

Modern Orthodoxy and the Road Not Taken: A Retrospective View

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The Oxford conference of 2014 set off a wave of self-reflection, with particular reference to my relationship to and role in Modern Orthodoxy. While the text below includes much of my presentation then, it covers a broader set of issues and offers my analyses of the different roads that the leadership of the community and I took—and why.¹

The essential insight of the conference was that since the 1960s, Modern Orthodoxy has not taken the road that I advocated. However, neither did it continue on the road it was on. I was the product of an earlier iteration of Modern Orthodoxy, and the policies I advocated in the 1960s could have been projected as the next natural steps for the movement. In the course of taking a different

¹ In 2014, I expressed appreciation for the conference's engagement with my thinking, noting that there had been little thoughtful critique of my work over the previous four decades. This was to my detriment, because all thinkers need intelligent criticism to correct errors or check excesses. In the absence of such criticism, one does not learn an essential element of all good thinking (i.e., knowledge of the limits of these views). A notable example of a rare but very helpful critique was Steven Katz's essay "Voluntary Covenant: Irving Greenberg on Faith after the Holocaust," in *Historicism, the Holocaust, and Zionism: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought and History*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 225–50, which was by far the most intelligent summary and searching critique of my theological responses to the Shoah.

I also want to thank Steven Bayme and Judith Weil for a close reading and critique of this article, which clarified many points and saved me from various errors in judgment or insight.

road, Modern Orthodoxy changed much of its cultural direction and religious style, and I argue that it took its eye off the distinctive mission and contribution of Modern Orthodoxy to pursue a copy of Haredi Orthodoxy. In other words, in choosing a different road, it lost its way.

GROWING UP IN MODERN ORTHODOXY

My parents were immigrants. My father was a *musmach* of Rav Hayim Brysker and a classic mitnagged, fully observant, a *talmid chacham*, who communicated the ultimacy of learning Torah. He also insisted that the Torah had a strong sense of justice and that God's primary demand was not ritual, but proper conduct between people (*bayn adam la'chavero*). His greatest dream was that his children should become American, at home in the country and loyal to its best values. He strongly conveyed the message that Christians in America were different from those in Poland. As they treated us well, so should we respect them and treat them with full ethical integrity. He understood that one of the prices of Americanization was that some people would become less observant or be influenced in their behaviors by American norms. He did not see such people as betrayers of the tradition or as evil.

Temple Beth El was the haute Modern Orthodox shul in Boro Park. My father was the rabbi of the *beit midrash*, teaching Talmud in Yiddish, while upstairs the rabbi spoke in English. The shul featured world-famous *chazzanim*, such as Moshe Koussevitsky. It had a choir and even installed an organ (but it was never, ever played). There was one Conservative congregation in the neighborhood, Temple Emanuel, which was completely traditional in all its services, but allowed mixed seating. The leadership of both synagogues treated each other with respect. Sometimes on holidays, after praying in his own shul, my father would stop off with me to hear the other Koussevitsky brother, David, at Temple Emanuel, because he wanted me to hear the beautiful *chazzanut*.

America had a certain normative weight in mid-twentieth century Modern Orthodox religious life. It was taken for granted that there were some people who worked or went in to their business on Shabbat, because that was the price of integrating in America. It was not seen as permitted activity, but those people were not looked down on or denied *aliyot* or synagogue honors. Temple Emanuel was seen not as the lair of some heretical, rebellious group, but as reflecting the price that some people paid out of respect for American customs.

At that time American Modern Orthodoxy was Zionist to the core. I was nurtured by the religious Zionist youth movement, then called HaShomer

Hadati (renamed Bnei Akiva after 1948). Profound Religious Zionist experiences inspired my teenage years, including demonstrating for and fundraising in support of the nascent state of Israel. All our Zionist activities were coeducational. We sang together and danced in concentric, if separate, circles. From the Hebrew Institute of Boro Park elementary school, I went on to attend Yeshiva University High School. I already had the idea that Modern Orthodoxy meant positive interaction with American culture. I read widely in American and world literature, and I even had some glimmers of the idea of a synthesis between the two cultures.

In college this positive attitude took the form of the decision to become a college professor teaching history. This was a highly respected profession, representing success in America. For some of my peers, becoming an American rabbi (Conservative/English-speaking/well-paid) was an equivalent form of successful Americanization. Young Modern Orthodox men did not think much of becoming a *rosh yeshiva*. Most of my teachers in advanced Jewish studies were European-born and -cultured.

There was one digression from my steady journey on the path of Modern Orthodoxy. I was planning to go to Yeshiva College, when I encountered Beit Yosef Novaredok, a yeshiva of the extreme right wing of the Mussar movement. All the teachers and the students were refugees—survivors of Siberia or of the concentration camps—who had settled in Boro Park. The *rosh yeshiva* told my father that they were thinking of taking in a few American boys, and, since my father respected him as a real *talmid chacham*, my father suggested that I take a look at the school, even though he was agnostic about Mussar. I stumbled into an intense meeting of learning *mussar b'hispaylus*, a highly emotional session of chanting and acting out Mussar moral maxims, and was so moved that I decided to attend this yeshiva.

This decision had a tremendous impact on my life in three ways. First, Beit Yosef was a hotbed of premodern yiddishkeit, and the religious dimension was not “filtered” by the modern. There was a sense of *hashgachah*, that God was close and directing everything in life. It was a profound religious encounter which showed me the limits of Modern Orthodoxy—or, rather, that it needed to be deepened (i.e., less domesticated spiritually).

This insight planted seeds that did not bear fruit until decades later. I sensed that Modern Orthodoxy had gone too far in accommodating the conventional, modern, rational reading of religion. It needed to restore an intense religious experience dimension to its life. This could be carried out in the form of a synthesis with the religious experiential component of the premodern culture

or by going deeper into modernity to a level that recognized and enabled an ongoing access to religious experience.

Secondly, Beit Yosef continued the tremendous emphasis on the centrality of ethics, the importance of character-building, the need for ongoing self-analysis and self-criticism. This reshaped my life. It taught me that Judaism was about human beings and about making a person into a mensch. The school focused on character and on personal development. The goal was to break the ego, by concentrating on self-criticism and self-analysis and simultaneously working to improve personal characteristics (overcoming anger, honors-seeking, impatience) and intensify respect for the other. This was the beginning of my thinking of Judaism as a way of shaping people into *tzelem Elokim*, the image of God.

The third profound effect of Beit Yosef was a by-product of my rebbe's decision to switch the special class for the American boys to the afternoon hours, which allowed me to go to Brooklyn College in the morning. There I encountered all the intellectual issues that I might have avoided had I gone to Yeshiva College or to Brooklyn College at night. I was introduced to the challenges of history/critical studies and of philosophy of religion, as well as to the conflicts between science and religion. Each of these challenges was a shock. Neither my father nor the *rosh yeshiva* had answers for the burning questions raised by my college courses. This really forced me to become Modern Orthodox. I could not retreat to the fundamentalist position, because I had already been exposed to the contradictions and to the debunking cultures/studies of modern civilization. I did not want to turn secular. This drove me toward Modern Orthodoxy, in the form of a synthesis and reconciliation between the two cultures.

Thanks to its dynamism, my yeshiva made another contribution to my religious life. It showed me that I could live dialectically. I could feel the religion was absolutely true, God was very much present, and the mitzvot were commanded. Nevertheless, in the mornings, I could learn about science, evolution, and the understanding of the Torah as not literal. This caused turmoil and religious searching and rethinking. But thanks to Beit Yosef and its profoundly persuasive religious culture, the Torah remained very serious and retained its ultimate claims.

For the rest of my professional career, the greatest impact of Beit Yosef was in its emphasis on *zikui harabim*, "the highest calling," which was to share and teach Torah to everyone else. In Poland when one finished studying and received ordination from the school, the expectation was that the graduate would go out and start another yeshiva. At Novaredok they emphasized that you had to be a Jewish educator and spread Torah to the Jewish people. I dreamed of creating an educational enrichment outreach to the whole Jewish

community. That urge never left me, and it came to dominate my career. Also, there is no question that the Beit Yosef experience seared into my soul that religion and Jewish identity were of ultimate significance. They remained central instead of shriveling or disappearing as they did in the lives of many other ambitious sons of immigrant Jews who entered American society and climbed the ladder to success.

The paradox was that another part of myself wanted to be Irving Greenberg, an *echt* academic. I wanted to fulfill my father's dream of becoming all-American. That is why I determined to go to Harvard, fortified by my conviction that the philanthropists who would support my educational mission to the Jews lived in Boston.

For the next decade, I lived with these two polar navigational stars. Guided by the religious vision I received from the yeshiva, I felt called to Young Israel of Brookline synagogue, where it was revealed to me that the Feuerstein family, an Orthodox philanthropic family just rising to national prominence, would back me in initiating a major religious outreach to the Jewish world. In the end, however, although I connected well with the family, they did not underwrite my vision of *zikui harabim*. They were moving to strengthen Torah U'Mesorah, the organizational seedbed of the burgeoning day school–movement. In the process, they handed that organization over to the spiritual guidance of the *roshei yeshiva* of the traditional yeshivot.² At that time, I did not grasp the significance of the move.

RABBI SOLOVEITCHIK'S INFLUENCE

In Boston, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, a giant among Modern Orthodox thinkers, had already set up the Maimonides Day School as coeducational, even in Jewish/sacred studies. He internalized the American norm as calling for women to have an education as good as the men, and introduced the study of Talmud for women—although this directly went against a Talmudic ruling that was the standard in Orthodox schools worldwide.³

When I encountered him in person in Boston, after I moved there for my graduate studies, I had a great and unequivocal experience. We met in his weekly *shiurim* (Torah lectures), given for the Boston Chevra Shas, and later I

2 Rabbi Soloveitchik kept the Maimonides School away from that influence.

3 Maimonides Day School was founded in 1937. See the discussion in Seth Farber, *An American Orthodox Dreamer: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Boston's Maimonides School* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2004).

participated in *shiurim* at his home, in summer sessions, and other opportunities. He inspired me to be a Modern Orthodox Jew for life.

I had already received *smicha* and considered myself a serious, learned Jew. Yet he reframed my understanding and taught me much richer patterns of meaning for everything that I knew: “The *halachah* became more than the sum of its thousands of observances and details. It was the system by which to live humanly, a way to seize life whole, a confrontation with the dilemmas and anxieties of existence.”⁴

Rabbi Soloveitchik modeled a true openness to modern culture and how one could learn from it and use its categories to find the deeper meaning in every aspect of Torah. It seemed obvious to me that his thinking had been immensely upgraded and his ways of interpretation broadened and deepened by his exposure to new paradigms of philosophy and science in PhD studies at the University of Berlin. Perhaps drawing from his struggles when he encountered secular studies, he showed his students how to ask questions boldly and thus get better answers from the sources. No one had ever articulated for me, as he did, the poetry, spirituality, and profoundly intellectual dimensions of the tradition. He encouraged me to pursue my secular studies and to find religious insight and explanatory paradigms for my spiritual explorations. I loved the man.

Years later, I came to understand his weaknesses. He had a strong apologetics streak. He would weave an idealized frame around a tradition that was so persuasive that it would blind him (and others) to actual problems or human suffering in the real situation. Most of all, he did not fully grapple with the reality that rethinking the tradition in the new setting would require revisions in moral assumptions, halakhic regulations, and understanding of classic concepts such as revelation, authority, and miracles. He did some of the necessary rethinking—as in improving women’s education, by stressing the universal against the tribal in Orthodox ethics; and *halakha*, by redefining miracles,⁵ etc. However, he often did this not by openly saying that there was a problem,

4 Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way* (New York: Summit, 1988) 7–8.

5 See, for example, his treatment of miracles in Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, ed. Michael S. Berger (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2005), 187–91. He wrote: “The word ‘miracle’ in Hebrew does not possess the connotation of the supernatural. It has never been placed on a transcendental level. ‘Miracle’ (*pele, nes*) describes only an outstanding event which causes amazement. ... Whether God planned that history adjust itself to natural catastrophe, or vice versa ... is irrelevant” (187–8). The timing of the Exodus miracles makes them a miracle. Thus, Soloveitchik fits miracles into an unchanging natural order without openly repudiating the supernaturalistic conception or acknowledging how strong the fundamentalist conception is in the Bible and traditions.

but by asserting his view as if it were the traditional or Torah view. He did this without acknowledging that the tribal or premodern view was widely present in the sources and maybe even dominant among his peers. Furthermore, he did not come to grips with such issues as historical development. This left the door open for some students, fundamentalist and legalistic in their thinking, to take over his legacy and develop it so as to become congruent with yeshivish/Haredi Orthodoxy.

This is not meant to diminish Rabbi Soloveitchik's contribution to my development. His ideas continued to shape my thinking and stimulate new insights in later years. Decades after, his idea that the Torah must work in every civilization took me to the next step on the path of synthesis. I concluded that the new modern civilization was so dynamic—and had brought with it such political/economic/social advances—that it would win out historically and become pretty much universal. Already most of the Jews of the world had willingly joined this cultural system. The Holocaust wiped out the largest part of those that had not. The expulsion of the Arab Jews from Muslim lands after the birth of Israel transferred that large fraction of premodern Jewry into the setting of modernity. Therefore, Judaism must be able to live and flourish in modernity's physical/cultural environment. Jewish identity and religion had to evolve and successfully adapt to this new context. Following Soloveitchik's line of reasoning, I concluded that belief in the eternity of Torah mandated that we must develop the religious understanding and cultural resources needed to enable Torah to function effectively and evoke loyalty in the new environment. Finding a shelter and/or staying out of modern civilization was wrong and probably futile.

No less important: modernity and some of its assumptions would have to be modified or reshaped to enable this successful integration without assimilation. It seemed to me that these needed changes were implicit in the unfolding of postmodernism. I concluded that the Orthodox, who correctly believed that the whole tradition should be brought with us in the new culture, would need to upgrade various moral positions in our heritage, lest it be experienced as ethically inferior. Successful adaptation would also require wider or more sophisticated understandings of classical concepts such as revelation (*Torah min hashamayim*), authority, covenant, etc. We would also be required to adjust the balance in the tradition between heteronomy and autonomy, between universal and particular, discipline and restriction, experiential and expression, individual and community—even as we would need to correct the host culture and rebalance various standard ideas and values of modernity. My belief in the divinity

of Torah gave me the confidence that this could be done and that Judaism could compete successfully in this civilization.

The groundwork for such an approach was laid down by Rabbi Soloveitchik, who portrayed the Haredi worldview as fundamentally flawed, in that it refused to engage with modernity or the political realities that necessitated Zionism. The underlying Haredi assumption that the Torah could not maintain itself in a modern dynamic culture or function within the urban, methodologically sophisticated, university-educated milieu, he said, denied the eternity of Torah.⁶ Thus, despite its resemblance to ultra-Orthodoxy, Modern Orthodoxy at that time was affirming a very different conception of religion: that ours is a Torah of life which must be lived in its time, in every era. Therefore it must engage and be credible in the new, modern culture of humanity.⁷ To me this implied that Modern Orthodoxy was committed to get even more involved in contemporary culture and needed to develop the capacity to show that the Torah could function credibly and sanctify life in it.

The next logical historical step could have been an affirmation that Modern Orthodoxy was defined by a commitment to enter fully into the new culture, while maintaining the whole Torah. The legitimate outcome of that aspiration would be a deeper mutual fructification.

THE HOLOCAUST TRANSFORMS MY THINKING: PLURALISM FOLLOWS

As I see it today, the problem with Modern Orthodoxy of the '50s and '60s was that it had a shallow understanding of (or would not deal with) the hardest issues raised by modernity. If one understood modern culture in depth, the problems that most of my teachers and the Modern Orthodox books I read, dealt with and offered answers to, were not credible. In truth, I did not feel that I had answers for the contradictions and challenges that I met in college. At the same time, the religious experience in the yeshiva was so gripping, and I was so in love with my family and my religious life, that I was not going to give up religion just because of these deep questions. I concluded that I would have to fashion a religious understanding that would be persuasive (and magnetic and livable) in the presence of an unfiltered modernity.

6 See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Hamesh Drashot* [in Hebrew], trans. David Telsner (Jerusalem: Machon Tal Orot, 1974), 97–100, 111–13.

7 Ibid.

Graduate studies in American Intellectual History at Harvard from 1953 to 1959 enriched my knowledge base and deepened my love for America. However, they had relatively little impact on the competing intellectual/cultural claims of religion and modern culture on my understanding. Marrying Blu Genauer in 1957 became a major intellectual/spiritual factor in the further development of my thinking and work, which unfolded as we grew in mutual interaction over the years.

I completed my PhD in the summer of 1959, but I still had not resolved the two impulses in me. When I was offered an academic position at Yeshiva University, it was a kind of fence straddle. Yeshiva University engaged in Jewish education, so I would have some entrée into the Jewish *chinuch* world, and the dean told me he wanted to improve the intellectual quality of the college, so I could be a high-level academic. I sensed that this could lead to an advance level of synthesis between religion and modernity. Soon after I arrived, a group of the new faculty, headed by Aharon Lichtenstein, Charles Liebman, and myself, started meeting regularly to discuss issues of Modern Orthodoxy and to consider how to improve Orthodox/Yeshiva education. That aspiration—for interaction and synthesis between the two parts of the school—was the key to my accepting the offer from Yeshiva University.

The next major turning point in my intellectual/theological life came in 1961, when I received a Fulbright scholarship to teach at Tel Aviv University. As religious Jews, we chose to live in Jerusalem. The week we moved there, a friend called to say that he could obtain really hard-to-get tickets to attend the Eichmann trial in its last week. I replied, “No, don’t bother. I can read about it in the newspaper.” Yet within a couple of weeks, I became totally caught up in the Shoah, spending most of my time at Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Authority in Jerusalem.

Twice a week I would drive to Tel Aviv to teach American intellectual history at the university. The rest of the time I was immersed in the Holocaust. It was an overwhelming and devastating experience for which I was wholly unprepared. Heretofore I had been a happy, religiously fulfilled Orthodox Jew. But there was no way I could reconcile what I was reading at Yad Vashem with my traditional outlook and what I thought was God’s role in the world. Nor could I resolve the contradiction between the depth of horror that I relived all day and the return home, seeing Jerusalem bursting with life and meeting Blu and our son Moshe daily, growing, kicking, laughing. There was an irreconcilable contrast between drowning in death all day and being flooded with life at night. On the one hand, the Jewish people were alive; God was alive; and the

covenant was being fulfilled before my eyes as Jerusalem was rebuilt. On the other hand, the Shoah had occurred, and death seemed to have been victorious, with divine intervention nowhere in sight. The struggle to resolve these two realities became pivotal. To this day, the tension between Israel and the Holocaust, between life and death, between God present and God totally absent, is something I wrestle with and feel constantly.⁸

The yearlong experience in 1961 changed my life trajectory in another way. I no longer wanted to be an academic; I wanted to work primarily for the Jewish religion and to heal and bind up the wounds of the Jewish people. When I came back to Yeshiva University and wanted to teach Jewish studies, Dr. Samuel Belkin, president of Yeshiva University, said, “With your Harvard PhD, why would you want to teach Jewish history?” As a classic Modern Orthodox Jew of those days, he had internalized the higher status of that which was American.

With encouragement from my students, I decided to introduce a course on the Holocaust. The course was approved by the faculty, but for two years in a row the dean vetoed it. He feared that it would destroy the credibility of the rigorous and highly successful premedical program. He finally signed on the course when I changed its name to “Totalitarianism and Ideology in the Twentieth Century.” But the administration’s inadequate understanding of the need to come to a new relationship with the secular/general culture continued to dog my steps, and I had to fight for every Jewish-themed course that I wanted to teach.

That struggle partly explains how I ended up becoming rabbi at the Riverdale Jewish Center in 1965. I had never wanted to be a pulpit rabbi, but I was looking for an outlet to serve the Jewish people full-time, and the shul offered me the opportunity to focus completely on Jewish matters. Initially, I did not leave Yeshiva University, but the shul came to be the center of my life and gave me the chance to build a community, create a school, and explore theologically my burning questions about tradition, modernity, and the Holocaust.

As I struggled with the theological conundrum of the Holocaust, I came to see that Modern Orthodoxy was not the sole legitimate Jewish position—nor was it a fully adequate one. Neither before, during, or after the catastrophe, did Orthodoxy (or any of the other movements) have the answers. In fact, the rest of Jewry—especially American, secular, Federation-oriented Jews—were

8 See Irving Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity After the Holocaust,” in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1977), 7–55.

ahead of the Orthodox in focusing on the Holocaust and the centrality of Israel. I looked at the other religious and secular Jewish movements with new respect—not least for their heroism (and that of all Jews) in reaffirming their Jewishness in the face of such a monstrous past and future danger. The conclusion was that Modern Orthodoxy, all by itself, was not adequate to meeting the challenge of the Shoah.

The study of the Holocaust also drove me to Jewish–Christian dialogue. I was convinced that Christians had set the Jews up for the Nazi onslaught through the teaching of contempt over the millennia. Blu and I openly stated that our goal was to stop Christianity’s teaching of hatred. Yet we soon discovered that the Christians that we engaged with were ahead of us in wanting to clean up Christianity. They wanted it to stop being associated with spreading hatred. They were ahead of us on other issues too, such as *tikkun olam*. Seeing their religious and moral lives, I began to recognize that Christianity had positive and redemptive elements. We saw the power in the religious ways and the moral force and inspiration in Christian ethical teachings. This moved me away from the unthinking, patronizing feeling that Christianity was only a good religion in that it incorporated so many positive Jewish teachings.⁹ The process of dialogue was an instructive and moving experience. This led me to think that the same procedure should be tried among Jews. Thus was born the core element of CLAL—a center for intra-Jewish dialogue and pluralism. Literally meaning “everyone” in Hebrew, CLAL was also an acronym for the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

Another post-Shoah experience that led to pluralism came through a friendship with Rabbi David Hartman. In 1965 Hartman convened a group of rabbis to study together, and he invited me to join with him in planning an institute. We called it the Canadian Center for Advanced Jewish Studies. In addition to Orthodox rabbis, we extended invitations to Eugene Borowitz and Emil Fackenheim, and other Conservative and Reform rabbis.

As we met for a week of intensive learning and conversation, I quickly concluded that the concepts underlying their movements were validated by the fact that they could produce such learned and faithful people. Out of an exchange with Jakob Petuchowski, I came to see that Jewish law was unfair to women with respect to the laws governing the issuance of a *get* (Jewish divorce document). Until that moment, I had complacently assumed that the halakha was entirely

9 See Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 3–48.

adequate and Reform Jews made changes lightly because they knew little or nothing about it. The encounter with Petuchowski and the other Reform rabbis crystallized my nascent pluralism. I concluded that not only were Reform Jews performing a service by reaching Jews that Orthodoxy could not, but also there were corrections needed in Modern Orthodoxy.

I was no less inspired by making a deep personal connection with Emil Fackenheim, whose critique of modern thought lit my path toward a synthesis (between equals) of modernity and tradition. He joined in my conviction that the Holocaust was a turning point in Jewish and general history—and this buoyed me when many colleagues and peers rejected any attempt to give theological weight to the catastrophe.

I was so inspired by this pluralist group that I considered it to be my spiritually sustaining community. This gave me the inner fortitude to defy the growing attempt to enclose Modern Orthodoxy and marginalize all who challenged the emerging centrist consensus. At that time, I had no institutional framework to act out my pluralism, but this Canadian experience provided a prototype for my conception of CLAL in the 1970s. I emerged from these summer institutes convinced that dialogue with liberal Jews and learning from them would help me become a better Orthodox Jew.

But the Yeshiva University community was moving in the reverse direction, becoming convinced that cutting off from the liberal Jews and reducing the influence of modern values would serve Orthodoxy better.

THE 1960S AND THEIR IMPACT

A year after I went to Yeshiva University, the 1960s arrived in America. In the 1950s the dominant tone had been monocultural. When I came to Harvard, for the first two years I did not wear my *kipa*. Without being told, I understood that this was a religious symbol outside of the regnant culture. Only in the third year did I decide to come out of the closet and wear the *kipa*. Most of my Modern Orthodox peers continued not to wear head coverings in public, non-Jewish spaces.

Then came the cultural revolution of the 1960s. There was a new mix of utopianism and pragmatism and a dream that America could quickly transform itself and also create a culture for an individualist, self-fulfilling, just society. The United States would be multicultural and open to all. Those groups hitherto suffering discrimination—blacks, women, gays—would become fully integrated and empowered, and would flourish. Many people mentally added Jews

to the list. I was optimistic that this would be good for the Jews—for if “black was beautiful,” then Jews could express themselves distinctively and outwardly as well.

As humanism, optimism, and multiculturalism came to the fore in America, the university was the environment where these rising values swept the field. The number of students attending university grew rapidly, while the number of Jews going to college exploded. Clearly, the college experience would become a decisive force not only in American life generally, but especially in the Jewish community.¹⁰ I became the adult advisor/spiritual leader for Yavneh, a student-initiated Orthodox college group whose founders sought to sustain Orthodox life and observance on campus. Yavneh’s programs encouraged students to embrace the understandings (which often challenged the simple traditional education they had received) and reach a higher-level synthesis of the tradition with American culture. This work was an ideal outlet for my spiritual and educational calling.¹¹ It led me to reflect more generally about the challenge to American Jewry’s capacity to live fully and maintain its distinctiveness in the rapidly opening society.¹² I also saw new opportunities for Jewish education. If ethnic studies were introduced to uphold multiculturalism, then Jewish studies could also be introduced. They could overcome some of the weaknesses of the shallow or nonexistent Jewish education given to many Jewish children.

By the middle of the decade, the definition of my calling to do *zikui harabim* widened. I wanted to help the Jewish people adapt to living distinctively while participating fully in an open society. Most American Jews were focused on becoming American, and the programs of the community institutions stressed nonsectarianism and universal liberal values. What would happen when Jews were totally accepted? Would there be enough Jewish content left in their lives to function as Jews? Once being Jewish (and the Jewish message) lost the protective tariff of antisemitism, would American Jews buy the total American package, including assimilation? The initial impact of the college experience was, in most cases, to diminish or erode Jewish identity. This was an early

10 See Irving Greenberg, “Jewish Survival and the College Campus,” *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 17, no. 3 (1968): 259–81.

11 See Benny Kraut, *The Greening of American Orthodoxy: Yavneh in the 1960s* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2011).

12 Irving Greenberg, “Adventure in Freedom—Or Escape from Freedom? Jewish Identity in America,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (September 1965): 5–21.

warning that most Jews' identity was shallowly nurtured and highly dependent on the now rapidly disappearing cultural shelter and ethnic exclusion.¹³

Now that through the State of Israel the Jews were responding by taking power in history, this called for revision in thinking on many fronts. Gradually, the Holocaust and Israel were becoming more prominent in American Jewish consciousness. There was an urgent need to recover the primacy of Jewish identity, especially if the community was to have the intestinal fortitude needed to stand up for Israel in times of difficulty. Jews who grasped the nature and lessons of the Holocaust would be empowered to reshape the host culture, even as they joined the new society. I believed that to stay religiously Orthodox in an open society meant that one had to critique, and not merely passively adapt, to the society.

In 1963, inspired by Jacob Birnbaum, Blu and I became active in the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry. The movement was particularly appealing to Modern Orthodox Jews. SSSJ had a strong *clal yisrael* (Jewish solidarity) orientation and was driven by the determination not to allow a repeat of the abandonment of European Jewry in the Holocaust. No less important was the participants' absorption of the American message of activism. This included imitating the role model of college students in challenging the establishment and taking the lead to protest and transform American politics. The mainstream Jewish organizations hesitated, because they were not yet comfortable with actively asserting distinctive Jewish interests and causes in the American public domain. Similarly, the Haredi religious leadership—including the European *roshei yeshiva* at Yeshiva University—held back, because they internalized the traditional Jewish outsider fear of confronting or offending political authorities.

The '60s activism and spirit of communalism was also expressed in my work at Riverdale Jewish Center. The goal was to nurture a synagogue that was a community, not just a house of prayer. We started SAR Academy to create a day school that would give a higher-level integration of Jewish and Western culture.

I became involved with the student group that took over the General Assembly of the Jewish Federations and demanded a more Jewish agenda for the community, with priority funding for Jewish education and culture. Conservative Rabbi Steven Shaw, a pioneer religious activist, introduced me to the world of federations. The takeover evoked tremendous resonance in the American Jewish community. This convinced me of the power and value of working in a pluralistic manner to foster a more Jewish agenda. In 1974 Steve

13 See the extended treatment of these issues in the articles cited in "Adventure in Freedom."

joined Elie Wiesel and me to found CLAL (then called the National Jewish Conference Center).

Throughout, I kept in touch with Jewish studies, which were growing rapidly in the university world. In 1970 a group of scholars came together to create the Association for Jewish Studies to encourage the growth, set standards, and nurture the expanding cohort of Jewish scholars who taught in this field. I saw academic Jewish studies as an important part of the Jewish future: since the overwhelming majority of Jewish students were going to attend university, Jewish learning and identity would have to make it there. Jewish studies professors overwhelmingly insisted that the academic standards in Jewish studies must be upheld and kept at a higher level than ethnic studies that suffered from undue politicization. I believed that university-level Jewish studies would constitute an affirmation of pluralism and of Judaism's presence at the highest levels of culture and civilization, which would inspire Jewish students and nurture their Jewish identity. My task and that of all Jewish educators was to communicate a culture and identity that were so vital that they would not want to give them up.

I remained deeply engaged with general societal developments. Jewish and American seem to be a recipe for synergy and achievement. The highlight was the Soviet Jewry movement, which injected itself into America's Cold War with Communism and gave an American patriotic stamp to a deeply Jewish cause. Many Modern Orthodox Jews reached out to the general community (Jewish and American) through these activities. To me, the message was that when Orthodoxy/Judaism joined in the general society, it grew stronger. It achieved its goals and positively influenced many others.

I also was further drawn into Jewish-Christian dialogue, which offered the promise of the best of the '60s—freedom, justice, pluralism, mutual respect—in the interreligious area. Blu and I joined with a group of friends to form *ha-Tzaad ha-Rishon* (the First Step), a project to integrate black Hebrews into the mainstream American Jewish community. I also became involved with the anti-Vietnam War movement, mainly through leading a group of Yeshiva University students to participate in the national Moratorium Shabbat in Washington, DC. In this process, I was invited to give a paper on behalf of the Orthodox community/Rabbinical Council of America during a symposium on the war sponsored by the Synagogue Council of America. This later led to testimony before the Senate Foreign Affairs committee. At a time when most Orthodox Jews and rabbis were staunch defenders of the government policy, I offered a nuanced critique of how and why the well-intentioned war

had gone wrong and should be terminated.¹⁴ It is noteworthy that the Rabbinical Council of America itself was still open enough to the liberal winds of the '60s that it would allow me and my slightly avant-garde views to represent Orthodoxy officially. I identified with the spirit of the '60s and was convinced that Modern Orthodoxy, indeed, all of Jewry, should march boldly into the brave new world being born.

Later, I reacted against the excesses—the mindless, extreme radicalism of some elements—and came under the influence of Norman Podhoretz and *Commentary* magazine, and was persuaded that many of the neoconservative criticisms and social policy alternatives were correct. Nevertheless, I remained convinced that many of the social advances and political liberalizations were also positive. They needed to be checked and limited, not repealed.

RECOIL FROM THE '60S AND THE RISE OF ULTRA-ORTHODOXY

Many people in the Modern Orthodox rabbinate and at Yeshiva University were far from satisfied, let alone fulfilled, by the social/cultural trends in the 1960s. The social changes were frequently accompanied by open expressions of disrespect for tradition. Many were threatened by the intellectual challenges and scholarly critiques of Orthodox ideas and beliefs. As they saw it, the college experience was undermining the religious positions of Jewish traditional students. They feared that Orthodox students would be lost to heresy, while the Jewish social identity of all students could well be swept away in the maelstrom of acceptance and activism.

At Yavneh we had an internal argument. The student leaders wanted to invite speakers from non-Orthodox circles, including Conservative rabbis and scholars, and I felt that the students needed to learn how to handle a variety of non-Orthodox and even anti-religious views. Allowing exposure to a wider set of scholars and thinking was also consistent with the pluralistic culture of the university—to which I believed that Modern Orthodoxy had to adapt in the long term. Norman Lamm (future president of Yeshiva University) and Aharon Lichtenstein (son-in-law of Rabbi Soloveitchik and future Religious Zionist yeshiva head) opposed this wider opening, because they feared that it might

14 For an extended treatment of my thinking and of the issues involved from a Modern Orthodox point of view, see Joshua M. Feigelson, “Into the Public Sphere: *Halakha* as an Ethic of Power,” in “Relationship, Power, and Holy Secularity: Rabbi Yitz Greenberg and American Jewish Life, 1966–1983” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2015), 75–104.

undermine the students' orthodoxy. I lost the argument, and the restrictive policy was adopted. I did not recognize the underlying signal—that Modern Orthodox educators were calling a halt to the openness and seeking to return to the use of shelter and exclusion in order to keep people on the reservation. Nor did I grasp the significance of the pushback and psychological withdrawal gathering strength inside Modern Orthodoxy.

The biggest factor in the turn away from the road on which I had embarked was the strengthening of Haredi Orthodoxy and its increasing influence on Modern Orthodoxy. I drew the lesson of the Shoah to mean that Modern Orthodoxy should reach out to affirm and work with its partners in the covenant of fate (*brit goral*) (i.e., liberal religious and secular movements). The Jews in those groups felt deeply Jewish, and embraced Jewish history and suffering and responsibility to each other (and Israel) and took action on all these fronts.¹⁵ The ultra-Orthodox shared the covenant of destiny with the Modern Orthodox—belief in a divinely given Torah, the binding nature of halakha, etc.—but they were weak on the issues of common fate, and in their extreme wing, the Satmar Hasidim, they spurned Israel as the work of the devil.¹⁶ The modern community's leadership turned toward the Haredim and their policies in the hope of warding off assimilation, and over the next few decades the ultra-Orthodox pulled the Modern Orthodox into their orbit and persuaded them that the Haredim were their only legitimate partners. As the Modern Orthodox became convinced that the two groups were one and the same community, the Haredi halakhic authorities became the dominant force in both communities.

In convincing the Modern Orthodox that the two communities and policies should be united against other Jews who deviated on religious ideology and observance, the Haredim undid the historic impact of Zionism, which had led to the greatest Jewish triumph of the past two millennia by saving the Jewish future. Since 1948, religious Zionists had failed to go forward with a renewal

15 See Rabbi Soloveitchik's formulation of the two dimensions of *brit goral* and *yiud* (covenant of fate and destiny) in his essay, "Kol Dodi Dofek," in Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Fate and Destiny: From the Holocaust to the State of Israel*, trans. Lawrence S. Kaplan (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1992), where he clearly delineates the covenant of fate as the most basic foundation of the covenant of the Jewish people. Through this category, he legitimated the nonreligious Zionist Jews and their institutions as valid partners in the covenant of Israel, though he did not apply this articulation to the non-Orthodox denominations in America.

16 See Joel Teitelbaum, *Al HaGeulah v'al HaTemurah* (Brooklyn, NY: Jerusalem Publishing, 1967).

of halakha in light of living in a sovereign Jewish state, and control of *psak* and halakha steadily passed to the Haredim. American Modern Orthodoxy made the same error. While they intensified their own Zionism, they ignored the ongoing anti-Zionism of some ultra-Orthodox, as well as the fact that living by ultra-Orthodox halakha would make it impossible for Israel to function. They ignored the lessons of the Holocaust and allowed shared beliefs and religious practices to override the more fundamental bonds of common fate and historical challenge, which should have led them to close ranks with *clal yisrael* (the majority of whom are non-Orthodox) and to try to work together to create a viable Jewish identity and culture inside modernity.

In a historical irony, the Haredim, who pronounced the Holocaust to be God's punishment for Jewry's modernization and Zionism, channeled the impact of the Shoah to strengthen themselves. Internally, they used the catastrophe to justify rejecting modernity entirely. Externally, they drew on the broader Jewish community's reaction of nostalgia for the lost world of tradition, and guilt for not having done more to save European Jewry, to elicit strong financial and social support to rebuild Haredi life. As the ultra-Orthodox grew in numbers and rebuilt their institutional infrastructure, their influence on the Modern Orthodox expanded steadily—until it became dominant.

THE LICHTENSTEIN–GREENBERG EXCHANGE IN *THE COMMENTATOR*

The Lichtenstein–Greenberg exchange that appeared in Yeshiva University's student publication the *Commentator* in 1966 was a signal of the internal shift underway in Modern Orthodoxy.¹⁷ Thanks to my encounter with the Shoah and Israel, I located my religious positions primarily in relation to the small circle of pluralistic rabbis to which I had connected, and I no longer had an accurate political reading of the intellectual/policy parameters of the nascent centrist Modern Orthodox.

In my interviews for the initial article, I wanted to put new thinking before my community and get them to take the next step forward by credibly meeting the intellectual/moral criteria of the post-Shoah, positive '60s culture. This included respect for (and cooperation with) the non-Orthodox, new thinking on historical and biblical studies, more openness to equality

17 "Dr. Greenberg Discusses Orthodoxy, YU, Viet Nam, & Sex," *Commentator*, April 28, 1966.

norms and to more natural male-female connections. I also felt that there should be greater willingness to critique internal community issues, instead of dutifully assuming that the authorities are always right.

I sought to reduce the conflict by use of Marrano language—to hint and offer layers of double meaning—so the traditionalists could read these views more traditionally, while the progressives could see the implications and go further with them. I felt keenly that the students were torn between the conservative/traditionalist values they were being taught by the *roshei yeshiva*, and exposure to their social reality, which was influenced by the general American atmosphere. While I rejected the emerging culture of promiscuity and abrogation of restraint, I believed that there was a need for a more egalitarian and socially connected ethic governing gender relationships, and that the growing emphasis on prohibiting *yichud* (a male and female meeting in private) and the later *shomer negiah* (aggressive prohibition on any touching) ethos went too far. They reflected ultra-Orthodox norms of discomfort/distaste for sexuality and an insistence on women's intrinsic sexual provocativeness and built the religious/ethical social ethic on heightened social separation, just when the general society was moving toward greater mixing and social interaction. Personally, I believed that in a more interconnected culture, relationships between men and women would be healthier, more respectful, and more humanly fulfilling. However, I put this exploratory thinking forward in vague language so that those who understood would understand (*ha-mayvin yavin*). I was similarly vague in speaking about liberal religious Jews, trying to sound positive rather than explicitly pluralist.

When the article appeared, there was an explosion. The younger traditionalist faculty and advanced students leaped on my words to spell out the most radical possible meanings to maximize the community's recoil. They sought to turn the moment into an opportunity to crush what they considered deviant views and to enshrine the growing traditionalism. They tried to get Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the most authoritative rabbinical figure and Modern Orthodox theologian, to denounce my statements, but he declined to do so. His son-in-law and protégé, Aharon Lichtenstein, stepped up. He had the Harvard credentials, as well as the learning, and he wrote a sharp critique.¹⁸ This led to a rejoinder from me and another from him, in which he skewered my equivocations. I am not proud of the way I handled this. However, I did not

18 "Rav Lichtenstein Writes Letter to Dr. Greenberg," *Commentator*, Thursday, June 2, 1966.

want to lose the community, nor had I developed the inner clarity and toughness needed to get the community to face up to these issues. I still believe that I needed to put fresh views forward, because Modern Orthodoxy was getting a full blast of the society's novel ideas, while the religious leadership was putting its head in the sand. I understood the community's recoil, because I myself had struggled and felt uncomfortable or even pained to make some of the proposed changes. However, I saw such a rethinking as part of a necessary reconceptualization of Judaism, especially the need to remove unethical or degrading attitudes toward Others.

A close reading of Lichtenstein's responses shows that he conceded the correctness of my main points, even as he sharply critiqued the excessively frank and too candid aspect of my writing. On the substance, he was arguing with a viewpoint that erred in parts but offered a legitimate alternative, if contested, view. He often said he believed that the students were not ready or strong enough intellectually or in their belief to deal with these issues positively. Instead of recruiting the leadership to figure out a way to upgrade the students' education and ability to cope, he wrote in a way that seemed to rule out explorations of such topics. And his critique of my language and style was so sharp that most of the public—and his conservative colleagues—read the rejoinder as a repudiation, rather than a nuanced disagreement. His article was exceedingly valuable and heavily utilized by the most conservative elements at Yeshiva University to argue that my views were beyond the pale. Although Lichtenstein personally later on dealt with me as a legitimate *bar plugta* (partner in an intellectual disagreement), he did not publicly contradict the misuse of his critique. Nor did he express objection to the growing use of the method of suppression of views deemed dangerous.

In his response to the initial interview, Lichtenstein dismissed my argument that the Modern Orthodox must allow maximum freedom of exploration and generate a culture within which people could feel safe even if they made errors in articulating new ideas to deal with the challenge to tradition. He concluded that the need for such a culture of exploration was overruled by the danger of heavy losses of Torah loyalties. We had previously argued about this problem at Yavneh, the Orthodox college student organization we both supported. He was upset by the thought that even a single student might be lost to Orthodoxy due to these exposures. I argued that only by being exposed to the full blast of the general culture could the system mature enough to maintain itself. I used the analogy of a mutated disease for which the population's immune system was not strong enough: Since we could not permanently shelter our students

from cultural/spiritual/social challenges, we had to expose them and help them develop a new immunity—trusting and believing that our Torah and our students were up to the challenges. He countered by asking how many patients would get deathly sick as the immune system evolved. I replied that any short-term gain from sheltering the students would be offset by widespread losses among those that could not or would not seek shelter. The only hope was to develop a new strain of student/Jewish identity that could live safely and thrive in the new culture.

I also argued that he was underestimating the students, that most would have the resilience to absorb shocks and/or come back after. He accused me of being cavalier about the high risks. I replied that the filter/shelter approach would not work, as the emerging culture was too magnetic. Even if we could save a minority who would accept our direction and not listen to the general culture or to heretical ideas, we would be abandoning the bulk of the Jewish people, which was completely unsheltered. I was anxious about the potential losses, but I felt that the path of filter/shelter would delay or distract from the development that was crucial.

Lichtenstein's *Commentator* article and the way it was used confirmed that he and the emerging centrist leadership would not support the exploration of these dangerous issues. In the '70's and '80s, this rightward shift took on the form of systematically excluding people like Hartman and me from the conversation. My views became off limits, and Yeshiva University students and centrist laymen heard only those from the right and never from the left. Modern Orthodox leadership went along with this exclusion, sometimes at the behest of the right and sometimes in anticipatory compliance with the right's growing dominance of community policy. Modern Orthodox institutional leadership folded and/or drifted, as American Modern Orthodoxy moved steadily toward the Haredi position in most areas of rabbinical adjudication, education, and community policy.

THE HAREDIZATION OF MODERN ORTHODOXY

The ultra-Orthodox were determinedly opposed to any connection with the non-Orthodox community. In the 1970s, the *roshei yeshiva* of the great yeshivot put out a prohibition on Orthodox participation in the Synagogue Council of America, in which all three denominations sat together as equals, and in local boards of rabbis. They did not invite Rabbi Soloveitchik to sign. In his lifetime, they rarely missed the chance to treat him as a deviant, for his embrace of Zionism

and modernity. For his part, Soloveitchik never did sign, but he did not fight back or legitimate intra-faith activity either. He temporized, arguing that vis-a-vis the federal government and American society, multid denominational representation of Jewry was needed and inescapable. However, as to internal spiritual matters, the non-Orthodox were not to be recognized as legitimate. Although his ambiguous instruction enabled the RCA and Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations to continue cooperating with liberal groups, they were continuously criticized from the right and increasingly on the defensive. Thus, they steadily reduced the extent of cooperation. As Soloveitchik aged and grew sick, the younger Yeshiva University rebbes aggressively affirmed the exclusion agenda.

This trend also held true in Jewish–Christian dialogue. In 1965 Soloveitchik gave policy guidance for interfaith relations: Dialogue was permitted on issues of social welfare and the common good; conversations on theology and matters of substantive religious/spiritual import were ruled out. As I saw it, he was attempting to triangulate the modern values that called for dialogue—especially as Christians were actively revising negative teachings on Jewry and Judaism for the good—with the traditionalist rejection of Christianity and opposition to any dialogue. His guidance was turned into a ruling and applied to ever more restricted Orthodox participation in religious dialogue. Orthodox individuals made important contributions to the Jewish–Christian dialogue (including David Hartman, Michael Wyschogrod, and me, among others), but this work was boycotted by the Modern Orthodox establishment.¹⁹

The outcome of all this was that, starting in the 1960s, American Modern Orthodoxy engaged in a steady retreat from its more modern positions, its leadership deferring to and adopting the ultra-Orthodox stances in most areas of Jewish law, education, and community policy. Examples include kashrut (*glatt kosher* standards of Hungarian Hasidim became the only legitimate ones), gender separation (synagogues without separate seating and *mechizahs* were excluded from membership in the Orthodox Union, and elementary schools were required by Torah U’Mesorah to separate boys and girls), women’s modesty (wives were expected to cover their hair in accordance with Haredi standards), and outreach (the National Conference of Synagogue Youth was primarily staffed by graduates of traditional yeshivas).

Yeshiva University’s spiritual leadership was taken over by rabbinic faculty who were yeshivish/Haredi in their religious orientation, their halakhic rulings,

19 Wyschogrod gave courses at Yeshiva University but never taught about his interfaith work or his important theological interaction with (Barthian) Christianity.

and their educational methods. They did not repudiate secular studies openly, but they tried to reduce the demands of secular studies on their students' time. They opposed any cooperation with non-Orthodox groups in Zionism or in any other areas. In their teachings, modern America became not something to emulate or learn from, but the source of never-ending temptation and heresy. They prohibited feminism or greater tolerance for gays and lesbians in the Orthodox community and defined them as cardinal sins (*yehareg v'al ya'avor*). Egalitarian practices such as women's tefillah groups or partnership minyanim were labelled *darkei ha'emori* (ways of the pagans) and *hukkot hagoyim* (imitating the laws of the Gentiles). Perhaps their most profound philosophical and moral reversal was expressed in the reassertion of the particularist, anti-goy (Gentile) elements in the tradition—to the point of communicating that only Jews were fully in the category of *tzelem elokim* (created in God's image).²⁰ They were completely legalistic in their religious thinking and pretty much dismissed any role for values such as justice or for human emotions in the halakhic equation. Thus, in the name of continuing Soloveitchik's tradition of learning, they reversed his religious/theological paradigm. In the process, they turned Yeshiva University, the flagship institution of Modern Orthodoxy, into a training ground for Haredi-lite clergy and laymen. To be sure, YU continued to retain students who were dedicated to the ideals of *Torah U'madda*. Moreover, as noted below, YU also enhanced its academic Jewish studies offerings, including study of Bible and rabbinics, which in turn broadened the education of students, in some cases preparing them for leadership positions within twenty-first-century Modern Orthodoxy. Yet the overriding outlook reflected the attitudes and the legal approach of the Haredi community. In sum, the legal decisions and policies adopted in the second half of the twentieth century met the needs of the Haredi community, but made it more difficult for Modern Orthodox Jews to be credible by American standards or to keep less observant Jews inside Modern Orthodox institutions.

Another result of these trends was that Modern Orthodoxy became less able to serve and strengthen the broader Jewish community. The exception was where individuals moved to reach out and serve in the Federation world, in the community day schools, and even in the Hebrew schools of the liberal movements. Over these decades, some of the most important civil servants

20 When Chief Rabbi Isaac Unterman gave a lecture endorsing the saving of life (*pikuach nefesh*) of Gentiles on Shabbat, because of *darkei shalom*, Rabbi Soloveitchik privately told a group of faculty that this saving was obligatory because Gentiles are unequivocally *tzelem elokim*.

and spiritual leaders of American Jewry were Modern Orthodox Jews. I would cite Elie Wiesel, Abe Foxman, Malcolm Hoenlein, and Barry Shrage as the top people in their respective fields, with tremendous influence in the broader Jewish community. Steven Bayme ran the American Jewish Committee's Jewish Communal Affairs Department and steered AJC's Jewish policies into far more focused Jewish policies and educational efforts than its Americanizing leadership had done in the past. Marvin Hier, who was more centrist, created a hugely successful Jewish defense organization, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, by transcending religious and denominational lines, even as he honored Orthodox observance in its programs. These individuals were the exceptions who proved the rule. Had Orthodoxy moved to the left and toward *clal yisrael*, it would have been welcomed with open arms and been offered many professional outlets. Then it would have given strength and stability to the rest of the community.

WORKING FOR *CLAL YISRAEL* AS A MODERN ORTHODOX JEW; LOSING GROUND IN MODERN ORTHODOXY

Throughout this period, I shifted my professional activity toward *clal yisrael*. Not surprisingly, this intensified the evolution of my theology toward embracing and justifying the behaviors of the whole Jewish people, which considerably pushed my understanding of Orthodoxy and its principles toward the left, religiously and culturally.

In the '60s and '70s—and due in no small measure to student activism—Jewish studies spread rapidly in the university world. Despite some academics' resistance, student pressure forced more and more schools to offer courses on the Holocaust. This became the most widely taught course in Jewish studies on campus. It was clear to me that Jewish studies programs would give the community a chance to reach a rapidly surging number of its young who were going to college. Despite a conscious push by some Jewish studies academics against allowing any affirmative, nonacademic role for these studies, the courses did have positive impacts on the Jewish identity of Jewish students and offered many Jewish students the opportunity to experience high-level Jewish education—unlike the minimal, shallow Hebrew/Sunday school experience of many young American Jews.

The symbolism of Judaism's presence in the central halls of Western culture, in itself, affected many Jewish students to view their identity more favorably. I became convinced early on that to maintain believability and attractive power in the university culture, Judaism would have to become more individualized,

more internalized, more activist-oriented, more nuanced, and more responsive to the growing openness and pluralism of the general society. And this would be good for Judaism and enable Jews to maintain their identity in the emerging, wide-open culture.

I was equally convinced that Modern Orthodoxy should move in the same direction. If it did, it could flourish and influence more people than ever before. A disproportionate number of Modern Orthodox Jews became Jewish studies faculty. On the other hand, the growing yeshivish and centrist elements recoiled from Jewish studies and tried to convince their students to avoid exposure to these academic approaches.²¹

In 1970, a group of academics came together to form the Association for Jewish Studies in order to facilitate its rapid growth, nurture younger scholars and provide outlets for scholarship, as well as to protect the high academic standards of the discipline. I joined the founders' group and argued for an open acknowledgment of the potential for Jewish studies playing a properly delimited role in nurturing Jewish culture and identity on campus. Most of the scholars were focused on attaining academic respectability and were not particularly willing to acknowledge the identity dimension of these courses.²² Nevertheless, over the next four decades, Jewish studies grew apace. Tens of thousands of Jewish students, as well as non-Jewish, took these courses. Universities eagerly sought Jewish funding, and the community responded. The effect was one of the most positive Jewish educational upgrades in American Jewish history. Happily, academic standards were protected and upheld during this process.

By 1972, I came to the conclusion that despite my great satisfaction and fulfillment in building a synagogue, day school, and community, I was failing to deliver the message of the Holocaust and Israel as turning points to the broader Jewish community. When I was offered the position of creating a Jewish studies department at City College of the City University of New York, I took it. I

21 Yeshiva University, paradoxically, upgraded its academic Jewish studies faculty and scholarship even as the yeshiva's atmosphere and teachings turned against such methods. The result was a growing bifurcation in which the more *frum* (religiously intense) students and those more devoted to Talmud and halakha studies were less open (or turned antagonistic) to academic Jewish studies. The school was a long way from the 1960s Soloveitchikian- or Samuel Belkin-inspired visions of synthesis.

22 See especially Irving Greenberg, "Scholarship and Continuity: Dilemma and Dialectic," and Gerson D. Cohen, "An Embarrassment of Riches: Reflections on the Conditions of American Jewish Scholarship in 1969," in *The Teaching of Judaica in American Universities: The Proceedings of a Colloquium*, ed. Leon Jick (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1970), 115–29, 135–50.

believed that, as an academic, at least I could more easily write and publish on the significance of the Holocaust and its lessons for Jews in the world. I also hoped that the post might give me a launching pad for a pluralist center for thought and education that could reach out with a dual message: American Jews must grow in Jewish knowledge and identity in order to participate in American society without assimilating. Jewish religion, ethics, culture, and relations with other groups must be rethought in the context of the Holocaust and Israel.

As chair of the new department, I convinced the administration to appoint Elie Wiesel as a Distinguished Professor of Jewish Studies at City College—even though he was a writer and did not have an advanced academic degree. This was his first full-time, adequately paid professional position that enabled him to spread his wings. Elie continuously wrote and lectured widely, articulating the weight of the Shoah and the need to confront it and draw conclusions. He modeled the dignity and moral force of the survivors and called for human solidarity and joint action to prevent any repetition of genocide or persecution.

After numerous conversations, Elie decided to serve as cofounder of CLAL with me. In 1973, with the aid of a legacy left to City College, which the administration designated for Jewish studies, we brought in the third cofounder, Rabbi Steven Shaw. He served as our guide as CLAL, initially called the National Jewish Conference Center, reached out. We targeted the federations with an agenda to make them more Jewish by casting Jewish learning, across all denominational lines, as a fundamental resource for leaders' personal identity. Typically, this experience also led the leaders to establish more Jewish priorities in Federation decisions in communal policy, religious activity, and educational funding.

When we started the organization, I believed that there was a race on between the possibility of renaissance and rebirth in a supportive, pluralist American society, against a growing assimilation and disintegration. The negative outcome would win if an ill-educated, religiously infantile Jewry entered totally into the most open and accepting culture of all time. I sometimes put it that CLAL's goal was to push up the angle of ascent of the wave of renewal, so that when the ascending curve met the downward curve of assimilation, there would be enough engaged Jews to successfully complete the adaptation of Jewry/Judaism into modern civilization. Sadly, the Pew survey of 2013 suggested that the two curves will interact in a much lower level of communal engagement and educational fortification than we had dreamed.

CLAL's other main theme was that Jewish communities must come to grips with the Holocaust and the State of Israel as transforming Jewish religion

and self-understanding. One implication was that all Jews were in this task together. CLAL was built on the principle of pluralism.²³ The staff was recruited from plural denominations. The courses were pluralist and academic level. Plural religious services were offered at CLAL retreats and institutes. Special programs were created to bring rabbis and rabbinical students together across denominational lines, to learn from each other and to dialogue on religious policies and issues.

This open affirmation of pluralism clashed with Modern Orthodoxy's move to the right. While a disproportionate number of CLAL's professional staff and lay leadership were Modern Orthodox (due to my roots, contacts, and past activity in the community), the organization itself was increasingly marginalized by the Orthodox. Norman Lamm, by then president of Yeshiva University, whose leading donors included nonobservant Jews, participated in the first two CLAL conferences on the theme of preserving "one Jewish people," but he stopped coming after that, as he explained, due to the backlash from the right. The number of rabbinical students from Yeshiva University who came to our seminars also declined as the school stopped openly sponsoring such activities.

As the growing polarization in Jewry inflamed Jewish life, I felt that the pluralism work was even more urgent. The fraying of ties with Orthodox Jews helped tilt the balance inside the Reform movement, which adopted an official declaration recognizing patrilineal descent as sufficient for identification as a Jew, as traditional Reform rabbinic leadership wrote off their concern to stay in relationship with the Orthodox (whom they perceived as now totally delegitimizing them). Similarly, as Modern Orthodoxy became a satellite of ultra-Orthodox policies, the Synagogue Council of America broke down, and the Orthodox withdrew.

I felt that giving up the principle of pluralism would be a gross betrayal of the lessons of the Holocaust and Israel, even though I saw that it was undermining my residual standing in Modern Orthodoxy. My stand was popular in the rest of the community. CLAL attracted lots of support thanks to holding up the banner of pluralism, including support from the shrinking number of progressive Modern Orthodox.

23 I felt it was time to apply Soloveitchik's categories of *brit goral* and *yiud* to the liberal denominations for maximum effectiveness in the fight against assimilation. See Irving Greenberg, "Toward a Principled Pluralism," in "Will There Be One Jewish People By the Year 2000?," *Perspectives*, June 1985 (New York: National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership [CLAL]).

Nevertheless, most Orthodox rabbis were convinced that pluralism was subversive of Orthodoxy because it weakened the Orthodox monopoly of being the (only) “authentic” Jews. More and more colleagues grew distant because they were upset by CLAL programs. Critiques and delegitimizing broadsides proliferated in the Orthodox community. The Agudath Israel publication, *The Jewish Observer*, published a scathing attack on Norman Lamm for consorting with a heretic (me) and on Modern Orthodoxy for tolerating me and my beyond heresy, unspeakable writings on Christianity. After one such attack, a national Jewish leader called me, “Cheer up,” he said. “They may be questioning if you are Orthodox inside the community. But you are the most popular Orthodox rabbi in the country—if you ask non-Orthodox Jews.”

The climax of the backlash came when I was brought up before the Rabbinical Council of America’s Honor Committee on charges of what might be called conduct unbecoming an Orthodox rabbi. The committee consisted of past presidents of the RCA, and its mandate was upholding/enforcing religious standards of Orthodox rabbis. Its powers included recommending sanctions, up to expulsion from the council. I was offended at this “criminalization” of my views and considered rejecting the summons and resigning. However, I saw myself to be an Orthodox rabbi and wanted my views to be recognized as legitimate inside the community. Hence, I decided to go through the process.

The main charge was that I, an Orthodox rabbi, was violating Torah law by running religious services (Conservative, Reform, etc.) whose practices such as mixed seating, and the like, violated halakha. There was a secondary charge of teaching heresy, which I gathered was because I wrote about Christianity. For some people, applying pluralism to Christianity was even more shocking, but they shied away from openly punishing such views. They were worried that if the news leaked publicly, this would evoke a backlash from Christians, so the charge of heresy was mostly soft-pedaled throughout the process.

The main charge was technically false. We had made a decision at CLAL that only a rabbi ordained in a particular denomination would lead services of that kind. CLAL felt this requirement was necessary to send a message that we did not consider all rabbis and services as interchangeable. We were pluralists, not relativists. However, at a deeper level the charge was true. As head of CLAL, I hired those diverse rabbis and aided them. Also, I enthusiastically taught Torah at those services, as I did in synagogues, from Orthodox to Reconstructionist, around the country. I explained to the committee that this was the meaning of being a pluralist. I did not run non-Orthodox services, but I did enable and make them available to others.

The committee members responded that this constituted a denial of the existence of all norms and standards. How could I, as an Orthodox rabbi, enable and participate in religious services that violated halakha? My response was that, although I personally prayed in an Orthodox minyan because I agreed that liberal services violated certain religious laws, nevertheless, I was convinced that God heard and accepted the prayers of liberal Jews, and, having been there, I could testify that the divine presence was palpably there in such synagogues and gatherings. Moreover, liberal religious services were reaching Jews whom neither I nor Orthodoxy could reach. They were uplifting them religiously and confirming their Jewish identity, and were therefore a valid and constructive part of *dal yisrael*. It was in our interest to strengthen and improve their religious performances, if we could.

The committee asked me to stop giving the liberal services legitimacy by teaching Torah there. I rejected that demand unequivocally; I would teach Torah in any place or to any person willing to learn with me. They asked me what my practice was when I taught Torah in non-Orthodox services. I explained that I personally davened beforehand, but showed respect for the congregation, standing up and sitting down as appropriate; I informed my hosts that I wanted them not to offer me honors such as *aliyot*, but if there was a slipup I did not refuse, because that would constitute degrading the service or embarrassing the people.

The committee again charged that I was undermining norms and distinctions. I was frustrated that a number of the past presidents simply could not grasp the idea of pluralism, and I was troubled by the fact that a number of them could, but would not defend me or try to stop the rush to judgment and condemnation.

By then, Lamm was under heavy pressure to stop the process, and he persuaded one of the past presidents of the RCA to negotiate a stand-down. As a concession, I offered never to take any honors in non-Orthodox synagogues, to make it clear that I honored distinctions and that I was Orthodox. Thus the matter ended with no action or public report. Although my antagonists did not achieve their maximum goals, I think they won a victory in that they confirmed my marginalization inside the movement.

Sadly, the Modern Orthodox institutional leadership never saw that they had an even larger stake than I did in keeping the widest possible spectrum inside Modern Orthodoxy, that no matter how far down the road of Haredization they went, Yeshiva University and centrists would always be seen as inauthentic, class-B Haredim. Nor did they stand up for the right of others in the

community to advocate pluralism or even a big-tent Orthodoxy. They just gave in to the right.

The Modern Orthodox leadership paid a heavy price for their capitulation. When Norman Lamm called to tell me that he would no longer participate in CLAL programs, I pointed out that he was yielding to the Haredi trend, instead of defending the Modern Orthodox alternative approach. In the process, he was acquiescing in the delegitimization of me, of pluralism, and of CLAL's (and all other *clal yisrael*) program activity. I told him that by doing this, he was cutting off the branch on which he was sitting: it would leave him as the most left, most modern spiritual voice in Modern Orthodoxy. But he needed the left as an integral part of Modern Orthodoxy, so that he could lead from the center. By abandoning the left, he was marginalizing himself.

Lamm did, in fact, become marginalized at Yeshiva University, particularly inside the rabbinical seminary. While many students still looked up to him, the growing majority of intense learners internalized a Haredized version of Modern Orthodoxy. They identified with and guided themselves by the rulings, policies and values of the yeshivish/Haredi world. I saw that all this was happening but could not do much. Modern Orthodox leadership did not want to help itself. Most leaders hesitated to articulate that the “moderns” needed distinctive policies and halakhic procedures.

Nor could CLAL do much to arrest the process of growing divisiveness and radicalization within the denominations. CLAL played an important role in moving the Federation world toward a more Jewish agenda and toward greater emphasis on living and learning Jewishly for the lay leadership. Teaching and shaping the communal agenda toward Jewish education and culture consumed almost all my time. This program side of the organization kept growing and succeeding. The interdenominational and pluralism work, the dialogues, the conferences on one Jewish people, the joint rabbinic learning also grew—but their impact was overwhelmed by the polarization and growing interdenominational antagonism. Separation and sectarianism surged as each side felt that its more radical policies were justified by the increasingly partisan programs of the other side.

In one area, however, CLAL's focus, theme, and program work on the centrality of the Shoah and of Israel in Jewish life broke through beyond my wildest dreams. Stuart Eizenstat, chief domestic affairs adviser to President Jimmy Carter, had been deeply involved in CLAL. He was profoundly affected by its teachings, both on the need for intensive Jewish education for his children and the importance of the Holocaust. When the president was

seeking an outreach gesture to American Jewry, Eizenstat proposed that he make it a national Holocaust memorial. Elie Wiesel was appointed chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust, and I was named to serve as executive director.

Wiesel, brilliantly and charismatically, led the commission to grasp the enormity of the event and its important implications for all of humanity, and it recommended a museum to tell the narrative and to influence the American educational system. This was an almost unimaginable breakthrough. It meant that the Holocaust Memorial Center would be created on behalf of all Americans. It was placed on the National Mall, the sacred ground of the American people, with the sponsorship and imprimatur of the government of the United States. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum has become the third most popularly visited museum on the Mall. The overall program included a commitment by the United States government to hold a National Day of Commemoration of the Holocaust on or about Yom HaShoah.

In my judgement, the US Holocaust Museum and its program validated one of the finest promises of the 1960s. America would become a pluralist culture in which Jews could be themselves fully. They could even help shape and upgrade American life through their values.

Before and after 1979, the ZACHOR Holocaust Resource Center worked with local Jewish communities to create similar communal Holocaust memorial centers. This stemmed from our conviction that only an institution focused on the event and offering an immersive encounter followed by education could do justice, and educate the Jewish/general public, to the centrality of this event in Jewish and general history. By the 1980s, I had concluded that my contribution to *zikui harabim*—educating the public—should focus on creating two historic institutions for Jewry, new institutions that could express and channel educationally the new historical era unfolding in Jewish history. One was the Holocaust Memorial Center. I believed that a local Holocaust memorial center would become a permanent institution in every major Jewish community. This would enable Jews to confront the event, to draw its implications, and to channel them into Jewish education and culture.

Nevertheless, in 1980, I determined to return to CLAL to work full-time and not stay on as director of the US Holocaust Museum. As central as raising Holocaust consciousness was, I believed that the even more fundamental task was to assure the future of Jewry in an open society by upgrading Jewish identity and saturating the community with Jewish culture. I wanted to give my life's priority to enriching Jewish life internally. CLAL offered classes, and especially

retreats, to enrich Jewish identity. Through CLAL, I wanted to focus on the creation of retreat centers to offer immersive Jewish learning and living experiences for Jewish communal leaders and, eventually, to all lay people. I remain convinced that offering a total environment, immersive group experience of Jewish living at many points in life (including day schools, camp and youth movements, Israel trips, and extended studies in the Land of Israel for college students, as well as adult retreats) will implant and nurture a Jewish identity vital enough to enable full participation in American society without assimilation or losing the primacy of Jewishness.

I consider my giving this priority to Jewish communal/educational work to be the outcome of my own identity as a Modern Orthodox Jew. Although I had become an unabashed pluralist by the 1970s, all my projects and programs were deeply rooted in the Modern Orthodox commitment to learning Torah as the key to living a successful Jewish life. I often thought of myself as a representative of Modern Orthodoxy, serving the entire Jewish people. CLAL—and I—pushed the Federations to serve kosher food and to respect Jewish holidays in all their programs. This was important for the Modern Orthodox participants and would be viewed as a sign of respect for Jewish unity and Jewish heritage. Most of the Jewish community recognized my rootedness in Modern Orthodoxy and gave the denomination credit for my activities.

When Birthright Israel was started, the founding philanthropists saw it as an outreach program to connect to the unaffiliated. A number of leaders proposed to exclude Modern Orthodox young people on the grounds that they did not need such a program, whereas their inclusion would put the total costs beyond the fundraising capabilities. I and our son J. J., z”l, executive director of Jewish Life Network, staffed the planning group. We insisted that the principle of *clal yisrael*/Jewish unity demanded their inclusion. Though we had to put ourselves and our professional roles on the line, we won the argument, and in actual practice, Orthodox participation has been strong and Orthodox providers have attained the largest market share of the trips.

CLAL was not successful in creating a retreat center or convincing American Jewish communities to construct their own. However, CLAL and I personally continued to offer individual and communal retreats with great impact. I remain convinced that a universal program of retreats, offered free to younger adults and/or young marrieds and/or new parents and/or all adults, is the single most powerful option to confirm Jewish identity and reverse the process of assimilation in America. Unfortunately, the community has not been able to put this option together.

There were other initiatives that failed to take off, such as universal Jewish prekindergarten and service learning. We created MAKOR, a Jewish outreach institution which presented as a secular, nondenominational music performance space and restaurant, to attract young Jews in their 20s and 30s, and offered classes in Hebrew and Jewish culture, as well as art programs and Jewish holiday experiences. For a time MAKOR was an important venue for young adult nightlife in New York, but it closed after its leadership moved to the 92nd St. Y. As a result, outreach has remained an outlier in the general Jewish community, primarily the province either of non-Orthodox or of premodern, mostly ultra-Orthodox missionary groups.

In the 1980s, I visited England on behalf of CLAL. The trip included giving talks at Orthodox venues and at Liberal and Reform conferences as well. When Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits learned of this schedule, he told me that if I did not cancel my talks at the liberal groups, all the Orthodox invitations would be withdrawn. It was the policy of the Orthodox United Synagogue not to recognize or legitimate non-Orthodox groups. I pleaded with him that British Jewry was facing the opening up of British society and that all the religious groups would be needed to cope with the challenge. I argued that the exclusion policy was inconsistent and bordering on hypocrisy. After all, he participated in interfaith conversations with Christians, which the United Synagogue actively supported in order to establish its civic, democratic bona fides with the general society, yet he refused to speak or dialogue with the liberal Jewish denominations. I also pointed out that this policy of accommodation to the growing ultra-Orthodox community was weakening the Modern Orthodox. Intra-religious dialogue would strengthen the Modern Orthodox lay people and equip them to handle better the modern ideas coming at them from the general society. In the absence of internal deepening and dialogue, the Modern Orthodox would be cannibalized from the right and from the left. Some would move toward the ultra-Orthodox—seeking shelter or believing that they were more authentic—while most would drift into liberal and/or assimilating communities.

Rabbi Jakobovits acknowledged that my scenario was a likely one, but insisted that the policies would continue. He predicted that the ultra-Orthodox would become dominant, and he was not going to fight them. I pointed out that modern civilization would not go away and that Judaism would have to work out some adjustments to function effectively in the dominant civilization. Modeling this capacity to participate and maintain distinctiveness could be the special purpose and contribution of Modern Orthodoxy to Diaspora Jewry. He acknowledged this argument also, then said that when the Haredim

were the only Jews left, the others having assimilated, they would deal with the issues and make the necessary adjustments. To which my response was: let us make the adjustments now while we still have most of the Jews with us. He was unmoved. The Orthodox invitations were mostly withdrawn—except that from Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen, a liberal and independent Orthodox rabbi of one of the largest United Synagogue congregations.

Within the United Kingdom, the Haredi takeover of the policies of Orthodox institutions continued. The halakhic, educational policy-setting mostly passed from the chief rabbi to the London Beth Din, dominated by Haredi Torah scholars. An accommodating conversion policy would have reduced intermarriage and the disintegrating impact of intermarriage on Jewish affiliation and identity. Instead, the Beth Din developed one of the most restrictive conversion processes in Diaspora Jewry. This served well the Haredi community who were counting on social distance and exclusion to keep intermarriage out of their ranks. It served badly the majority of British Jews, whose children were rapidly integrating in the general society.

The dominance of the ultra-Orthodox London Beth Din continued and even intensified under Jakobovits's successor, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. He brilliantly reached out in dialogue with the general culture and society and made a great spiritual/moral/political contribution to Britain. However, internally, he deferred to the London Beth Din and the ultra-Orthodox. Jews' College, the fountainhead of British Modern Orthodoxy, continued to decline and finally closed its ordination program. In response to pressure from colleagues in the British rabbinate, Sacks removed one of his most important theological insights from the second edition of his important book, *The Dignity of Difference*: his unequivocal pluralist statement that God spoke to Jews through Judaism, to Christians through Christianity, and to Muslims through Islam.²⁴

I never could make up my mind as to what motivated the Modern Orthodox leadership in America, Great Britain, and elsewhere to allow the ultra-Orthodox to take over and to set policy. Were they politically intimidated? Did they feel that the yeshivish/Haredi movement was more authentic, or its leadership more learned, than they were? Or, did they become convinced that this Haredi development was an irreversible historical tide? When he completed his term as chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks made a stinging critique of the ultra-Orthodox policies and tendencies. This made clear that he never

24 Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Continuum, 2002).

abandoned the Modern Orthodox view, but that did not retroactively change the Haredi dominance of Orthodox communal policies.

Also in the 1980s, I noticed that four Modern Orthodox spiritual leaders in Israel that I greatly admired had built remarkable educational platforms. Yet all four stalwarts were being attacked: Adin Steinsaltz's bona fides as an Orthodox authority was impugned on the grounds that his Talmud edition departed from the traditional pagination and used modern, historical material in the commentary. Aharon Lichtenstein was denounced for a willingness to forfeit sacred land and for supporting a traditional peace movement. Shlomo Riskin was challenged for a step he took to advance women's learning. David Hartman was condemned for his religious pluralism.

I went to Israel and visited all four with a proposal: We five should take a stand and put out a joint statement. We did not agree with each other on all religious matters or doctrines. However, we were all trying to advance the place of Torah and its teachings and values in Jewish life from a Modern Orthodox standpoint. The issues were formidable, and the obstacles were great. Therefore, we needed a culture that sought truth and would strive for understandings that could inspire modern people. We could call on our fellow Modern Orthodox Jews to come together and repudiate delegitimizing attacks designed to suppress religious development. Our arguments should be *l'shem shamayim* (for the sake of heaven), assuming that the opposing group was operating out of goodwill, a desire to arrive at Torah's truth and to live by its guidelines.

I went to see Hartman first; he was willing, but he warned me that Lichtenstein considered him beyond the pale. Then I spoke to Steinsaltz and Riskin, and they came up with similar answers: despite attacks, each considered himself well-ensconced within Orthodoxy and felt that any such joint activity would only weaken his position.

When I met with Aharon, he heard me out and gave the following response (paraphrased): "As far as I am concerned, Hartman has crossed the line and is out. I don't know where you are. Some people tell me that you have crossed the line. But since I'm not in America and have not followed you closely, I will simply suspend judgment. Steinsaltz and Riskin stand on their own two feet ... I am a Rosh Yeshiva. My priority is teaching Torah and educating as many students as I can. The Yeshiva world is my world. I am not about to do anything that damages my priority to help out you or Hartman for the sake of a nebulous, more open culture that could as likely harm as help the students' *emunah* and *yirat shamayim*." I told him that I understood his realism and the prudence of his answer. However, I felt that Modern Orthodoxy was being strangled slowly.

Opening up its culture would be lifesaving for it, and would serve the Jewish people better. He demurred.

So my proposal for a joint statement went nowhere. The shunning of the left continued apace. Lichtenstein was a great *rosh yeshiva* for another thirty years; his voice for a mature, moderate, ethical Judaism inspired many, and his role model uplifted the national-religious community. But his voice was relatively drowned out by the unchecked, often louder, more politically extreme and spiritually sectarian voices. The uncontested assertions from the right extended their sway in the Centrist Orthodox community. Legalism and ritual punctiliousness grew, and ethical focus shrank. Discomfort with modernity and negative attitudes toward Gentiles and other outsiders strengthened. Modern Orthodoxy continued to decline.

TOWARD A POSTMODERN JEWISH CULTURE AND A POSTMODERN ORTHODOXY

By the 1990s, I became convinced that the Jewish community had to move beyond its commitment to modernity and its internalization of modern values and assumptions, toward a new synthesis of Judaism and postmodernity. Modern Orthodoxy also had to reformulate itself as “Postmodern” Orthodoxy.

A word about postmodernity. Some readers will classify this phenomenon with the denial of the existence of objective facts and truth. Some equate it with the insistence that all truth claims are specious fronts for subjective, agenda-driven narratives. Such a culture frequently comes with an atmosphere of anything goes and claims that all identities are purely social constructs, protean, easily adopted and lightly shed. I consider this version to be an overextended, distortedly crystallized version of the true insights of postmodernity.

All truths are inescapably articulated and understood in a social and historical context. The wrong conclusion to be drawn from this is a worldview of relativism or nihilism. The right response is to acknowledge the subjectivity, seek to offset and filter it with a hermeneutic of skepticism and with cross-cultural comparisons and insights. What is right about postmodern culture, and what needs to be incorporated into our religious beliefs and systems? The best approach is to recover as many voices from the past and present as possible, so as to allow for a 360-degree view of the truth and/or the issue.

Postmodernity emerged as humanity has lived through and recognized the fallacies and failures of modernity. This includes the methodological insight that many of the binaries held up by modern culture were not objective,

as claimed, but constructed. Therefore, the forced choices between science and religion, or facts and values, are not correct; nor are reason and science objective and authoritative, while faith is emotional and inferior. This means that it is all right to believe, side by side with science. In this culture, religious experience is both possible and authentic. When we acknowledge that divinity and belief are not fully accessible to language and objects, this insight enables us to grasp metaphors, poetry, and narrative models of faith.

Many truths of modernity and the very strengths that led to the upgrading of life and increased human dignity turned destructive or even catastrophic when extended beyond their limits or allowed to go out of control. The correct response is not to reject such phenomena as universalism, industrialization, commerce, technology, bureaucracy, but to employ them with limits, corrective mechanisms, and countervailing forces and norms.

Thus, postmodernity enables us to take the best insights and moral improvements of our culture into our traditions. The equality of women, the legitimacy of various forms of sexuality, affirmation of embodiment and the dignity of the body—which were fought by Orthodoxy as the spoor of modernity—can now be embraced and embedded in traditional culture and worldview. Similarly, postmodernity enables us to embrace every aspect of the heritage fully and incorporate it into a vital religious life. The transcendence of Divinity and the eternity of Torah—hitherto impugned by modern categories of understanding—can now be recovered.

Sociologically, the monolithic authority of modernity carried a tacit message to Jews: give up being different, in return for full admission to the club. Postmodernity's message is: you are here by right. Being Jewish and different is kosher. In this mode, pluralism becomes not the abandonment of absolutes and a way-station to relativism and moral indifference. It becomes a way of intensively affirming our religion, along with an acknowledgment that other religions may contribute to the world or even enrich our religious lives.

Finally, a healthy postmodernity embraces the human assumption of power. Whole new vistas of *tikkun olam* have opened up. At the same time, limits, covenantal standards and partnership with God and humans are essential to prevent this process of development from turning into unrestrained growth—that is, cancer, be it biological, political, or moral.

As I saw it, by the 1990s, Judaism had to evolve into a postmodern formulation. Already in 1979 I had written that, since the “idol worship of modernity has been broken in the Holocaust ... , correcting the excessive moderniza-

tion of Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and secular Jews is a major task ... we should be looking for a post-modern position ... This would include major growth and synthesis between Torah values and post-modern values and insights ... a major renewal of Modern Orthodoxy.”²⁵

I felt that the binary, either/or positions taken by Orthodox, Conservative and Reform in the first stage of modernity were all partially right and partially wrong. Many of these denominational conflicts stemmed from modern cultural assumptions and standards. On issues such as accepting or rejecting modern values (democracy and equality, or universal morality), meeting modern intellectual criteria as established by historical and critical methods, or the authority of reason and of tradition, the accumulation of evidence had become overwhelming. For people living in the culture, the issues had been settled decisively. Therefore, the real challenge was not whether, but how, to respond. I concluded that the valid responses were spaced along a spectrum. Consequently, pluralist responses were legitimate and necessary, especially if the whole Jewish people was to make it into the new culture.

By then, my primary teaching opportunities were at CLAL and at the Wexner Heritage Program. Both settings were pluralist in their working principles, with a widely diversified student cohort. While I never stopped being Modern Orthodox in my religious practice and institutional affiliations, I had become a pluralist. I affirmed the legitimacy of all the denominations and considered that denominational loyalties should be secondary to *clal yisrael* needs.

I believed the task of Jewish educators was to fight the values-free, nihilistic reading of postmodernity. The mission of Modern Orthodoxy was to join others in articulating the Jewish tradition and culture in a credible way in this emerging civilization. The postmodern Orthodox could make a special contribution in the process, because they were deeply grounded in and had access to the resources of the whole tradition. Yet they were close enough and integrated enough to learn how to make it fully credible in the new culture. It was urgent that they take leadership. If the level of Jewish culture and identity was not upgraded and intensified—the need to do this was the great insight and strength of Orthodoxy—then there was a high risk of broad-scale assimilation.

The Haredi effort to evade this culture was futile. The postmodern culture, at least in America, was even more open to Jews—so 95 percent of the Jewish community went into it enthusiastically. As I saw it, ultra-Orthodoxy’s success in creating some shelter and building itself as the counterculture was impressive, but

25 Irving Greenberg, “Orthodox Judaism and the Holocaust,” *Gesher* 71 (1979): 55–82.

was useful, essentially, only for itself. In choosing and carrying out these policies, it wrote off the bulk of the Jewish community. Furthermore, I estimated that this shelter solution would not last more than a generation or two. Therefore, I concluded that Modern Orthodoxy had a mission to go fully into the postmodern culture alongside the bulk of Jewry and show the way to a successful integration.

This community could provide important leadership, role models, and social heft to Jewry. To do this, Modern Orthodoxy would have to incorporate the positive moral and intellectual advances of modernity into its Torah heritage. Clearly, this would place a great strain on its capacity to grow and to reformulate the vital center of its tradition. I was convinced that on balance, democracy, pluralism, humanism, feminism, individualism, self-expression, this-worldliness, affirmation of the body and pleasure, cultural creativity, and variety of expression were moral and spiritual advances that the tradition should incorporate (while also critiquing and modifying them). Furthermore, both science and historical/critical studies had deepened our understanding of reality. The tradition needed to acknowledge these achievements and properly and persuasively reformulate the classic doctrines of revelation (that is, the understanding of commandment and of *Torah min hashamayim*), the continuity and eternity of tradition, and the covenant, in a manner credible to people with a new understanding through the postmodern lens.²⁶ By the light of the classic tradition, Jewry would critique, reshape, and put dialectical limits on postmodern culture—to the betterment of both. All the other strains of Jewish identity and strands of Jewish culture/religion would have to undergo a parallel process of upgrade, correction, and integration.

By the '90s, the right wing/centrists had frozen me out, so that neither my voice nor sympathetic views were heard in places like Yeshiva University, the Orthodox Union, or the Rabbinical Council of America. When I received an invitation from a small student group at Yeshiva to speak to them, posted signs announcing the lecture were torn down and replaced by signs stating that the

26 In recent years, two important postmodern Orthodox statements have emerged. One is the posthumous publications of the works of Rav Shagar (Shimon Gershon Rosenberg); see especially his comments on postmodernism in *Luhot v'Shivrei Luhot* (Tablets and Broken Tablets) (Tel Aviv: Yediot-Sifrei Hemed, 2013), 428–40. The other important address to the issues of historicity, narrative, and revelation is Yehuda Gellman, *This Was from God: A Contemporary Theology of Torah and History* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016). TheTorah.com is a website which connects Orthodox/observant Jews with contemporary biblical historical-critical scholarship to enable Jews who accept the divinity of Torah to learn from (and possibly integrate) critical scholarship.

lecture had been canceled. (I went anyway, and there were fewer than ten students present. They reported that the action was taken at the instigation of the *roshei yeshiva*, but when I reported the incident, Lamm said, “I had no idea.”)

In the 1990s, I worked with Michael Steinhardt to create a model of entrepreneurial philanthropy, designed to innovate educational formats and enable the community to meet the culture/identity challenge. Through the Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation, we sought to build out the communal educational/experiential infrastructure needed to nurture Jewish identity in the open society. JLN/SF was a leader, especially in the creation of immersive experiences (Birthright Israel), day schools (through the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education), and camps (through the Grinspoon Foundation).

Michael Steinhardt was persuaded that it was in the interest of the broader Jewish community (and of his goals) to revive Modern Orthodoxy. He put up matching money, and I was able to recruit a group of Modern Orthodox philanthropists to fund a new outlet for a progressive, communal-oriented Orthodoxy, which we called EDAH. EDAH’s programming leaned over backward not to appear too progressive. It repeatedly stressed that it was only advocating pluralism within Orthodoxy. Its slogan “the courage to be modern and Orthodox” captured the fear of delegitimization by the right and a desire for their approval. Steinhardt was disillusioned by EDAH’s inability to mount a serious challenge to the rightward drift, and dropped out.

EDAH was ahead of its time. There were no self-affirming, proudly Modern Orthodox institutions to stand in solidarity with it. Nor did it have a self-aware, battle-seasoned lay leadership that wanted to reclaim the direction of the community. EDAH offered its administrative leadership to an outstanding and iconic Modern Orthodox rabbi, Rabbi Saul Berman, who managed to sustain it for a decade of modest programming and cautious policy moves before it closed.

Nevertheless, the left of Modern Orthodoxy began to stir. Thanks to such stalwarts as Blu Greenberg, Rabbi Avi Weiss, and a host of lay leaders, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA), Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (YCT), and Yeshivat Maharat began the work of rebuilding a genuine, open Modern Orthodoxy. The International Rabbinical Fellowship (IRF) was founded by Rabbis Avi Weiss and Marc Angel to serve as a rabbinic organization for more progressive Orthodox rabbis—especially as the RCA continued to move to the right. (The RCA refused to recognize the ordination of those who graduated YCT and would not admit them to membership because the views taught at the school were openly progressive Orthodox.) The IRF membership is now over two hundred rabbis.

As these groups strengthened, I discovered that my views were no longer as decidedly different from the Orthodox camp's spectrum than in the past. I have supported and helped these new groups, including teaching under their auspices but have not been active in their consolidation. Honestly, I had not expected these developments in my lifetime. I often think of the Talmudic dictum *zachu-melachtam naaseyt al yedei acheyrim* (If people are lucky/worthy, their work is done for them by others).²⁷

These organizations are only finding their way. Furthermore, they are continuously fending off delegitimizing attacks from the Haredi community and the centrist institutions, such as Yeshiva University and the RCA. This pressure holds them down to some extent. That said, they are mostly not where I am. For example, they are not yet pluralist. They have not yet arrived at the understanding of the need to mature beyond Modern Orthodoxy into a postmodern Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, they are highly significant. They shed new light on the terminology that I represent, the road not taken for Modern Orthodoxy.

I believe that history will record that in the past half century, Modern Orthodoxy (especially its leadership) lost its way and turned onto the path of halakhic reaction, communal separation, and seeking cultural shelter. Instead of growing and moving forward into postmodernity, it retreated and turned toward the ghetto/shelter of premodernity. This rightward turn made it miss two historic missions that it could have fulfilled. One was to lead the world Jewish community to successfully master the forces of assimilation and alienation from their religious heritage by offering an integrated, intellectually, and morally credible Jewish way of life in the heart of (post)modern civilization. The other was to recalibrate the relationship of Judaism and Christianity, ending the Christian denigration of Jewish religion and enabling both faiths to partner in teaching and modeling the covenant of redemption for the world.

THE DECLINE AND REBIRTH OF (POST)MODERN ORTHODOXY

The flight from history and responsibility has been close to catastrophic for Modern Orthodoxy, which now amounts to only 3 percent of American Jewry.²⁸ It has lost many of the young people who were educated by the Haredi/

27 BT Berakhot 35b.

28 "A Portrait of Jewish Americans, Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews, 2013," <http://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2013/10/jewish-american-full-report-for-web.pdf>.

yeshivish rebbes staffing its institutions, either because the campus atmosphere and academic studies of the best universities undermined their belief systems and observance patterns, or because they moved even further to the right and became ultra-Orthodox.

The decline of Modern Orthodoxy has been no less harmful to the general Jewish community, as their ability to synthesize modernity and tradition and show all Jews how to live Jewishly in the world has been damaged. As Modern Orthodoxy weakened and its leadership deferred to the right, the Haredim took control of the religious public agenda. They installed Haredi-friendly policies that were inimical to the best interests of other groups. These policies included delegitimation of non-Orthodox groups, rather than cooperative strengthening of the community's educational infrastructure and/or joint outreach to the unaffiliated.

In Israel, the Modern Orthodox failed to check strident Haredi attacks on liberal Judaism or the use of their role in government coalitions to exclude non-Haredim from public spaces (such as the Kotel/Western Wall). These policies alienated many American Jews from the Jewish state and hurt Israel's image as a democracy. Yet the Centrist Orthodox were persuaded to stand in solidarity with the Haredim in both countries—even though the ultra-Orthodox frequently demeaned Modern and even some Centrist Orthodox rabbis or denied the legitimacy of Modern Orthodox practices and rabbinic conversions.

An impossibly demanding, exclusionary conversion policy was enforced by the Israeli chief rabbinate and was generally followed by the Centrist Orthodox in America. As the American Jewish community was participating intensely in the general society, Jews met and fell in love with non-Jews, while many Gentiles became interested in Judaism and open to conversion, especially to marry a Jew. Instead of helping them stay Jewish by easing entry of prospective converts into the general Jewish community, Orthodox requirements were considerably tightened. The legitimacy of all liberal conversions, no matter how rigorously or seriously done, were denied, even though statistics showed that such converts and their spouses became considerably more affiliated and participatory in Jewish life than those who intermarried but did not convert. The outcome was that the surge in intermarriage was bleeding people out of Jewry—whereas a more *clal yisrael*-oriented, welcoming conversion policy could have turned interfaith relationships into a recruitment tool for the Jewish people.

In Israel, 300,000 Russian *olim* were ready to become full citizens and join the Jewish religion to be one with the Jewish majority. They served in the IDF (Israel Defense Force), putting their lives on the line to protect the Jewish state,

but they were presented with the demand that they become ultra-observant in order to be converted. The ultra-Orthodox rabbinic staff's treatment of the would-be converts during the process, and their all-out assaults and denial of legitimacy to those who went through a more lenient Orthodox process, also alienated the community, so Israeli Russian public opinion turned against conversion.

The ultra-Orthodox educational system made students less qualified to contribute to the contemporary polity, economy, and scientific/technological culture. Although the Modern Orthodox did get highly educated and contributed much, as they became more influenced by ultra-Orthodox values, this reduced or cramped their participation. At a time when Israel and Jewry took on political sovereignty and the creation of a military infrastructure to defend it, the Haredim taught that everything depended on being right with God—as a substitute for an army which they did not join. They diminished the moral dimension of the religion in favor of pleasing God with religious behaviorism. This reduced the Orthodox contribution to solving the moral dilemmas of exercising power.

Haredi influence stimulated the growth of the *hardal* grouping inside Religious Zionism. These ultra-religious nationalists translated the worldview that all depended on God into messianist policies. Their visions would not be bound by political/military realities, by Israeli government authority, or by international public opinion.

The reduction of modern influences and increasing withdrawal from contact with people of other viewpoints led to considerable growth of anti-Arab prejudice and hostility to Christian minorities among Orthodox Jews. The religious community and its voters repeatedly became an obstacle to exploring peace possibilities, or they supported restrictions on civil rights and democratic practices.

In 2017 the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (OU) ruled that “a woman should not be appointed to serve in a clergy position.”²⁹ This prohibition was a response to the spread of Orthodox women's ordination and service as clergy in communities both in the United States and Israel. This was stimulated by the steady advance of women to leadership in politics, education, business, and professions, as well as the overwhelming triumph in American and Israeli society of the principle that women are fully equal to men and should be treated that way. The prohibition of women serving as clergy was

29 See www.rabbis.org/pdfs/Responses-of-OU-Rabbinic-Panel.pdf.

justified on three specific halakhic grounds and on a global “halakhic ethos.” Each of the rationales fits the Haredi community perfectly but is dissonant with the actual way of life of Modern Orthodox Jews.

The Haredi Agudath Israel of America and its rabbinic leadership had already proclaimed these developments to be beyond Orthodoxy, but they continued, so the traditionalists within the Orthodox Union sought to reverse this direction within Modern Orthodoxy. However, the ruling is out of step with the Modern Orthodox reality and its prevalent values. Most Modern Orthodox Jews perceive women’s equality as morally superior to women’s inequality. The 2017 ruling makes it harder to function as a Modern Orthodox Jew. Many Modern Orthodox young people are in college/university settings where exclusion of women from leadership roles is deadly to their ethical standing and religious credibility among their peers. Like the other rulings above, this policy forces Modern Orthodox Jews to move to the right or lose out.

What makes this policy destructive to Modern Orthodoxy is that it was handed down by seven rabbis, six of them from Yeshiva University, the flagship center of Modern Orthodoxy. Under that cover, it presents as a halakhic ruling to be legitimately imposed on Modern Orthodox synagogues and laypeople. It gives no halakhic weight to the existence of Modern Orthodox authorities, who rule that women can be ordained and can serve as rabbis.

This ruling continues the domination of Haredi values on Modern Orthodox life. These values have been so damaging to the modern community and have strengthened the Haredim at the expense of the Modern Orthodox, steadily driving out more Americanized, less traditional Jews. In 1960, based on my personal observations and the results of demographic studies in some local communities, I estimated that the Orthodox were around 20 percent of the adult national Jewish community. Perhaps half of Modern Orthodox synagogue membership was comprised of semi-observant or nonobservant Jews who identified as Orthodox. Their numbers and the institutions they supported gave heft to the Modern Orthodox community. Three decades later, these Jews or their children were gone, and the term “non-observant Orthodox” was viewed as an oxymoron inside the community. In the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, Orthodoxy was down to 7.7 percent of American Jewry. Almost all that decline was in Modern Orthodoxy.

The same outcome holds true in Jewish education. Separate gender education honored Haredi norms, but served as a signal to non-Orthodox parents that Jewish day school was un-American. The single biggest obstacle to day-school enrollment was the widespread feeling among non-Orthodox American

Jews that they wanted maximum social integration in American life for their children. Gender segregation and other Haredi practices (such as restricting women's singing) put the day schools into an "alien" box. Once labeled this way, the schools found it hard to get out of being categorized as on the fringe. Outside the large metropolitan centers, the typical Jewish day school was started and driven by Modern Orthodox families, but needed non-Orthodox registration to survive financially. As the schools adopted a more Haredi atmosphere, they lost registration, struggled financially, and became less relevant to the rest of the Jewish families. In some communities, parents started Solomon Schechter (Conservative) schools or more sectarian schools. Both developments weakened the Modern Orthodox or the community day schools.

The 2013 Pew survey of American Jewry shows the cumulative impact of these policies, which drove off the less traditional, more Americanized Jews. In the half century from 1960 on, Modern Orthodoxy lost more than 50 percent of its membership. This decline, which was recognized as stemming from the move to the right, was rationalized by Modern Orthodox leadership as the creation of a more solid, observant core constituency. This was true to a point. However, the larger part of Modern Orthodoxy (led by Yeshiva University) distanced itself from American culture. Most called themselves centrist, not "modern." This group, *de facto*, had become Haredi-lite. Since many in its community were still exposed to American jobs, culture, and standards, especially when its sons and daughters went to regular colleges and universities, the community continued to bleed children from its committed families.

THE ROAD TO BE TAKEN

There are people who despair of Modern Orthodoxy's future. If you believe that the Jewish people can live without the Torah (and 85 percent of Jewry reject ultra-Orthodox religion), then Modern Orthodoxy may well disappear. If you believe that the Torah can live without the Jewish people—and this is the implication of an Orthodoxy that insists on the premodern way of life, which 95 percent of Jewry will not accept—then Modern Orthodoxy may well disappear. However, if you believe that both cannot live without each other, then Modern Orthodoxy will have to be reborn. The community/movement must reinvent itself to survive and to nurture Jews in this new postmodern culture.

This long-awaited rebirth is happening before our eyes now. It is now plausible that Modern Orthodoxy will turn onto the same road that *dal yisrael* is on: a way to postmodernity that is illuminated by the orienting events of the

Holocaust and the State of Israel, which signal a turn to taking political and military power in a responsible and morally restrained way. On this road, Jews will participate fully in scientific, medical, technological, and cultural breakthroughs, while upholding the moral restraints and spiritual guidelines of the tradition—alongside and in tandem with all people. Strengthened by Modern Orthodox teaching and models, all Jews will act out of Jewish values and see challenges through a Jewish lens, but they will acknowledge the dignity, validity, and contribution of other religions and national cultures.

In preparation for that development—which may well occur after my lifetime—I have worked for the past thirty years to create a Jewish narrative that could be persuasive in an open society in the full presence of other religions and cultures. Part of its credibility is that it affirms the other religions and respects them rather than dismissing them. This thinking started in the '60s with the notion of the centrality of *tzelem elokim*, the dignity of all persons created in the image of God. Next came pluralism. Once one encounters the power and contribution of other religions and religious trends, how can one go on affirming the absolute claims of one's own tradition? Pluralism holds the continuing authority (and even absolute demands) of one's own tradition, while acknowledging that there are other, sometimes even contradictory, teachings that are also valid. I continue to believe that pluralism is the only acceptable alternative to relativism. The fundamentalist upholding of absolutism requires creating a shelter or forcibly reducing the presence of other religions and cultures. Such a policy is morally flawed and spiritually warped—as can be seen in those countries where fundamentalism rules supreme. The policy is also likely doomed to failure as technology, more and more, interconnects people and their traditions.

I have gone through three waves of interpretation of pluralism. In the first wave, I derived pluralism from the tradition's building blocks of *tzelem elokim* and covenant. This included coming to understand Christianity—and trying to formulate a Jewish relationship to it—as an independent, dignified religion which has a genuine covenantal relationship with God (the same God as the Jewish people's).

In the second wave—reworking the understanding of the covenant in the light of the Shoah—I articulated the concept of a voluntary covenant. In the Holocaust, the covenant was broken and then reaccepted by the Jewish people, voluntarily, out of love of God, love of the Torah, and love of the vision of *tikkun olam*—even by those who did not believe in God. This formulation was used to delegitimize me and my thinking, particularly in Haredi and centrist circles. This is another example of the constant tension between trying to navigate by

the light of the new orienting events while seeking to uphold and participate in Modern Orthodoxy. I was pained by my loss of credibility in the community. Still, I believed that I must faithfully interpret the religious revelation of our time. I never lost hope that Modern Orthodoxy would grow religiously, then it would acknowledge and integrate these new events and come to understand where it should stand religiously.

This struggle led to the next round of thinking—articulated in a narrative theology that has not yet been published. This interpretation is focused on a repeated divine *tzimtzum*. The initial divine self-limitation constitutes the entry into the covenant in the biblical stage. The next stage was a summons to Jewry to take on a more active role in the covenant. That Jewish response to God's call is expressed in the world and culture of rabbinic Judaism. I believe that since the beginning of modernity, we have been living through a third divine *tzimtzum*. This constitutes a call to the Jewish people and to all humanity to take power and assume full responsibility for the realization of the covenant. This third-stage human response is meant to be out of love, free will, and full, autonomous identification with the goal of *tikkun olam*. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm is not one of God breaking the covenant and Jewry voluntarily reaccepting it. The better understanding is that the covenant was always meant to be an educational process. God intended (as it were) that the human partners develop, then grow up, and become empowered enough to take full responsibility. Having given over the mandate to the human partners, the Divine did not shirk responsibility during the Holocaust; God was present and infinitely shared the pain and torment of the Jews. However, humanity did not exercise its responsibility.

Part of the failure to act in the Shoah stemmed from the inherited absolutist denigration of Judaism and hatred of Jewry. Another factor was modern humanity's loss of the sense of being covenanted (i.e., a partner in Creation and history). This failure of understanding has led to increasing human arrogance and self-deification, which is being expressed in exploitation of Creation and other human beings. These tendencies have become a threat to all life, as exemplified in climate change and species destruction. The failure to preserve the sense of partnership was aided and abetted by religious groups who have insisted that, out of respect for God, humanity should not take on powers that were once beyond it, nor should humans assume roles that were seen in the past as in the realm of the Divine. But an important part of the Jewish mission is to teach the ongoing power and relevance of the partnership. Jewry can be a role model on how to follow the (totally hidden but totally present) God into the new era of human empowerment, without becoming idolatrous. Thus, Jewry

can become again a “light unto the nations” even as it persists and pursues its own covenantal goals.

As for Modern Orthodoxy, it cannot be the whole answer for every Jew; nor can it save Jewry or the tradition all by itself. Still, I hope that it will relocate itself in the center of Jewish life—and lead the charge into postmodernity. Being in the center means that one mediates, as Moses and the great prophets and rabbis did, between God and the people, between tradition and the need for change, between the entire heritage and postmodernity. When it lost its way, Centrist Orthodoxy located itself in the faux center—halfway between the Orthodox left and Satmar. But that actually placed them on the extreme right margin of *clal yisrael*, with 95 percent of the Jews living to their left, operating by different cultural assumptions and struggling with alternative moral paradigms and existential challenges. Modern Orthodoxy must relocate itself solidly inside postmodernity, sharing the fate, the challenges, and the experiences of all of Israel. Then it will be able to deepen the tradition, incorporate new methods, insights, and values, while connecting all people to the deepest levels of the entire heritage. This is the road that I believe will still be taken.