat Yisrael, the main ḥaredi political party. A group of ḥaredi children, whose appearance testified to this fact (clothing, sidelocks, and the like) is deep in argument. Suddenly, one of the debaters turns to another and says something which is obviously intended to decide the argument: "My grandmother saw it on TV." His companions are silent for a moment and then one says in amazement: "What! Your grandmother looks at TV?" (There is a generally accepted prohibition on watching TV among ḥaredi Jews.) The first child is confused for a minute but quickly composes himself and says: "My grandmother is from the previous generation."

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