

Sliding to the Right

The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy



Samuel C. Heilman

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Orthodoxy in America after the Holocaust

Let us put aside our pain and bitter experiences and demonstrate for all the world to see that we are the people of the Torah, blessed with eternal life.

Eliczer Gershon Friedenson,
Beth Jacob Journal, June 27, 1938

*The branch that may be bare will bloom again—
The flowers, once fallen, never rejoin the bough*

Hua-Pen, “Song of the Forsaken Wife”

In his analysis of what he calls “The Third Great Cycle in Jewish History,” an epoch that begins in the last half of the twentieth century, Irving Greenberg defines the Holocaust as an “orienting event,” one that changes the way Jews view the world. While this analysis may or may not be true for other Jews, for the Orthodox—particularly in America—the Holocaust undoubtedly not only set their future direction but also ex post facto reconsecrated and even more importantly *reframed* and redefined their past. After the Holocaust, much of that Jewish past was sentimentally perceived, anachronistically understood, and nostalgically recollected in often inaccurate ways. In part this was because the new post-Holocaust reality confronted Orthodoxy most dramatically with the question of whether its past strategies for survival had been correct, whether in light of its massive losses in the Nazi firestorm it could continue to exist, and, if so, what would be its best future course for survival. Nowhere were these questions more urgent than in the Diaspora, which according to a worldview promoted particularly by Zionists (including the “religious” among them) *ineluctably* led to persecution and ultimately genocide—the inevitable consequences, for the Jews, of being a people bereft of their homeland and dependent on the hospitality, protection, and tolerance of others. All Jewish life in societies not their

own, these Jewish nationalists (who now had a state of their own) asserted, must end in maltreatment and banishment.¹ The Holocaust, the argument ran, simply carried this process to its logical and fateful extreme. The facts seemed obvious. In Europe, yeshivas, synagogues, Hasidic courts, and indeed whole communities of the Orthodox (who were easiest to identify and slowest to flee) and many of their leaders had been destroyed or at best decimated by the Nazis and their supporters. The question therefore was whether the fate of the European Jewish Diaspora was a template for the remaining Diaspora Jewish communities—including America—or whether lessons could be learned from Europe to help prevent another disaster.

Orthodoxy in what would become its new major Diaspora, America, had to answer this question and to deal with the human and institutional reality of its extraordinary losses. The influx of Holocaust refugees and survivors just before (many through the efforts of the Orthodox-sponsored Hatzalah program) and in the aftermath of World War II, which gave American Orthodoxy an important infusion of new blood, made this question even more consequential.² Indeed, the proportion of Holocaust survivors who remained Orthodox after arrival in America is twice as high as the proportion of the Orthodox in the American population overall, a figure confirmed in every National Jewish Population Survey since 1970.³ Postwar Orthodoxy, after all, had to face the question of its own responsibility for those deaths—in great measure because so many of its leaders had urged their followers not to leave Europe's Jewish communities for what they described as the impurities of the cultural melting pot that was America or the heresies of a largely secular and socialist Israel, places in which they argued individual Jews might physically survive but genuine Judaism would not. Finally, as it grew by virtue of the flow of refugees and survivors, American Orthodoxy became overwhelmingly populated by those in its midst who had been traumatized by and survived the events in Europe.⁴ One might argue that much of what Orthodoxy has become after the war, particularly in the new American Diaspora, is in some way a reflection of how it came to terms with these issues. In all this, one might argue, Orthodoxy evolved a post-Holocaust ideology and sociology that have played a role in its persistence and character in the ensuing years. In effect, American Orthodox Jews, during most of the years since the end of the Holocaust, have asked themselves, either explicitly or implicitly, if what they have done justifies their survival. Hence this is where the analysis of today's American Orthodoxy must begin.

The Last 150 Years

However tragic the Nazi era was for Orthodox Jews and Judaism, it would be a misreading of history to suggest that only the Holocaust affected them. The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries were periods of social flux and cultural change. While a review of this era is far beyond the scope of this chapter, one can recall—albeit telegraphically—that through much of this period Jews experienced the dislocations of mass migration, during which a majority moved (or were chased) from places in which they had lived for generations. They also lived through processes of rapid urbanization, during which the last vestiges of rural Jewry disappeared; then, by the end of the era, at least in America, many would experience the new realities of suburbanization, when whole communities had to be invented from scratch. During the years leading up to the Holocaust, Jews also felt the impact of the sweeping, almost relentless forces of what appeared to many to be the ineluctable imperatives of secularization, when large numbers of people abandoned and often actively spurned the traditional and religious ways of life that had been dominant in favor of something else, mostly shaped by non-Jewish cultural norms. This was a time when Jews became increasingly assimilated into the host cultures around them, at least insofar as they were accepted (the Holocaust, of course, demonstrated the limits of this acceptance). All of this inevitably left the Orthodox who disdained assimilation with a sense of their fragility as a people, along with a cultural fixation on the matter of Jewish survival.

Uprootedness and change, the basic elements of what Erik Erikson calls “transmigrations,” were the essential components of this sense of fragility. The vicissitudes of transmigration and of surviving a variety of assimilationist waves as well as persecutions culminating in the Holocaust made a feeling of “uprootedness” an abiding part of Orthodox identity. Put differently, one might say that for many of these Jews the experiences of the last 150 years fostered a consciousness in which an expectation of change rather than stability became the governing element of life. In varying ways this history seemed repeatedly to force breaks with the past. If previous generations of the Orthodox had shared (at least for a time) a general sense that their future would essentially be no different from their past—barring some miraculous messianic redemption—the Orthodox at the midpoint of the twentieth century, on the contrary, were increasingly convinced that the future was less and less prone to be anything at all like the past. The line between yesterday, today, and tomorrow seemed always to be broken.

Like all those who undergo such repeated migrations, these Jews found that they often had to suddenly assume “new and often transitory identities” whose purpose was to help them navigate the traumatic passage from one world or way of life to another without feeling as if they have been completely set adrift.⁵ Jews therefore often found themselves looking for new ways of defining who they were, a quest for identity that was often indistinguishable from the process of their migration. To be sure, many of the identities they adopted tended to be “liminal” or transitional.⁶ The Orthodox, although they wanted to remain true to tradition, albeit in a sometimes purely reactive way, found that doing so was increasingly difficult as the cultural and social contexts in which they tried to do it changed.⁷ The Orthodox movement, itself a product of the ferment and change that marked the era, and by no means monolithic, therefore kept trying to redefine what it meant to be Orthodox. Moreover, they were not always successful in holding onto their members. Even in their most hallowed institutions like the yeshivas, interests in the world outside and Zionism and changes in those who were students moved significant numbers out of the confines of Orthodoxy and in the direction of the modern culture.⁸ Many sensed what most Jews were coming to believe: the advantage was to those who chose *verbesserung*, the German-Jewish term for naturalization or acculturation, or at the very least were willing to engage in religious adaptation and reform and break the restraints of traditional Jewish life.⁹

In response, some of the Orthodox leaders railed against those who broke with tradition, warning loyalists that in such an era of transition it was mandatory to avoid even minor accommodations and to stay within the religious confines of European Orthodoxy. In the face of change, the only possible response was to embrace a more stringent insularity and parochialism that would enable one to avoid or perhaps deny the dislocations of change. Change had to be actively rejected and yesterday frozen in the imagination; no accommodation to local conditions was acceptable, lest it lead to drift. The Orthodox opposition to accommodation and reform came from the belief that any effort to blend Jewish identity with *verbesserung* was cultural suicide. Moreover, even when they did something new, the Orthodox had to persuade themselves that they were not really changing.

The so-called neo-Orthodox, who traced their origins to German-speaking Jewry, disagreed. They strove to respond to the experience of transmigration and change by fashioning a life that eschewed the rejectionist approach to accommodation or change and included a sense of belonging to both the host and Jewish cultures in which they found them-

selves. Theirs was an Orthodoxy that endowed the general civilization that so many of their co-religionists wanted to be part of with ontological meaning and cultural value, even as they remained powerfully loyal and profoundly attached to Jewish tradition and law (Halacha). This was what some called *Torah-im-derech-eretz* (Torah Judaism combined with the surrounding culture), in terminology that German Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch made famous.¹⁰ Such Jews, seeking to participate in civil society, were convinced that, if mined carefully, the surrounding civilization could ultimately contribute positively to their humanity and their Judaism. As such, they became the ideological predecessors of those who later in America came to be called “modern Orthodox” and defined themselves as Jews who grappled “with the issues involved in both civilizations,” understanding “their points of conflict and tension.”¹¹ To be sure, to add the adjective *modern* to the identity “Orthodox” is somehow “to invite the inference that this implies modification in the attachment to tradition.”¹² But the neo-Orthodox believed that they could have the associations of the first without fundamentally undermining the associations of the second, something their more tradition-minded opponents would always challenge.

In general, as noted in the previous chapter, the accommodationist approach was most popular in cultural milieus where features that characterized the surrounding civilization were attractive to Jews and where they had some hope of access to that culture. In nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Germany, with its high culture, this often became the case, especially for Jews who lived in the cities. In eastern Europe and Poland this was less likely. Here Orthodox Jews more often sought to emphasize their parochialism and sectarian rejection of non-Jewish culture. Looking at their surroundings in the shtetls and pale of settlement where they most frequently found themselves, these Orthodox Jews saw peasants and those whose culture presented little they found attractive or superior to what they had within their own precincts. In practice, therefore, sectarianism for these shtetl Jews was no great sacrifice. Compared to what they saw on the other side of the cultural divide, these Jews could genuinely believe, as a popular maxim put it, that *toyreh ist di beste schoyre* (the Torah offers us the best goods). But those surrounded by the high culture of Western Europe were not quite as certain.

The border between the culturally pluralist Hirschian approach and the more sectarian eastern European one was somewhere in central Europe, in the remnants of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Here both types of Orthodoxy could be found. Indeed the conflicts along this frontline in the Jewish ideological battleground were probably the sharpest—which is why

the Hungarian region is one to which both the most insular Orthodox sects as well as the most assimilated of modern Jewries can trace their origins. Those on one side of the divide were attracted by the European “high culture” around them more than the Jewish one, while those on the other were repelled by what they saw as the surrounding “low culture,” preferring what they viewed as the superiority of Jewish life and tradition.¹³

The ideological successors of these highly sectarian Jews are today’s Haredim, particularly (but not exclusively) those who trace their origins to Hungary and parts of Romania where the Jewish culture wars were most sharply defined.¹⁴ The sectarians encouraged, as noted in our introduction, a purposeful sense of alienation from the contemporary, often enticing, westernized, materialistic world that they believed would lead ultimately to assimilation and the end of true Orthodox Judaism, which was to them the only true Judaism.

Yet whatever their differences from one another, insofar as they were Orthodox these prewar Jews were clearly steadfastly holding onto a way of life that ran against the rest of Jewish stream. While no one can be certain what would have happened had the Nazis not extinguished European Jewry, it was nevertheless already clear by the eve of the war that Orthodoxy, whatever its orientation, was destined to be at best a minority orientation among Ashkenazic Jews. Certainly that was the case in America, where the Nazi horror did not reach; American Orthodox Jews—those who had been willing to come to the Jewish frontier in the New World—were and continued through most of the twentieth century to be an ever-shrinking minority.

After the Holocaust, however, the relatively few Orthodox survivors looked around in the ashes of their European Jewish life. Notwithstanding all the erosion of their numbers before the war, the Nazi regime seemed more than anything else to strike the deathblow to Orthodoxy. Or at least so it might have looked in the war’s immediate aftermath. The Orthodox Jews were particularly bewildered to discover that proportionately they had been hardest hit and that their strategies for survival had on their face been a terrible mistake, nowhere more so than among those who had been most uncompromising in their Orthodoxy. In the summer of 1945, writing in *Diglenu*, a publication of the Tzeiray Agudat Yisrael, Moshe Sheinfeld captured the reality that many Jews like him could not help but perceive at the time.¹⁵

What do the numbers tell us? In Poland . . . about thirty thousand Jews remained, broken in body and spirit. And the proportion of observant Jews among them was

totally negligible, since it was those who spoke fluent Polish and were able to pass themselves off as Poles who were saved. In the labor camps it was the master craftsmen and the most robust who survived [and many Orthodox yeshiva boys or elderly rabbinic sages belonged to neither category]. . . . [T]he fact is that religious Jewry in Poland and the Baltic states was effectively annihilated and no longer exists. . . . The Jews in Slovakia, who were for the most part organized in independent Orthodox communities and excelled in piousness and the pure belief in the sages . . . , were also nearly all wiped out. And in Romania it was still more forcefully apparent that the Holocaust had singled out Orthodox Jewry in particular. One hundred and forty thousand Jews from Carpathian Russia, all of them followers of popular Hasidim, were deported to the crematoria in Poland. The same holds for the myriads of village Jews from Marmaros [Hungary] who worshipped God with ardent joy and were wonderfully devoted to their spiritual leaders.

To Sheinfeld the facts were incontrovertible: “[W]hoever was more pious was more utterly destroyed.”¹⁶ To drive his point about the greater vulnerability of the Orthodox, he added: “Saloniki, the Greek [Jewish] community famous for its Sabbath rest in its port, was destroyed. Assimilated Athens, with God’s help, emerged alive. In Belgium there were two large communities: the liberal Brussels community which was almost completely saved thanks be to God, and the Antwerp community, a great Jewish center unexampled in Western Europe—of its forty thousand Jews, fewer than two thousand survived.”¹⁷

In effect, those who had been expert in parochial Jewish crafts and scholarship and nothing more were lost in great numbers, as were those sectarians who had remained totally within the precincts of Judaism. Loyalty to the Orthodox community and its ways had turned out to be a recipe for disaster. If other Jews had also been unlucky, the Orthodox Jews were nevertheless even more unfortunate.

Sheinfeld, who found himself living and writing in a Jewish state, was not alone in his perceptions. Many of those who ended up in yet another Diaspora in America saw things the same way. They also asked themselves, “Why did this happen to us?” and “What must we do now?”¹⁸ These questions and the answers that people formulated for themselves were particularly compelling in America because that society, particularly in the 1950s and the decades that followed, offered so much opportunity for Jews, as indeed for everyone, to “start over” anew after the war.¹⁹

American Orthodox Jews could not help but share in this sense of the new. They could also not be blind to the fact that life here was not like life in Europe. American culture and society were welcoming, particularly to the survivors, refugees, and displaced persons who were brought

to this country just at the time that it was about to renew itself and prosper after nearly a half-century of war and economic depression. But the question that lingered somewhere in the minds of many of these new Orthodox immigrants, survivors and children of survivors, was: Would this Diaspora be better for them, or would it end as had the previous one, in tragedy?

First, however, was the question of regeneration. The Orthodox community that was going to try to reconstitute itself in America had lost some of the most remarkable flowers of European Orthodoxy. Now they would see if the branch that was nearly bare could be made to bloom again. Although the Orthodox went to the cities, particularly in the Northeast and especially in and around New York, they came in the 1950s, just as Americans were about to begin the great suburban migration. The trends of suburbanization and its capacity for reinvention would emerge along with a new version of the Jewish local community. Jews, like everyone else in these suburbs, could gain access to the community (such as it was) and become something new. While the Orthodox were slower than others of their co-religionists in coming to suburbia, both because they were among the poorest of all Jews and because they remained bonded to the established Jewish institutions that were reluctant to leave the city, they would in time come in increasing numbers to the new suburban frontier. Here and also in the cities they would endeavor to transform their “uprootedness” into “transplantedness.”

Implicit in this effort at transplantation were two different and often competing assumptions about the character of America. The first was the modernist and accommodationist one, which asserted that America was “different,” a place in which Jews were not now or ever excluded legally from full-fledged citizenship. Consequently, the proper Jewish response was to become a *new kind of Jew* who instead of being identified with the old ways was ready to start over. This called for affirmative acculturation, a rerooting that acknowledged that America was a good place to be and be part of. This attitude provided a comforting psychosocial response to the deeply unsettling experience of uprootedness and stigmatization that was Jewish life during the first half of this century.²⁰ Only thus, by rejecting old places and ways and embracing the new, could Jews feel fully “at home in America.”²¹ Taking advantage of American opportunities, education, and mobility, Jews were increasingly inclined to speak in “new languages,” mostly English, albeit with a newcomer’s accent, rather than in the old languages without one. They often changed their physical appearance, making their clothes and grooming indistinguishable from what

was standard in contemporary Western civilization. And they actively pursued education, occupations, and lifestyles that made it possible for them to pass unnoticed into the mainstream cultures around them.²² This was the strategy of most Jews, and it was also that of modern Orthodoxy, even as it tried to maintain allegiance to the tradition.

At the other extreme was what would become the Haredi assumption, which avowed that if America was different a greater vigilance and more powerful strategies would be necessary to prevent its undoing of tradition and Orthodoxy. They worried that attractive new American identities would come at the expense of Jewish ones. And if America was not different, then the best course of action was to revert to the old patterns of behavior, the ways that some called *Yisrael sabbah*, meaning a kind of tribalist attachment to the paradigmatic old-worldly ways of the “Jewish grandfather,” in which any change from the past (or the past as those after the Holocaust imagined it) was proscribed.²³ Yet because the sentiments and doubts expressed by Sheinfeld were common (if not always as explicit) among these Jews, at least in the immediate aftermath of the war, they were slow in coming back to those ways or at least soft-pedaled their arguments in favor of it. Particularly in America in the late 1940s and early 1950s many Orthodox survivors, including some of the most prominent rabbis and Hasidic leaders, seemed broken and unsure of themselves and their future.²⁴ Indeed, there was an insecurity and stillness in many Orthodox quarters during what might best be called the “aftershock years,” a time when the Orthodox (and certainly the Haredim among them) in America were almost invisible. Trying to fathom the meaning of what had happened, some actually counseled survivors to “sit in loneliness and be silent” and suggested that they would do best by “not asking questions but contemplating our condition.”²⁵ *Dor sheh tov lo ha shetika* (a generation that would do well to be silent) was the emblematic phrase used by a preeminent Orthodox religious leader in Israel, the Hazon Ish, Rabbi Avraham Yishayahu Karelitz (1878–1953). The advice was taken up in America as well. Those who, in spite of their “shame, embarrassment and guilt over their utter failure to save their communities,” wanted nevertheless to maintain a steadfast attachment to the traditions of Orthodoxy settled their questions of faith at the outset with the modest theological conclusion that “[m]ysterious are the ways of the Lord and who can fathom their purpose.”²⁶ Thus, as American Orthodoxy began the second half of the twentieth century with a combination of immigrants, refugees, and those who had been trying to make traditional Judaism take root in what had for a long time been an Orthodox periphery but was about to become a

major center of it, the question that took up its attention was less the classic “Who is a truly Orthodox Jew?” than “What is to be the nature of an American Orthodox Jew?” and “How is the Jewish tradition to be expressed, if at all?”

To Compensate and Continue: The Orthodox as Survivors

American Orthodox Jews of all sorts who reflected on these questions and wondered about their future could see themselves as survivors in a double sense: first, they had survived the social ferment, waves of assimilation, and religious reform that had marked the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century; and second, however decimated and dislocated as a community, they had survived the Holocaust. But in the late 1940s and the early years of the next decade, the aftereffects of this twofold onslaught surely left them feeling like a shadow of what they once had been and beset by doubts and anxiety about their continued survival. Was Sheinfeld right? Was the very strategy they had used for surviving the first onslaught—holding fast to the ways of *Yisrael sababah*—that which had exacerbated the damage of the second? Was Orthodox reinvention the only hope for continued survival?

In this light, the possibility that Orthodox refugees might see themselves as relics of a bygone era and way of life, becoming ready either to abandon that old way or to see themselves as its final incarnation, would not be surprising. That, as we have seen, was what some sociologists believed to be the likely outcome. This sort of denouement would not be unusual in America, with its collective tendency to forget the past and focus on the future, and it surely would have been in tune with suburbanization. While we do not know how many survivors abandoned their attachments to Orthodoxy, through most of the twentieth century more American Jews left the ranks of the Orthodox than entered them. We must conclude that some Holocaust survivors also chose that option, though, as noted, many of the refugees did not.

What of those who kept the faith? Some still saw Orthodoxy as the “right answer” and therefore explained both their decimation and survival by reverting to the “ancient response to persecution: *mipnei chatoenu* ‘because of our sins,’ we have been punished” but also shifting the blame of the sinning to others.²⁷ Fingers were pointed in a variety of directions. To some postwar Orthodox, the sins were those of their generation who

had gone too far in their religious reform or assimilation. Others argued that heretical secular Zionists had angered and agitated God, by rebelling against an exile that they had sought to end before its God-appointed time, and had aroused the ire of enemies of the Jews (judged to be instruments of Divine anger) who saw activities in favor of a Jewish homeland as signs of Jewish disloyalty to and denigration of their citizenship in the lands of their domicile. For the most part, however, these arguments were not heard very clearly and did not stand out until years after the war.²⁸

There was also in some quarters an effort to perceive the Holocaust not as somehow preventable but rather as part of an ineluctable, ongoing historic Jewish experience of persecution, part of the endless tests of faith that were the destiny of the faithful. In line with this, certain Orthodox Jews rejected the idea of the Holocaust's uniqueness and shunned the Hebrew term *sho'ah*, that was used by some Jews, referring instead to *churban*, the Hebrew word used to describe Jewish destruction and ruin since the days of the Holy Temple. They therefore claimed to commemorate the loss not on Yom HaSho'ah, the special anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising that the Israeli government had established as the official memorial day, but rather on Tisha B'Av, the fast day in the Jewish calendar that already was used to mark the destruction of both the first and second Holy Temples in Jerusalem and the paradigm from which all Jewish mourning emerged.²⁹ Thus this suffering was to be seen as part of an ongoing "Divine retribution" and not as an "isolated catastrophe."³⁰

"Jews have always been beaten by Gentiles," this argument ran—in this case in the words of Rabbi Yitzhak Hutner, the postwar head of the major Orthodox Chaim Berlin Yeshiva in America. Pursuing the theme of ongoing Jewish persecution, Hutner concluded that "only the means and instruments of torment have varied." Then, with a xenophobic flourish, he added that the latest destruction—what we call the Holocaust—had been more traumatizing because before it "Jews were deluded into trust in the Gentiles by a series of laws and regulations in their behalf, only to have that trust shattered by the rescission of those very laws."³¹ "Trust in the Gentiles" was the way the rabbi, along with many of the most sectarian and insular Orthodox, understood any and all acculturationist movements and motivations. Hence, for the faithful, the only response to the Holocaust was to turn powerfully against modern Western culture ("trust in the Gentiles"). The lesson, these Orthodox concluded, was that the Holocaust proved the worthlessness of "the values of Western society. After all, the horrendous outrages were perpetrated not by some primitive tribes but by one of the most 'civilized' nations." "[H]ow can one

respect modern culture, if a Martin Heidegger, one of the most celebrated German philosophers, could turn into a Nazi and enthusiastically endorse Hitler's policies":³² For Jews like Hutner and those who shared his outlook, the lesson of the Holocaust was that no culture, however attractive or open, could be trusted. Judaism, especially Judaism in its most traditional forms, was the only reliable treasure. This argument was directed toward the modern Orthodox in America who *did* trust American culture.

"A man with a conviction," say the authors of *When Prophecy Fails*, the classic study of the persistence of faith in the face of disconfirming evidence, "is a hard man to change. Tell him you disagree and he turns away. Show him facts or figures and he questions your sources. Appeal to logic and he fails to see your point."³³ Indeed, they tell us that confronted by facts that might be imagined to undermine their beliefs or the behaviors they have established to support them, believers "may even show a new fervor about convincing and converting other people to [their] view."³⁴ This is particularly true when beliefs are specific and deeply held; when they demand certain definite or concrete commitments, and when there is a social framework that supports both the beliefs and practices. Such was and remains the case with Orthodox Jews and Judaism. Hutner and other Orthodox who held similar viewpoints demonstrated this sort of fervor. Accordingly, rather than withering away or atrophying in a frozen and shocked silence, their Orthodoxy came back, and did so with an astonishing vitality and remarkable speed—Sheinfeld's questions notwithstanding.

At the start, the resistance took the form of a quiet but unyielding commitment to remain faithful and attached to Jewish tradition and Orthodox practice, even in America. This took the form of building yeshivas and other Orthodox institutions. The commitment was striking, particularly to the young. Netty Gross, for example, describes how struck she was by watching the religious devotion of "my grandparents, ultra-Orthodox survivors, and not quite being able to understand why, after God failed such righteous people, my grandparents went on adhering to their way of life."³⁵ Moreover, the Orthodox were not content simply to hold onto the old ways; rather they sought to grow even more vigorously than before the war and even to reach beyond their natural constituency—the survivors, their spouses, and their offspring—in order to bring back and reconvert as well the "wayward" non-Orthodox Jews to Orthodox ways. The silence that the Hazon Ish had advocated was short-lived, and the "new fervor" that the authors of *When Prophecy Fails* describe was undeniable. As the twentieth century drew to a close, these Jews would not be

satisfied with simply holding onto their own; many of them would be focusing increasing attention on what came to be called *kiruv*, the bringing of outsiders nearer to the tradition.³⁶

Part of this Orthodox resurgence is explained by the fact that many post-Holocaust Orthodox Jews saw their survival as a sacred religious and moral challenge and defined their continued existence as a way to demonstrate to themselves and others that, despite the realities as Sheinfeld had summarized them, they had definitely *not* been abandoned by God or Jewish history. Closely related to this theme was the notion, also commonly found in Orthodox Jewish responses to the Holocaust, of survivors feeling a “responsibility [to act] as God’s witnesses in history.”³⁷ The Orthodox renewal was thus a way of giving content and meaning to the words spoken by the believers when in the dark days of recent history they swore, *Mir velen sie iberleben, Avinu shebashomayim* (We will outlive them, O Father in Heaven).³⁸ While the “them” were the Nazis and their supporters, the line could also be understood after the war as referring to Jews who assimilated. Hence continuing to live as Orthodox Jews and doing so uncompromisingly became a means of proving that the advice they and their forebears had followed to remain steadfast was in the longer view historically correct. This would mean being able, as one postwar Orthodox theologian put it, “to see again the finger of God in the fate of the Jewish people.”³⁹

“Let us put aside our pain and bitter experiences and demonstrate for all the world to see that we are the people of the Torah, blessed with eternal life.” These words, quoted as the epigraph to this chapter, come from Eliezer Gershon Friedenson in the *Beth Jacob Journal* on the eve of the second Siyum Ha Shas (completion of the review of the entire Talmud), June 27, 1938, as the Holocaust was looming frighteningly close, but they were echoed again and again after the war, most recently in 1990 at the Ninth Siyum Ha Shas, the great mass celebration of Haredi Orthodoxy in New York’s Madison Square Garden that marked the coordinated completion by thousands of mostly Orthodox Jews the world over of the entire Talmud in a seven-and-a-half-year cycle.⁴⁰ In their sentiment, they capture what became the essential response of most of those who remained Orthodox after the Holocaust: surviving and doing so visibly.

Michael Wyschograd, a contemporary Orthodox philosopher, writing in *Tradition*, the journal of the (Orthodox) Rabbinical Council of America, elaborated the reasoning behind this attitude thus: “[E]very time a Jew encounters the holocaust and loses his faith, the holocaust has claimed one more Jewish victim.”⁴¹ The requirement to maintain Jewish life and faith

in its *most* intense form becomes for each practicing Orthodox Jew whose people suffered so at the hands of Nazis a way to at once defeat Hitler and carry on the legacy of the dead. It also tries to undo the decimation by in a sense replacing it with a kind of Orthodox resurrection. Ensuring the continuity of Orthodoxy was therefore the point of survival. “On our shoulders was placed the historic duty to mend the torn Sefer Torah and put on it a new beautiful mantle,” was how in 1976 Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, the American-born Novominsker Rebbe and a leader of the Haredi Agudath Israel of America, put it, suggesting that the restoration of the damaged scroll of all that is Jewish tradition was the responsibility of Orthodox Jewry and that “if we succeed in our task we shall look back to the Churban and proclaim to the entire world . . . ‘Do not rejoice enemies of Yisroel [Israel]! Indeed I have fallen but I have arisen again.’”⁴²

The imperative to remain Orthodox is affirmed by the conviction among the survivors that “those who perished at the hands of the Nazi murderers did not wish the demise of Judaism.”⁴³ Many in the Orthodox audience that Perlow addressed saw themselves as the true heirs of the ancients—if not their reincarnation—and as being so *only because they had chosen to stay the course*. That was why they had survived, the rabbi assured them, and why they needed to believe that Jews who in these days did not maintain the traditions of the past had somehow forfeited the moral justification for their survival. To have survived and thrived was also an inversion of the common accusation that the Orthodox victims were like lambs led to the slaughter, easy targets, doing nothing to fight for their survival.⁴⁴

This requirement to defy death by bearing witness through one’s existence as an Orthodox Jew was a theme not only reiterated in words but also echoed in the Orthodox commemorations of the Holocaust, which were often symbolically blended with the re-creation of a vital Orthodox life. Describing one such typical ceremony in which the names of the *kidoshim*, the [holy] Jewish martyrs, were publicly inscribed by Orthodox day school children on shattered glass that was then ceremonially placed in a mosaic on a memorial tablet on the school wall to spell out a message, the principal of this New York institution concluded: “We had taken the broken pieces of the lives of the ‘*Kidoshim*’ and created ‘Am Yisroel Chai’ [the Jewish people lives].”⁴⁵ In other words, the presence of Orthodox children in an Orthodox Jewish day school symbolically and practically transformed the shards of an Orthodoxy broken by the Holocaust into a living testament to Jewish continuity. Their continuing Orthodoxy became nothing less than an existential response to the Holocaust. By twenty years after the war, as the resurgence of Orthodoxy grew in in-

tensity, this survivor attitude had become firmly established in the Orthodox community of America. “We, today, are all children of the Holocaust,” as Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, a yeshiva head at the famous Telshe Yeshiva in Wickliffe, Ohio, explained in 1974 to a conference of teachers of the Orthodox young.⁴⁶

The end result was a post-Holocaust Orthodoxy that not only sought to give a second life to its predecessors but also determined, as part of the survival of its members, no less so than for the survivors whom Freud describes in *Totem and Taboo*, “not to repeat the deed[s] which had brought destruction” to their forbears.⁴⁷ In this way, the survivors who made up a resurgent postwar Orthodoxy could—to borrow again from Freud’s analysis—“smooth things over and make it possible to forget the event[s] to which it owed its origin.”⁴⁸ In a sense, Orthodox Jews ideologically and sociologically endorsed the idea of rebirth and rebuilding because it shifted the focus from the question of their guilt for not having found ways to survive previously to an argument about how to survive in the present. That is why the question that people like Sheinfeld raised about who was responsible for the Holocaust gave way to the issue of how to give new vitality to Orthodox life in the Diaspora and what lessons needed to be learned in order not to end Diaspora once again with Holocaust.

One might thus argue that psychologically a part of the drive behind the imperative of robust Orthodox continuity was a combination of guilt that more had not survived and survivor guilt among those who had, a felt need to prove the religious and existential significance of their having survived. This survivor guilt was not necessarily felt at a personal level by all Orthodox Jews; rather, it was a kind of institutionalized survivor guilt built into their ideology and the institutions or behavior patterns that supported it.

Incorporated in this institutionalized, collective Orthodox survivor guilt, however, was also an anger at the dead for having, through their demise, left the survivors alone, along with a longing for these very same people, whose absence was keenly felt and often recalled.⁴⁹ One way to deal with these complicated feelings, as Freud suggests, is to endow the dead with an enhanced power, making them “stronger than the living.”⁵⁰ Hence after the war the European Orthodoxy that had suffered death and destruction became “stronger” in the imagined memory of the survivors. Rather than recalling how it had been losing so many of its adherents to assimilation and reform or how its strategies had led to decimation, survivors portrayed it in idealized form. They also made it in imagined retrospect more religiously demanding and developed, more loyal to the

recreated past. To enhance the ingeniously resurrected dead even more, the living Orthodox (particularly the Haredim, who perhaps felt most guilty about the part they might have played in the Orthodox past) always claimed to defer to them as somehow superior. As one Haredi rabbinic head of a yeshiva put it: “Modern people . . . believe that today we’re much more advanced, superior human beings . . . and we haredim believe we’re going downhill.”⁵¹

This attitude led to an effort to stop the slide down the slippery slope by creating more and more powerful orthodoxies and orthopraxies. “As surviving witnesses we are charged with an awesome responsibility,” one Orthodox writer stated in the *Jewish Observer*, an American monthly published by the Haredi Agudath Israel of America.⁵² That responsibility was not only to hold onto traditional beliefs and maintain an uncompromising ideological commitment to an invigorated Orthodoxy, as part of the consciousness of the *churban*. For many Orthodox Jews, it meant also joining an ideological battle, which was best won by becoming *even more* punctilious in religious and ritual practices to slow down the inevitable decline and corrosion of Judaism that modern life had wrought.

If American Orthodox Jews needed proof that they were engaged in a rebuilding effort whose success would justify their survival—and remove any feelings of guilt—they found it in the surprising renaissance of their institutions—from the growth of their families to the multiplicity of their congregations and schools—all in places and times that many had once thought impossible. That renaissance, in full swing by the 1980s, was what one Orthodox writer, in reflection at the World Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in 1982, called “compensation.” As he put it, “[F]ollowing the vast losses of the Holocaust ‘answers’ and ‘replacements’ were not forthcoming, but compensations were: new spouses, new children . . . new yeshivot, Jewish reawakening in Russia and elsewhere.”⁵³ In this thinking Orthodox Jewish expansion and growth took on theological and ideological dimensions.

The schools were perhaps the most important expression of rebirth and resurrection. These themes still reverberate in many of the appeals that Orthodox institutions make even today to their supporters, as seen in the following text from a fairly typical fund-raising flyer for a rabbinic training institute in Brooklyn, New York, named Asei Lecho Rav (Make for Yourself a Teacher), after the famous imperative in the Talmudic *Pirke Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers). The organization defines itself (somewhat hyperbolically) as “dedicated to nothing less than building the Torah leadership of the future,” and in the leaflet justifies the need for this as fol-

lows: “Less than fifty years ago, one third of our people and most of our greatest Talmidei Chachomim [scholars] were barbarically destroyed, ה"ה [May God avenge their blood]. In spite of this indescribable tragedy, our generation has witnessed a tremendous resurgence of Yiddishkeit [Jewishness] in America ב"ה [Praise the Lord].”

Implicit, but hardly hidden, in this brochure are at least two important and repeated themes (with proof texts in Scripture) connecting the continuity of contemporary Orthodoxy with the Holocaust. One is the theme of miraculous survival against all odds and in the face of “indescribable tragedy.” That survival is presented as a gift from God; the survivors are “a brand snatched from the fire,” in the words of the prophet.⁵⁴ The second theme is the responsibility to “reinstate as far as possible, that which was lost,” in order to ensure the continuity of the institutions of Jewish life and law that were destroyed.⁵⁵

In this newly created Orthodox American culture that was both institutionally rich and religiously demanding, names resonated with resurrection themes. Synagogues were, for example, named *Zichron* (memorial of) this or that. Hasidic courts that came from Europe and reestablished themselves in America resurrected the names of the towns from which they had come. If Chabad Hasidim had once lived in the White Russian village of Lubavitch, now that their headquarters had moved to Crown Heights, Brooklyn, they would still call themselves Lubavitchers—so too with other Hasidic groups who rerooted themselves here with names and histories that came from there. The same happened to many of the yeshivas whose origins had been in Lithuania and elsewhere in eastern Europe.

The participants in the new resurrected Orthodoxy would have to stand up against the twin threats of assimilation and anti-Semitism by being *haredi*, constantly fretful, anxious, and vigilant about their attachment to tradition, and by stressing the continuing importance of remaining behind the wall of virtue they had created around their insular enclave cultures. They would demonstrate, moreover, that they, and no other group of Jews, were doing the most to reinstate that which had been lost.⁵⁶

The Modern Orthodox Choice

If Orthodox Jews share a psychological, ideological, and social sense of their responsibility for Orthodox continuity after the Holocaust as well as a determination not to repeat the mistakes of their forebears, they do

not agree on the best way to ensure it. Indeed, the differences that had emerged among Orthodox Jews prior to the Holocaust appeared again after the war—except that in the aftermath of the Holocaust they seemed affectively sharper. Surrounded even more than before by a majority of Jews who were not Orthodox, post-Holocaust American Orthodox Jews, like their European predecessors, had to deal with the question of whether they should become like most American Jews—acculturated to or assimilated by the host Gentile society—or whether they should try to transform that society with a reborn Orthodoxy. Given the moral and psychological burden they carried as survivors, while some decided to try to blend into America (as had most of the earlier Orthodox immigrants) and maintain a kind of nominal, almost nostalgic or ethnic attachment to their Jewish traditions, most Orthodox Jews—and in particular those who arrived in America after the war—chose the second alternative. But because Orthodox Jews were not alike, they tried to rebuild their Orthodoxy in their varying images, simultaneously reflecting their differing interpretations of the lessons of the Holocaust.

The Haredim by and large increasingly took the position that had crystallized by the 1970s that, in the words of Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, head of the Ner Israel Yeshiva in Baltimore, “there is an ‘otherness’ to us, a gulf of strangeness that cannot be bridged, separating us from our compatriots.”⁵⁷ The modernists rejected this sort of purposive estrangement and the ritual punctiliousness that help enforce it. Both were certain, however, that their approaches were based on lessons learned from the European Jewish experience.

As insistent as the Haredim were, the modernists were no less so, but unlike the former they embraced the idea of America and its promise of new beginnings. This was an Orthodoxy ever more powerfully committed to a positive attitude toward what they saw as “healthy Americanism.”⁵⁸ They urged one another—in the words of Professor Lawrence Kaplan, one of their most articulate contemporary writers—to “be wary of separatist groups.”⁵⁹ In post-World War II America they would, as Rabbi Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University through most of this period, put it, see their “religious duty” and “sacred responsibility to live the whole Torah tradition *in the* world instead of retreated from the world.”⁶⁰ Only by turning their Orthodoxy into a component of engagement with the modern world of America, they believed, could they succeed in surviving. For them, the lesson to be learned from the recent past was that Judaism was “not identified with ghetto conditions”; “the Torah commanded man . . . to exercise his authority as an intelligent be-

ing whose task consists in engaging the objective order in a cognitive contest” and, through constructive “conflict and intellectual performance,” to rebuild attachments to Jewish law and tradition in a way that engaged them with contemporary culture.⁶¹ As Rabbi Walter Wurzbarger, one of the champions of this new Orthodoxy, put it, they of course had to examine “each part of the modern ethos as to its compatibility with Halakhic Judaism.” But informed by their open inquiry and engagement, they would, most of the modernists believed, discover it unnecessary to reject *all* of modern America. If properly educated, they would discover the power of “tolerance, democracy, and human initiative in creating cultural values” and would see that these were far from “contaminating,” as the Haredim or “right-wing Orthodoxy” might suggest.⁶²

To such modern Orthodox Jews post-Holocaust Orthodoxy had to be adaptive, based both ideologically and sociologically on an “equally firm commitment to Torah on the one hand, and to the values of World Culture on the other.”⁶³ Mirroring the emergent and increasingly dominant late-twentieth-century American ethos of pluralism, these modern Orthodox aimed also to foster “an awareness and respect for a diversity of views among ourselves and in American society, and an understanding of the equality and dignity of all people.”⁶⁴

This line of behavior and thinking was to be distinguished from the more popular strategy of American Conservative Judaism, with its more compromisingly accommodationist approach, which seemed to give modern American culture *priority* over Jewish law and in practice gave *equal* authority to representatives of the laity to decide along with ordained Conservative rabbis what in Judaism was subject to change and compromise.⁶⁵ Some of the modern Orthodox feared that the attractiveness of Conservative Judaism, along with the American ethos of do-it-yourselfism that allowed individuals to choose for themselves how to live their lives, would lead to the slow demise of Orthodoxy, especially if the latter remained insular, stultified, and unbending.⁶⁶ Hence, while they embraced cultural accommodations, these had to be far more controlled, *subject to rabbinic approval*. The modern Orthodox Jew might make autonomous choices, but these would always be subject to rabbinic sanction and authorization.

RABBINIC DEPENDENCE AND LEGITIMATION

Essential to the modern Orthodox approach of seeking rabbinic approval was dependence by the laity, who lived in both the Jewish and general

societies at once, on a rabbinate that embraced its religious commitments as well as the value these Jews placed on engagement with the general culture of America and who could act as a legitimating authority for the accommodations that the modernists sought. Without such outward-looking bicultural rabbis, the modern Orthodox would be forced to allow the laity the authority to choose what was permissible and what crossed the line. If they did that, the modern Orthodox would as such become indistinguishable from the Conservative Jews. Indeed, during the mid-twentieth century in America one could find many formerly Orthodox Jews who had made the transition to Conservative Jewish synagogues and from there to the Conservative movement, people who could not find Orthodox rabbis that were sufficiently adaptive for them or who did not want to bother checking with the rabbis because they found them too parochial and culturally limited. This danger of slippage always stood behind the adaptations of the modern Orthodox, who worked very hard to keep the distinctions between them and the Conservatives clear, with varying degrees of success.⁶⁷

Many of the modern Orthodox rabbis who dominated the scene and who fulfilled these roles during the late 1940s, the 1950s, and much of the 1960s were influenced by German neo-Orthodoxy or associated with Yeshiva University.⁶⁸ Almost all of the first generation of these twentieth-century leaders were European born. Foremost among them was Joseph B. Soloveitchik, originally from eastern Europe (born in Poland but from a well-known Lithuanian rabbinic family). Ordained by his father, and scion of the Brisk and Volozhin Yeshiva world, he had also received a doctorate in philosophy from Berlin in 1932 and ultimately became the towering rabbinic head of the seminary at Yeshiva University, a post he took over from his father Moses in 1941 and held for more than forty years. But there were others (most of whom were both rabbis and holders of university doctorates) like Dov Revel, Samuel Belkin, Joseph Lookstein, Leo Jung, Eliezer Berkovits, and Walter Wurzbarger.⁶⁹ These were men who wanted to ease the transition to America and not close themselves off from it, who embraced the value inherent in non-Jewish culture (as their university degrees testified) but who also believed that in so doing there was no need to compromise Jewish attachment and fidelity to Jewish law and practice. The second generation of American modern Orthodox rabbinic leaders was also American born and even more comfortable forming attachments to American culture. These were men like Norman Lamm and Israel Miller (who became respectively president and vice-president of Yeshiva University), Haskell Lookstein (head of the Ra-

maz School, pulpit rabbi in New York, and a leader of the Synagogue Council of America), Emanuel Rackman (a former practicing attorney, pulpit rabbi in New York City, provost at Yeshiva University of New York, and later president and chancellor of Israel's Bar Ilan University), Irving Greenberg (Harvard graduate, pulpit rabbi, professor of history at the City University of New York, and head of a variety of outreach Jewish organizations), Shlomo Riskin (pulpit rabbi, Yeshiva College teacher, and later modern Orthodox leader in Efrat, Israel), David Hartman (pulpit rabbi in Canada and later in Israel founder of the Shalom Hartman Institute), Jacob J. Schachter (Harvard PhD, professor at Yeshiva University, for many years pulpit rabbi at New York's Jewish Center, and later head of the Soloveitchik Institute at Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts). These were rabbis who through their lives and philosophies, which were very much influenced by the overarching model of Rabbi Soloveitchik, acted as legitimating authorities for modern Orthodoxy's engagement with American culture and modern society, an engagement that did not gainsay their fidelity to the demands of Jewish law and tradition. More importantly, perhaps, they all had held pulpits for a time and thus had learned to speak to and serve the needs of Orthodox laity—something that the Haredi rabbis who were often yeshiva heads did not need to do.⁷⁰ Typical of the attitude of this second generation of modern Orthodox rabbis was the assertion by Rabbi David Hartman that modern Orthodoxy requires training young Jews to believe—as the medieval philosopher and rabbi Moses Maimonides did (these rabbis were always invoking this physician and traditional authority)—“that experiential and intellectual encounter with modern values and insights can help deepen and illuminate one's commitment to the tradition.”⁷¹

Such encounters required nuanced and vigilant engagement. Soloveitchik suggested that Orthodox Jews could “cooperate with the members of other faith communities in all fields of constructive human endeavor,” but at the same time he cautioned that they should be wary of the risks of such cooperation. They needed to keep in mind that, “simultaneously with [their] integration into the general social framework,” they would have to “engage in a movement of recoil” and be ready, where and when the attraction led to an undermining of Jewish attachments, to “retrace [their] steps”: the same accommodators to American culture had to be prepared also to “feel as strangers and outsiders.”⁷² For the modern Orthodox, as for all the Orthodox, the rabbis were there both to sanction engagements with the larger culture and to signal the necessary retreats.

In practice this required sophisticated and sometimes complex cogni-

tive leadership as well as nuanced instrumental adjustments, intellectual skills that few rabbis were taught as part of their training. Elsewhere I have defined these modern Orthodox strategies at greater length as involving reinterpretation, in which the contradictions between Judaism and American cultural belonging were interpretively reconstructed so as to diminish the sense of dissonance created by their combination.⁷³ Old meanings were ascribed to new elements, making modernity seem to be in tune with tradition, and old elements were understood in new ways, making tradition seem to be at home in modern life. In this approach there was nothing so old that it could not be made new and nothing so new that it had not been foreseen by the ancient law and Torah, although at times to some Orthodox who resisted accommodation these interpretations seemed forced.⁷⁴ In the modern Orthodox Jewish milieu this process was supported by an ethos that prescribed, as Grand Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (viewed by many Orthodox Jews as a precursor of this modernist ideology) once put it, that “the old must be made new; the new must be made holy.” Or, to use the more sociological language of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*, “[T]he present is interpreted so as to stand in a continuous relationship with the past, with a tendency to minimize such transformations as have actually taken place.”⁷⁵ These processes, which respectively I call *contemporization* and *traditioning*, required ideological virtuosi, comfortable in and committed to both the modern and traditional Jewish worlds. That was precisely the role that many of those modern Orthodox rabbis tried to fill.

With the death or decline of the first generation of postwar rabbis, whose stature and connection to traditional Orthodoxy gave them an authority that the next generation did not have, there arose a new generation of rabbinic leaders, trained increasingly by Haredim (for most modernists completed their almost universal university education and chose *not* to be rabbis, instead pursuing other more cosmopolitan vocations and leaving their more parochial kin to be teachers in the yeshivas and seminaries). These new Orthodox rabbis emerged with a greater attachment to Jewish parochialism and wariness of American culture. They often considered the yeshiva the ideal environment and the modern world and university education a necessary evil or distraction—perhaps even an obstacle to Orthodoxy. More to the point, they did not see the skills of contemporization and traditioning as essential to their rabbinic vocation. These men’s capacity to serve as reinterpretators and guides for sometimes perplexed modern Orthodox Jews was accordingly both less developed and less persuasive than had been the case among their earlier counterparts.

Ironically, the decline of rabbinic concern with contemporization and traditioning came just at a time when the challenges to integrate Orthodox Judaism and American contemporary culture became greater. By the turn of the millennium the need to find a way to harmonize Orthodoxy with such thorny issues as feminism, homosexuality, messianism, nationalist Zionism, large-scale pluralism, and intermarriage—among the matters that rose to prominence as time passed—required Orthodox reinterpretations of an unprecedented complexity. But the emerging Orthodox rabbis who might offer a modern Orthodox approach to navigating these issues were more interested in reviewing ancient texts and embedding themselves in traditional yeshiva study or values than in providing direction through the changing currents of American life. Others became caught up with right-wing political movements, messianism, and settlement in Israeli territories.

STABILIZED DUALISM

While most American modern Orthodox Jews wanted to remain planted in two worlds at once, ideologically anchored in Jewish law and tradition and culturally attached to contemporary America, they began to depend less and less on rabbis (who were becoming more and more parochial by the last quarter of the twentieth century) to help maintain their dualistic stance. Instead they focused on acquiring a profession, achieving economic security, and anchoring themselves in modern Orthodox communities. There they could find places where people shared lifestyles and a number of instrumental and institutional ties with Jews of similar outlooks and attachments. They did not really partake fully in the high culture of Western civilization, even though they paid lip service to it. Rather, they were embracing American popular culture and middle-class values. This lifestyle of modern Orthodoxy might be characterized as “stabilized dualism.” Cynics might call it “stabilized duplicity.” This was the twentieth-century American version of *Torah-im-derech-eret*.⁷⁶ When it succeeded, the modern Orthodox community stood with its feet firmly planted in two very different worlds at once, living with and even embracing the tensions caused by this dualism. The repeated patterns of engagement in religious life and with the world outside it became second nature. It was as if they were putting weight first on one foot, the one planted in the tribal community, and then on the other, the secular American one. So adept were they in their shifting stances and involvements that they seemed to go on almost automatically. They lacked a powerful ideological drive

and were instead what David Reisman called “other-directed,” an orientation normative during America’s midcentury. Other-directedness, as Reisman explained, was a way of life in which people looked to “their contemporaries . . . [as] the source of direction for the individual”; it was less an ideology and more a commitment to being like one’s contemporaries.⁷⁷ Modern Orthodox Jews became either diffident and often ideologically bankrupt or increasingly concerned with being as or no more or less *frum* than others in their community and thereby generally unthinkingly validated and sustained one another’s beliefs and behaviors. That was why they tended increasingly to stress practical behavior rather than ideology. That was also why creating community, usually through a synagogue and a school, was so important to these people, as was keeping tabs on community standards. Their leaders became lay, and their rabbis increasingly defined a separate cultural order.

To the modern Orthodox these other-directed choices may have *seemed* autonomous because they leaned less and less on rabbinic authority. To the rabbis who were not being obeyed they may have also seemed that way. But as Reisman makes clear, other-directedness masquerades as individual choice.

Ironically, in so emphasizing the importance of their communities for helping them articulate what it meant to be contrapuntalist modern Orthodox, these Jews were creating a kind of enclave culture. Indeed, in their conformist nature many modern Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods began to take on the characteristics of more traditionalist, even Haredi, orthodoxy.⁷⁸ To be sure, these were Jews who left their enclaves readily and continued to embrace life beyond them. Yet increasingly they were finding that they needed to be with other like-minded Jews, where they felt more secure and directed in their Judaism. The modern Orthodox Jews became no less ghettoized than the Haredim, and when those ghettos began to swing to the religious right, the individuals and families living within them fell like dominoes all in the same direction. But this did not happen right away; it came at the end of a process that started out with the desire to remain culturally dualistic and in tune with others who shared this desire.

Seeing that one could be serious about one’s commitments to Judaism but that one did not therefore have to spend life either in a yeshiva or completely and always within the boundaries of the traditional Orthodox enclave, many modern Orthodox Jews had gone on after the 1950s to pursue lives very much rooted in American professions, dependent on extended American (secular) education (often at campuses far beyond the

orbit of Orthodoxy), and outward-looking. In these places, they often had to extrapolate for themselves what they could or should do as Orthodox Jews. In the early days of this outward movement, Jewish campus organizations like Hillel were dominated by the non-Orthodox, and although an Orthodox campus organization called Yavneh was formed, it never had more than about thirty-five chapters, with a handful of members in most.⁷⁹ That made college among the most difficult places for modern Orthodox Jews to use a community-belonging strategy, something that would have consequences later as the modern Orthodox began to worry about the religious price tag of being on campus. Because of their enhanced Jewish education, many felt able to make some Halachic (i.e., traditional-Judaic legal) judgments for themselves, at least at the level of practical knowledge. Yet this was generally not a strategy they trumpeted as an ideology; they still looked to rabbis as the ultimate authorities, even though there were fewer and fewer such rabbis who could speak to their needs. By the end of the twentieth century, young Orthodox Jews on campus were increasingly huddling together in enclaves of like-minded Jews who had similar experiences and biographies, hoping thereby to maintain their particular way of life; in this regard they were no different from the adult communities.

In addition to anchoring themselves in modern Orthodox communities and other-directedly guiding themselves by community norms and behaviors, the modern Orthodox laity also often turned toward *compartmentalization*. In this ad hoc strategy, one accepted contradiction by ignoring it. This approach required of modern Orthodox Jews a kind of conceptual looking away from the inherent conflicts built into their competing beliefs and practices as well as their dissonant cultural stances. Here two possibilities exist: inattention and disattention. The former involves a kind of conceptual dimming of the lights, while the latter requires an active withdrawal of attention from contradiction. In compartmentalizing, people assign a *temporarily* inferior ontological status, and thereby a not-to-be-taken-seriously cognitive status, to elements that contradict their conviction that one can be truly Orthodox and also engaged in the American society and culture or vice versa. Thus modern Orthodox Jews either ignored those laws and observances that did not fit into the modern world when the occasion seemed to demand it or actively blotted them out. Such action did not presume an ideological or legalistic repudiation whereby the inappropriate was wiped off the books—the approach of Conservative and Reform Judaism. Nor did it even require a well-thought-out ideological virtuosity, as had been offered by people like

Rabbi Soloveitchik. On the contrary, in the compartmentalist approach, the same matters that might be blotted out or ignored on one occasion could be honored on another. Moreover, when pressed to account for their inattention to Jewish laws and practice—skipping afternoon prayers, for example, because they were busy at work—the compartmentalizing modern Orthodox would likely admit the error of their ways. That is, to use terminology Robert Merton made famous, they saw themselves as criminals rather than revolutionaries, the latter being the status of non-Orthodox religious reformers.⁸⁰

Alternatively, compartmentalization led Orthodox Jews to engage in avoidance behavior, so that they simply did not carry on behaviors that seemed to undermine their religious commitments. “Don’t put yourself in a situation where you’ll have a conflict.” Thus they might avoid living in suburbs where there were no Orthodox synagogues, choose only those careers that would let them observe Jewish law and tradition, travel only to places where permissible food was available, and so on. In short, they might stay anchored in modern Orthodox ghettos, the strategy previously outlined. Here people knew what they could or could not do—and learned not to challenge the inconsistencies or accommodations of their neighbors.

But this sort of anchoring was not the same as remaining strictly within the Orthodox enclave in an assertively sectarian existence, a strategy characteristic of Haredi Orthodoxy. The modern Orthodox enclaves tended to function more like bedroom or weekend communities, allowing their members to wander culturally and socially far afield much of the rest of the time. They offered a longer and more flexible tether than did Haredi ones. Both the compartmentalization and the avoidance behavior so characteristic of the modern Orthodox required a kind of endless cultural and instrumental shifting. I have called this dynamic of belonging “contrapuntal.”

CONTRAPUNTALISM

The dynamic belonging or contrapuntalism that was at the heart of the modern Orthodox ideology, such as it was before it devolved into other-directedness, was not simply a disguised effort to ease the restrictions of Orthodox practice or compromise the Jewish traditions to which the Orthodox were expected to hold fast. It was, as at least some of the adherents believed, driven at least through the late 1970s by a desire to expand the nature of what it meant to be Orthodox and Jewish in the modern

age. As one thinker who espoused this attitude, Professor Lawrence J. Kaplan, put it in an article in *Commentary Magazine* in which he tried to mark the differences of this movement from even the most moderate Conservative Jewish approaches, "It is possible and necessary, to live with the dissonance and tension between halachic values and modern ones."⁸¹ Indeed, Kaplan and other contrapuntal modernists like him saw that tension as creative, even a particular source of strength, because it allowed people to intellectually stretch, innovate, and develop both their Judaism and their manner of engagement in the modern world. Even compartmentalization and avoidance required creativity.

Although its ideological virtuosi were declining in number and its emphasis was more on lifestyle by the 1980s, for at least thirty years after the Second World War modern Orthodox contrapuntalism seemed to flourish. It represented a new engaged-with-the-world flexible kind of Orthodox Judaism that could live with contradiction and build upon it. As such, it also wanted to demonstrate to itself and the rest of the Jewish world that one did not need to abandon commitments to Jewish law (Halacha) and traditional observance in order to live this way. To these Jews not only was their way of life possible; it was, they increasingly believed, also the most desirable way to live Jewishly. As such, some of these Jews perceived themselves to be engaged in "a cognitive contest" with all other forms of Jewish adaptation to contemporary realities and were convinced they were bound to win.⁸²

While modern Orthodoxy held to this notion that it was living according to Halacha and, unlike the non-Orthodox, not according to some temporal choice, this did not mean that its adherents believed that there was no room for change or variation in what they did. Indeed, just as they sought to distinguish themselves from the non-Orthodox, they also wanted to be set apart from the Haredim. Thus, unlike the Haredim, the modern Orthodox accepted the idea that "the definition of 'right and good' changed from generation to generation," as Rabbi Walter S. Wurzbarger put it. "In other words," he continued, "religious behavior need not be totally stagnant; there can be an evolution here as well."⁸³

Being in the middle, however, was not easy. Too strong a contestation with the non-Orthodox would lead to the modernists' being defined as hopelessly parochial, and too enthusiastic an embrace of change would result in their Orthodox legitimacy being questioned by the growing Haredi sector, which was quietly building itself up, particularly in the rabbinic ranks. The modern Orthodox laity handled this by trying to keep its faith in Orthodox standards but to do so in as understated a way as

possible. After all, for all of Soloveitchik's desire to draw the line sharply and engage in a cognitive contest, there was, as most rank-and-file modern Orthodox Jews realized, something quite comparable between their own aims and those among their non-Orthodox counterparts who tried seriously to adapt their Judaism to America. The latter might go too far in abandoning tradition and embracing reform, as far as the modern Orthodox were concerned, by declaring core matters peripheral or outdated. However, the modern Orthodox did *not* believe that their non-Orthodox counterparts were completely wrongheaded in their outward-looking Americanism (which may have been why Soloveitchik, afraid of the blurring of boundaries, tried so hard to draw the line).

The modern Orthodox enthusiasm of the postwar period in America did not last forever. Compartmentalization, which had worked for at least a generation as a supportive mechanism for contrapuntalism, was by the last quarter of the twentieth century beginning to wear thin. The challenges of a changing American society and culture that was increasingly permissive and radical were progressively more difficult to disattend. Moreover, many of the next generation of modern Orthodox were looking at the dualism of their parents' generation with disdain and seeing it rather as duplicity. Without the distinguished rabbis to lead the way and offer it legitimacy, they saw the actions of the modern Orthodox laity as driven more by habit or inertia and convenience than by an inspiring ideology. Once again, they needed ideological virtuosi to help navigate through the cultural narrows without taking them either toward the Scylla of Haredism or the Charybdis of Conservative and Reform Jewish reformulations. But, as noted, their movement into that outside world also led to a decline in the number of them who chose to be rabbis.

At the same time, as we have seen, those who opted to be rabbis increasingly found themselves trained by those who had chosen *not* to embrace the contrapuntalism of modern Orthodoxy but had instead remained within the framework of yeshiva studies and tended to be both more insular and parochial as well as religiously right wing. With the disappearance of the generation of those trained by and modeling themselves after the outward-looking Soloveitchik, men who sought an impressive secular education to combine with their Jewish learning; this became even more the case. As a result, the number of rabbis who were prepared to act as legitimating authorities for the approach of modern Orthodoxy diminished radically. Those who remained were unable to stand up to the challenges increasingly thrown at modern Orthodoxy by the rabbis of the Haredi world. In addition, there emerged a kind of revisionism in

defining exactly who Rabbi Soloveitchik was and where he stood on matters relating to modernist tendencies, with increasing numbers of people arguing that he genuinely embraced the Haredi point of view and took modernist stances only under duress and in limited circumstances.⁸⁴ By the end of the twentieth century, and increasingly following Soloveitchik's death in 1993, newly minted rabbis would emerge with viewpoints that were far more retrograde and parochial.⁸⁵ Without modernist rabbinic champions to guide their way, the center of gravity within modern Orthodoxy moved even more toward the laity or toward a few rabbis who were increasingly treated as marginal by their Orthodox rabbinic peers (many of whom were becoming increasingly Haredi) and who lacked the cultural stature of the first and second generations after the Holocaust. This left the modern Orthodox struggling to stabilize their dualism. The fracture lines among them became clearer and began to shift.

VARIETIES OF MODERN ORTHODOXY

To follow these developments it is necessary to understand that the group I have been calling modern Orthodox was never monolithic. In 1989, in our book *Cosmopolitans and Parochials: Modern Orthodox Jews in America*, Steven M. Cohen and I tried to describe the variations that existed within this group that was generally characterized by contrapuntalism.⁸⁶ We found then that modern Orthodox Jews in America were essentially clustered in three general orientations. At one end, we found those we called the "nominally Orthodox." These were people who, while they chose to *call* themselves Orthodox and were in many of their social affiliations undoubtedly within the Orthodox realm of influence, nevertheless spent their lives in the outermost reaches of that realm, in great measure because they were drawn ever more powerfully to the society and culture of America. They sought to reduce the tension between their Orthodoxy and the demands of modern America by embedding themselves as much as possible in the latter but still not abandoning the Orthodox label, which many held onto at best out of family history or nostalgic connections. Toward that end they maintained relatively few ritual practices, were the least fervent in and most uncertain about their religious beliefs, were the most flexible in their cultural outlook, and were far more pluralist in their affiliations than other Orthodox Jews, who tended to be more exclusively bonded to an Orthodox social community and cultural enclave. At one point they were perhaps as much as a third of the population who were identified as Orthodox. In a well-worn reference to these Jews, pundits

often jokingly typified them by noting that “the synagogue they don’t regularly attend is an Orthodox one.” In the era of 1950s and well into the 1960s they turned up in the sanctuary occasionally, especially on the High Holy Days, when, as Haym Soloveitchik describes them, “most didn’t know what they were saying, and bored, wandered in and out. Yet, at the closing service of Yom Kippur, the *Ne’ilah*, the synagogue filled and a hush set in upon the crowd. The tension was palpable and tears were shed.”⁸⁷ Although they might send their offspring to a yeshiva, they were satisfied with sending their children to afternoon Hebrew schools (commonly those affiliated with Orthodox synagogues) rather than the emerging day schools. Until the beginning of the 1970s most of these Jews found it possible to be minimally involved in their Orthodox Judaism without somehow disqualifying themselves from inclusion in it. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, as we shall see, as the ante for being considered Orthodox was raised more and more by many within the movement, these Jews found it more and more difficult and ultimately inapt to call themselves Orthodox. Unwilling to go beyond their symbolic religiosity, these Jews often dropped out, no longer choosing to identify themselves as Orthodox.⁸⁸ The nostalgia and inertia that had sustained their attachments were simply no longer sufficient, while the growing demands of Orthodox affiliation were becoming too great.

At the opposite extreme were those Cohen and I called the “traditionally Orthodox,” people who were far more powerfully drawn toward old school Orthodoxies, more stringent in their practices, traditionally oriented in their religious beliefs, ready to take a confrontational stance vis-à-vis non-Orthodoxy (although in an understated way), relatively monochromatic in their cultural outlook, and tending toward the proudly insular in their social affiliations. They were not the purely enclavist and actively confrontational Haredim, a term Cohen and I did not use, but they were certainly sympathetic to the Haredi way. In practice the traditionally Orthodox were distinguished from Haredim by their tacit acceptance (and often reluctant embrace) of the cultural legitimacy of the world beyond Orthodoxy and a feeling that one could find a place in that world for tradition. Yet one sensed that as that outside world became increasingly debased in their eyes throughout the radically permissive social revolution of the 1960s and 1970s or began to undermine the values and practices of Judaism that they considered paramount they would tend to adopt the ethos of insularity and aggressive cultural opposition characteristic of Haredi Orthodoxy—and if not, they might have children who would. In effect, to reduce the tension between their Orthodoxy and the

demands of a modern America by which they were becoming increasingly disturbed, they chose to shift toward the Haredi orbit. They trusted in the religious right more than in the liberal left.

Ironically, part of this repositioning came from a growing self-confidence of Orthodoxy that it *could* find a place in an America that had gradually grown more pluralist and cognizant, if not always respectful, of the social and cultural requirements of minority communities. When therefore the traditionally Orthodox felt they were not always getting what they needed to maintain their way of life and guarantee their future because American popular culture or social trends were threatening to absorb or otherwise undo their Jewish life and values, increasing numbers of them embraced what the late Charles Liebman called “extremism as a religious norm” and the demands of Haredi enclave culture as “*an irreducible basis for communal and personal identity.*”⁸⁹ In other words, the Haredi option of being *in* but not *of* American culture became both more attractive and more conceivable in America than it had been in the previous decades. Even among the American born it became acceptable to stress reservations about liberal, popular American culture and to choose an alternative identity. Over the course of the last twenty years of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, many of these traditionalists in the mainstream of modern Orthodoxy came to have doubts about modernism and to believe that only Haredism and identities rooted in it could ensure that Orthodox Judaism (which they considered the only legitimate expression of Judaism) would remain free from religious and cultural erosion, immune to substantial destructive change, and protected from the vicissitudes of history and social change until the time of divine redemption. They believed that only thus were they honoring the memory of those whom the Holocaust had incinerated.

Finally, between these extremes Cohen and I described were those who tried to maintain an equal balance in their dualism, who worked for its stabilization so that they could keep one foot inside the world of Orthodox commitments and the other in the mainstream of modern American culture, society, practices, and values. These were the bulk of Orthodox Jews, and they bridged the gap between the traditionalists at one extreme and members of the Orthodox movement in little more than name only at the other. We called them “centrists.”⁹⁰ At the time of our survey in the mid-1980s, the forces pulling the nominally Orthodox further toward the religious left and the traditionally Orthodox further toward the right were not yet as powerful or at least as obvious as they would later become.⁹¹

The term *centrist* was both analytically descriptive—these Orthodox

Jews were in the middle of all our scales on belief, religious practices, communal solidarity, and cultural outlook, doing “more” and scoring “higher” than those to the religious left of them and “less” than those to the religious right—and symbolic. These were people who *chose* to be in the middle, who eschewed extremism as a religious norm but also disdained excessive religious laxity. As such, centrism and its adherents were for us the most powerful exemplars—the heart—of modern Orthodoxy, which we believed had purposefully staked out a broad middle ground in religion and culture. We thought that the centrists’ numbers also gave them dominance in defining American Orthodoxy.

These assumptions about the centrist mainstream were based not only on their numbers but also on their successes in creating institutions, primarily the day school—about which more later in this volume—but also a web of synagogues (many of them in the burgeoning suburban communities that were also dominated by them) to which modern Orthodox families gravitated, as well as other organizations, from youth movements to kashruth-certifying agencies. The centrists were largely a cadre of college-educated but religiously observant young people, most of whom appeared willing to follow the modern Orthodox cultural norm of stabilized dualism. Indeed, “the encounter with American culture was considered desirable, providing an opportunity for engagement, challenge, and ultimately integration, and was not merely an economically driven pragmatic middle-class value.”⁹² As Seth Farber has argued in his description of a community of such modern Orthodox Jews as they began to take shape in Boston (a community dominated by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik) in the 1950s and early 1960s: “What held this group together was a shared belief that American societal norms and Orthodox Jewish life could be integrated seamlessly. They did not see any conflict between the two. Attendance at Fenway Park (the home field of the Boston Red Sox), barbecues, theater outings, ski trips, and trips to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts were frequent activities as were synagogue participation and public study convocations.”⁹³ As Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, son-in-law and student of Soloveitchik, celebrated this sort of Orthodoxy, “Centrism at its best encourages a sense of complexity and integration . . . [I]nasmuch as a person of this orientation looks to the right and to the left, he is more likely to reject the kind of black-and-white solutions appealing to others . . . , relates to more areas of human life . . . , [and is] more inclined to perceive shadings and nuances, differences between areas and levels of moral and spiritual reality.”⁹⁴

To be sure, as noted, there were limits to the integration possible, and

centrist Orthodox Jews understood that because of their irrevocable attachments to Jewish tradition and the particular demands that their commitments to Jewish law and ritual made on them their lot in life was always to be “both citizen and stranger,” as Rabbi Soloveitchik put it.⁹⁵ They were content to know that the multiple worlds they inhabited could not always be perfectly harmonized, and in the final analysis above all else they remained committed to Orthodoxy. That knowledge was behind Rabbi Soloveitchik’s belief that even under the best conditions there remained for all Orthodox Jews in America a necessary level of estrangement that limited their complete absorption in America. (This belief was what the Haredim used as evidence that Soloveitchik was one of them.) But in the heyday of American modern Orthodoxy, the twenty years between 1945 and 1965, most of its advocates believed that the necessary estrangement and cultural distance from America would be mitigated in culturally wholesome mid-twentieth-century America, where being religiously observant was neither shameful nor a recipe for exclusion and intolerance. After all, in 1954, the time when this sort of Orthodoxy was carving out its middle ground, America added the words “under God” into its national pledge of allegiance, and the motto “The family that prays together, stays together” was on billboards throughout the land. Adherents to modern Orthodoxy did believe that “America was different” and that here a true modern Orthodoxy could find a home. There would be nothing in America from which they would have to really run—or so they believed in those early years.

From Modernism to Haredism

With the radicalization of that once culturally wholesome America by the late 1960s and into the next decade, Orthodox estrangement seemed to grow, and modernism gave way to a centrism that was more reticent in its Americanism, was doubtful about the wholesomeness of America, and looked more for continuity with its traditionalist right wing. The Orthodox community, though largely on the periphery of this radicalization, was not untouched by it. By the end of the 1970s, in the wake of racial turmoil, often violent anti-Vietnam War protests, growing radicalism on campus, polarization in the political process, the excesses of the sexual revolution, freethinking in lifestyle choices, and increasing signs of a decline in Jewish affiliation and involvement among young college graduates, the American dream seemed to growing numbers of Orthodox Jews to have become a nightmare. This was when the once whole-

some culture to which the modernists had aspired to integrate themselves, and which they saw as a source of personal improvement and a vehicle for the social betterment of their children, increasingly became instead a destructive, radicalized, *unhealthy* Americanism. Most disturbing was the fact that its most radical, antireligious, and destructive elements were in the universities where the modern Orthodox had been sending those children. Indeed, the most elite schools to which many of the modern Orthodox had aspired were often the most radicalized and countercultural—Columbia University being perhaps the archetype. Now the strategy that modern Orthodoxy had enabled of keeping a foot in that world began to look less attractive and more dangerous. It could become a destabilizing element. The thought that a modern Orthodox childhood might not ensure adolescent or even adult Jewish continuity was now increasingly reasonable. As if to underscore this, Jewish population surveys (whose results were widely disseminated) made clear that the number of Orthodox Jews in America was not growing.

All this led at least some among the traditionalist right wing of modern Orthodoxy, for whom the level of estrangement from American society and culture had always been higher, to suspect that the nascent Haredi sector (whose estrangement was highest) might be correct: that the encounter with the modern world, even and perhaps especially in the United States, was a propaedeutic to assimilation, a recipe for disaster. These traditionalists began to look anew at both the integrative goals of modern Orthodoxy and the separatist ideology of Haredi Orthodoxy. As the former looked more worrisome, the latter looked more appealing. A careful observer could see these changes in the evolving terminology of the times. By the late 1980s and 1990s, our analytically descriptive term *centrist* was, within Orthodox circles, supplanting the adjective *modern*, which had for a long time named the major stream of contemporary Orthodoxy. In some measure this was because in the preceding fifteen years *modern* had acquired a kind of ignominy in an America that increasingly valued the traditional over the modern and where those on the nominal periphery were slipping out of the Orthodox orbit by way of their attachments to America. Moreover, in the atmosphere of postmodernism that was part of the emerging American scene, where being a little of this *and* that rather than choosing to be this *or* that was acceptable, the need to label oneself as unambiguously modern was no longer viewed as essential.

Centrist was no longer just a description of a group in the middle; it was the title for a group that did *not* want to be associated with the liberalism that was correlated with modernism. By the 1980s the idea of an

Orthodox centrism that was culturally conservative and uncomfortable with some American excesses (for the center is always dependent on where the extremes happen to be) had eroded the enthusiasm for Orthodox modernism. While some people conflated the term *centrist Orthodox* with *modern Orthodox*, the two labels were less and less cognate. As the extremes moved further apart, the strain on those standing in the center with a foot in each world grew exponentially.

Centrist Orthodoxy had always been a kind of ambivalent Orthodoxy. Groups in the center generally are always torn, particularly if they are contrapuntal in character, as this one was. This was not, however, simply a psychological ambivalence. "So-called sectarian behavior has little to do with personal psychology."⁹⁶ It was in part anchored in the competing and not always harmonious expectations of centrists' position in the Orthodox world. This resulted in what Robert Merton and Elinor Barber have called "sociological ambivalence," ambivalence indigenous to those who are forced to accept and adapt to the contradictory values attached to a plurality of contradictory cultures.⁹⁷

With the gradual evaporation of the nominally Orthodox, the movement had become far more hard-core by the end of the 1980s. The traditionalists were being pulled gradually so close to Haredism that at times it was difficult to see the line of separation. As for the centrists, they found themselves no longer inhabiting a middle ground where they had staked out their ideological and behavioral place. Instead, they now represented the liberal outer edge, a position they found unnerving. They were concerned that from their new position at the liberal edge they would be outcast by the Orthodox rabbis and those to their right, and there was some of that going on. They retreated further and turned their modernist suburbs into increasingly parochial cultural enclaves. Their communities were transformed "from suburb to shtetl," as Egon Mayer put it in his eponymous book on an Orthodox neighborhood in New York.⁹⁸

Indeed, the absence of the nominally Orthodox, whose presence within the movement had served to offset the Haredi tendencies on the other extreme of Orthodoxy, allowed the latter become a stronger force within the movement. So when they exerted their influence and made their case for a more stringent and parochial Orthodoxy, those who had once been in the center felt rightly that the Haredi criticisms were now directed at them and not at the nominally Orthodox who had once been on their liberal left. They looked to the left and saw no Orthodoxy there. They had themselves become the left. These Jews were therefore distressed that their sort of Orthodoxy might be accused of threatening the continuity of ob-

servant Judaism and that as such they would fail those who had died in the Holocaust but who had not wavered in their religious observance (or at least were reputed in retrospect to have been religious stalwarts). They had two choices now: to become more traditionalist like the Haredim or to move out of the movement as their nominally Orthodox counterparts had.

Those who chose to move out, who threw off the increasingly heavy yoke of Orthodoxy with its Haredi mandates, looked at the movement they left behind and saw it becoming more religiously right wing, a perception that reconfirmed them in their conclusion that they were correct to leave, since the contrapuntal dualism they had once found attractive in modern Orthodoxy was giving way to the monotones of Haredism. Those who remained found that their contrapuntalism was too dissonant and their ambiguity too threatening for a movement that increasingly standardized its behavior and beliefs in favor of the stringencies of Haredism. If they tried to make the case for greater autonomy and personal style, the rabbis and the Haredi world reminded them how dangerous and duplicitous this stance was, pulling back from the edge. Whereas modern Orthodoxy had recognized, at least implicitly, that the multiple worlds in which they lived were never going to be completely harmonized, Haredism was in favor of a single world, all Jewish, and allowed for neither dissonance nor contrapuntalism. Anyone who did not follow this tune, or who was slightly off-key, was silenced or dismissed. Orthodoxy in America became harder core.

There was yet another basis for the centrists' discomfort: the liturgy, which impressed on those who recited it daily, as did these Orthodox Jews, that they needed to "be forgiven for we have sinned and be absolved for we have transgressed." Multiple times a day and in a variety of prayers they recited the words that reminded them that wrongdoing and desire for exculpation were an inevitable part of their lives. In other words, feelings of guilt were built into their expressions of religiousness, on top of the post-Holocaust and Haredi-induced sense of guilt that was part of the late-twentieth-century experience. Thus, if there was something structural that might tip the balance in their increasingly ambivalent cultural stance away from engagement in the modern world—as indeed happened during these years with the growing influence and confidence of Haredi outcasting and enclavism—their liturgy was ready to give expression to underlying feelings of culpability that were in any event part of their post-Holocaust Orthodoxy. The words of the liturgy began to take on new meanings at least for some (especially when their children came back from school with a

renewed fervor for prayer that they injected into Orthodox life).⁹⁹ To mitigate the feelings of blame that they were told they deserved for wandering into the “defiling” world beyond the Orthodox enclaves, some centrists began to draw back from that world.

This was at a time that an ever more vigorous and outspoken Haredi enclavist Orthodoxy, exercising “its own distinctive power of exclusion,” was willing to declare that “Orthodox independence from the organized community was the ideal.”¹⁰⁰ By and large, Haredim had for many years remained content to build their own religious institutions, live in their separate communities, and eschew the acculturative and educational aspirations of the majority of Jewry. They did this not only by emphasizing the superiority of their *orach chayim* (way of life) but also by devaluing the *chukos hagoyim* (the ways of Gentiles) and defining those rewards as counterfeit (*goyim nachas*). Throughout the twentieth century and more aggressively in its final quarter, Haredim increasingly turned away from the American dream and engaged in what Mary Douglas has called “outcasting” and “downgrading” those outside their enclaves. They extended the “power of exclusion” so that what was different was essentially defined as “abhorrent.”¹⁰¹ Outcasting was a key instrument by which enclavist Orthodoxy helped maintain the boundaries of their community. While these Jews did not long to feel beleaguered or attacked, they sensed that when Jews did feel this way Judaism as a way of life was somehow protected from the smothering embrace and dangers of easy assimilation. Hence it was not unusual to find voices in the Haredi world that not only stressed distrust of Gentiles but reminded Jews that they were forever subject to attacks from these “others.” “Esau hates Jacob” was the way they articulated this “truth.”¹⁰² As Rabbi Yitzhak Hutner of the Chaim Berlin Yeshiva and the Rabbinic Council of Sages of Agudath Israel asserted, it was and remained “a sin to trust other nations from which will follow רעות רבות,” many evils. Indeed, he added, “[W]e have seen, the ‘great evils and troubles’ did indeed come upon us from those very Gentile nations who had gained our confidence and trust.”¹⁰³

So powerful was this belief that even dialogue with Gentiles was viewed as corrupting and prohibited. No less a rabbinic authority than Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, in an opinion issued in March 1967, asserted that dialogue with Catholics and Protestants was prohibited because “all contact and discussion with them, even on worldly matters, is forbidden, for the act of ‘drawing near’ is in and of itself forbidden, as it falls under the category of the grave prohibition against “rapprochement with idolatry—*hitkarvut im avodah zarah*.”¹⁰⁴ Nothing could be a clearer expression of outcasting.

As this enclavist approach aligned people with Haredi cultural biases, the spirit of cooperation that had once been a hallmark of modern Orthodoxy began to weaken, particularly in the closing years of the twentieth century. Not only did the Synagogue Council fall apart in 1994, as mentioned in the Introduction, but also intra-Jewish organizations that included the Orthodox were declining in number.¹⁰⁵ In a statement typical of the time, the traditionalist Orthodox rabbinic organization Agudath Harabonim, taking a position to the religious right of the more moderate Rabbinical Council of America, declared in 1997 that Conservative and Reform Judaism, with which up to two-thirds of American Jewry affiliated, were “not Judaism.” In part, this attitude among the Haredim and those within the Orthodox world who sympathized with them was driven by the typical preoccupation and fear of enclave cultures: “the leakage of members.”¹⁰⁶ Ironically, all this activity of raising the barriers and outcasting aimed at stemming this only helped accelerate the exodus of the nominally Orthodox from the movement. All this pushing and pulling in the meantime was pulling the centrists apart.

The stress on the center was not unique to Orthodoxy. American society in general was becoming bifurcated—more liberal in some respects and more conservative in others. The moderate center was shrinking. While the Christian and conservative as well as ethnic forces grew more aggressive in setting their agenda to become the American one, other Americans were also increasingly willing to legitimate new and often radical lifestyles and values and to allow for the end of WASP cultural hegemony.

Among American Jews too there was a shrinking of the middle. A minority was becoming actively Jewish and producing a richer and more complex Jewish culture than America had ever seen, while the majority of American Jewry were interested in maintaining little more than a positive attitude toward the Jewish heritage.¹⁰⁷ On the right, full-time Jewish education grew while supplementary Jewish education waned. On the left, the declining affiliation of young Jews was leading to increased intermarriage and growing numbers of Jews who were largely divorced from Jewish life. In denominational life among the affiliated, the increasing liberalism of non-Orthodox Jewish groups was creating an ever-wider chasm separating them from an increasingly conservative Orthodoxy. The decisions of the Reform movement to ordain women as rabbis in the 1970s and a parallel one among Conservative Jews in 1983, the same year Reform Jews resolved to accept patrilineal descent as a basis for Jewish belonging no less legitimate than the traditional matrilineal descent that

Orthodox Jewish law considered the exclusive basis for Jewish continuity, and later permissive stances on a variety of personal status issues were only the most prominent moves that widened the gap between the Orthodox and everyone else.

The ambivalence of the Orthodox centrists had mirrored something that already in 1976 Charles Liebman saw in all of those who took their Judaism seriously in America. He described this ambivalence as coming out of a Jewry that “desperately sought to participate in the society and rejected sectarianism as a survival strategy, yet at the same time refused to make [their] own Jewishness irrelevant.”¹⁰⁸ When they thought of themselves as simply “modern Orthodox,” the emphasis was on modernity, which in practice signified participation in the larger society. But when this sector of Orthodoxy began to have doubts and anxieties about the value of its participation in American society and culture, its ambivalence crumbled and what remained nudged those who had been in the center, at first slightly and then more vigorously, in the direction of sectarianism.

While the Orthodox were by the closing years of the twentieth century moving toward greater sectarianism and retreating to an enclave culture behind what they viewed as a Jewish wall of virtue, American society was rapidly moving toward more flexible definitions of religious boundaries. The old notions that one must be either one religion or another gave way to the postmodern conception that one could be more than one at a time—in part a reflection of increasing intermarriage rates. The increasingly dominant attitude in America was that “the intermingling of peoples of a variety of backgrounds strengthens the national culture.”¹⁰⁹ In this view, intermarriage and other crossing of old social and cultural boundaries was not only a sign that a person had transcended segregation, either coerced or self-imposed, but also the most potent illustration of the extent to which Americans did *not* encourage sectarian separation from one from another. This attitude, particularly powerful among those who had received a liberal arts education, which the modern Orthodox had embraced as an ideal, these same Orthodox Jews saw as a sure pathway to the disappearance of Judaism and betrayal of the post-Holocaust pledge to survive. Such cultural conflicts their contrapuntalism could not handle. If indeed the university educated were more likely to think of themselves as having multiple identities, then maybe the Orthodox needed to rethink and better arm themselves before entering college.¹¹⁰ The university environment was of course the most fertile setting for spawning encounters across religious boundaries, interdating, intermarriage, and multiple or shifting identities.

Transcultural encounters had for much of the last quarter of a century acquired a positive valence for America, since by crossing boundaries and interdating and intermarrying, individuals would lose the negative attitudes they had toward other groups, becoming more integrated and thus creating a more harmonious society—something necessary for the multiracial, multicultural, and multiethnic society that the United States had increasingly become since 1965, the year the immigration law was changed to remove most of the national origin quotas and allow more newcomers from non-European sources. It was, however, problematic for Jews, and particularly for Orthodox Jews, who despite their desire to be integrated into American society and culture placed a high premium on continued Orthodox Jewish survival. They understood well that intermarriage decreases the salience of cultural distinctions in future generations, since the children of mixed marriages are less likely to identify themselves with a single group. Only outcasting could prevent the Orthodox from following this path.

As for matters of gender, the growing American trend of offering equality to women, the result of a new wave of feminism (sometimes called “radical”) that began in the 1970s on the heels of civil rights reform, changed the way American society and culture looked at the separation of the sexes. As modern Americans, the modern Orthodox were moved in this direction as well, but in their Orthodox Jewish character they were reluctant to breach traditional distinctions between the sexes that Jewish law held to be sacrosanct.

Together, these trends toward postmodern attitudes of religious identity, changing views regarding gender equality, and in general the breaking down of all sorts of barriers to integration created a dilemma for the modern Orthodox. They could not, or perhaps did not want to, keep up with the pace of postmodernity. Traditionalism and centrism were their response.

This was a striking turnaround. At midcentury, modern Orthodoxy, with its emergent day schools and soon to be suburban synagogues, had seemed to be the face of the future. It was happy to hold multiple contrapuntal identities and participate in several worlds. It made the center a place that was both modern and traditional. It created institutions—mostly day schools, synagogues, and communities—that reflected this. It had rabbis who encouraged and even celebrated this stance. Barely thirty years later, it was retreating toward sectarianism, if at first with only a slight shift in emphasis that would show itself most clearly in the way people identified themselves, educational choices, and decisions about the sorts of

experiences they wanted their children to have. Most of these choices turned out to be, as we shall see in greater detail later, in a contra-aculturative and sectarian direction.

By 1996, those who still wanted to hold onto modern Orthodoxy needed to create a new organization in order “to refresh the spirit of the Orthodox Jewish community.” That organization, calling itself Edah, had as its motto “the courage to be modern and Orthodox,” for by this time those who wanted to be modern felt they needed moral courage.¹¹¹

This Orthodox shift to the right could be seen in all sorts of ways. It was in the changing Orthodox position on intra-Jewish cooperation and dialogue in favor of outcasting. During the first half of the twentieth century, modern American Orthodox Jews tended to engage in interdenominational collaboration, whether in education or community concerns from kashruth supervision to institution building.¹¹² While some have suggested that this sort of collaboration was a result of Orthodox institutional weakness and necessity rather than ideological commitment, there is no doubt that for some of the modernists necessity morphed into an attitudinal tendency to accept the idea of cooperation as a positive development. But by forty years later Orthodox cooperation with other Jews was increasingly overwhelmed by the Haredi attitude of outcasting that argued that no cooperation was possible. To be sure, this was not unprecedented. Already among nineteenth-century German Jewry controversy had erupted in 1845 over whether Orthodox Jews should be included in the *Gemeinde* (community) or whether they should be a separate community (*Austrits Gemeinde*).¹¹³ The latter point of view stressed the need of the Orthodox to distinguish themselves from and confront their non-Orthodox co-religionists and hence avoid being swallowed up by them in theory and practice.¹¹⁴

Orthodoxy thus had always been wary of intra-Jewish relations because they were reluctant to legitimate non-Orthodox Judaism and were wary of being indistinguishable from Jews in the Conservative movement. Even such a centrist Orthodox rabbi as Shubert Spero argued in the early 1980s that with regard to relations between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews “our dealings with the other cannot always be reciprocal.” Although Spero tried to hold back the increasingly exclusionary and outcasting tendencies of Orthodoxy when he suggested what he called a “de-denominationalized zone” in which the Orthodox and all other sorts of Jews could meet in mutual respect and cooperation while suspending judgments of one another’s Jewish legitimacy, he also asserted that Orthodox Jews could not “affirm that each branch of Judaism is an equally valid version of Ju-

daim, an equally correct approach to God, an equally legitimate Jewish way of life.”¹¹⁵ That rightward-tilting centrist position ever more dominated the Orthodox perspective and led gradually and inexorably to an increasing level of American Orthodox sectarianism.

While the modern Orthodox went through these realignments, seeking a variety of means to gain access to the world beyond the boundaries of their religious and cultural enclaves, the Haredim, and increasingly the traditionalists and some of the centrists (those on centrism’s religious right wing), were warning that this was not necessarily a primary goal for Orthodoxy.¹¹⁶ The Haredi Orthodox Jews looked anew at the lessons of the Holocaust in light of developments in late-twentieth-century America and concluded with growing vehemence that the best way to turn was away from an increasingly debased and debasing American cultural life. This required a growing consensus within the Haredi enclave that the world outside was not only dangerous for Jewish survival but polluting. They had to return to the conclusion that despite their losses in the Holocaust their sectarianism and insularity were after all the right strategy for survival. The remarks of Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner are typical of this reassessment. He combined the lessons he believed should be learned from the Holocaust and from the developments in America in the late 1970s, both which moved him to urge Orthodox Jews (and in particular the hundred Jewish school principals gathered in 1977 at the Chaim Berlin Yeshiva) to turn away from “illusions,” “infatuations,” and “misplaced trust” in the “Gentile ways” of secularity and non-Orthodox Judaism.¹¹⁷ The Orthodox society that these Jews should build needed to be an *alternative* one inside a protected enclave culture, behind a Jewish wall of virtue, rather than one that was free of these boundaries and sought integration. In this Orthodox Jewish countersociety and culture, which had a distinctive pattern of claims of what was necessary to life, those who wanted to survive as Jews committed to Orthodox Judaism had to get away from thinking that they were like or belonged anywhere near the mainstream. To these sectarian Orthodox, as Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, dean of the Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore, put it in 1978, “there is no way that we can become totally assimilated in our adopted countries,” so the lesson of the Holocaust and of American life was to remind Jews, especially those looking to become part of modern America: “Do not assume their values or their lives. You are not part of them. You are not in your proper place; while there, you are not living your lives.”¹¹⁸ The Haredim believed, as Menachem Friedman has put it, that Orthodox Jewry was “obligated to close in on itself and to differentiate itself from the world around it (both the non-Jewish world and the modern Jewish secular world), to

see itself as being ‘on one side’ with ‘all the rest of the world on the other.’”¹¹⁹ Understood as well was the notion that those who were not in their proper place had transgressed and ran the risk of becoming themselves outcast. Indeed, in this view, to relate positively to either the non-Orthodox or the non-Jew was to flirt with sin and exclusion.

While once these sorts of messages would have fallen on deaf ears among the modern Orthodox, by the last quarter of the twentieth century more of them were giving heed. This was also abetted by the absence of alternative rabbinic voices of consequence that espoused the dualistic or dialectic cultural approach. And it was all happening just at the time that modern Orthodoxy was having doubts about what it had stepped into—even with only one foot—when it walked toward American society and culture. Haredi thinking that Judaism and Jewish life were totalistic in its character was finding a receptive audience even among the centrists. Contrapuntalism was in retreat.

Thus an ever more exclusive enclave culture developed that marked people as either insiders or outsiders, defining outsiders as at worst defiled outcasts and at best people of a “lower order.” This led to hostility or at least disdain toward popular culture, especially as it had emerged in contemporary America, to rejection of the ideal of the melting pot and mobility, and to downgrading of the Jewish *bona fides* of all those who were not Haredi in their Judaism. As well, it led to an embrace, among other things, of the ideal of separate but equal, a standard that of course had been repudiated in the United States, where integration had been the goal for at least fifty years.

The American Haredim who argued this point understood (or at least their ideological leaders did) that this turning away from American society and culture and its promises was difficult, since America was a beckoning, open society that did not want its citizens to feel a sense of exile—the very sense of exile that the Haredim were demanding as a propaedeutic to redemption—but rather encouraged acculturation in the salad-bowl multicultural United States, or even assimilation in its melting-pot precursor.¹²⁰ Accordingly, to these Orthodox Jews the *golus* or exile mentality, the embrace of estrangement from all other ways of life, became the key to survival, the sure way to avoid another Holocaust and wholesale Jewish destruction. In short, they argued that “it is imperative that we impress upon American Jews that we are, have been, and always will be, different.”¹²¹ Modern Orthodoxy had rejected that idea, but there were signs by the end of the century that their rejection was beginning to erode.

The counterarguments of the Haredim that were repeated continu-

ously began to be heard, particularly among the young who were in a variety of educational institutions where they were exposed to them.¹²² When the temptation to assimilate or even adapt grew, the battle against those tendencies had to be joined. Hence the success that the modern Orthodox had had in the first thirty years after the Holocaust in modern American society called forth an equally powerful counterforce. In 1953 Rabbi Elya Meir Bloch, the head of the Yeshiva of Telshe, was said to have explained: “We no longer have to fear [the movement of Jewish] Conservatism—that is no longer the danger. Everyone knows that it is *avoda zara* [idol worship]. What we have to fear is Modern Orthodoxy.”¹²³ By the 1970s, that warning was being publicly repeated, but by a Haredi Orthodoxy ready to be far more outcasting of the modernists.

In what has become a struggle to determine the character and direction of American Orthodoxy, the question is who will lead in the future. If the early aftermath of the Holocaust made it seem that the modernists would come out ascendant, the trends now seem to have switched. Evidence abounds. Typical of the turn toward outcasting and insularity within precincts once belonging to modern Orthodoxy are the following comments coming from a written “*d’var* [words of] *torah*,” by Rabbi Herschel Schachter as circulated on an Internet site called Torahweb. Schachter, often described as “the preeminent student” of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, serves at the time of this writing as Rosh Kollel at Yeshiva University, the head of the advanced Talmudic institute where many of the most dedicated Orthodox students prepare themselves and where many of those who will make up the next generation of Orthodox rabbis are being trained. He is thus a key figure in shaping the future and orienting the worldview of the religious leadership of modern Orthodoxy—those who study Torah but do so within a university framework. Here is what Schachter had to say in March 2004:¹²⁴

G-d [sic] describes Himself in His Torah as “a jealous G-d.” He forbids us to display any interest in any other religion. We are not permitted to attend a religious service of any other faith, or even watch it on television. We may not study works of or about any other religion, watch films about them, or study any pieces of religious art. A Jew may not enter a house of worship of any other religion even during the hours that services are not being held. We may not even “utter upon our lips” the name of any other god. This jealousy of G-d is not because He feels personally slighted and hurt. The Tehillim [Book of Psalms] described G-d as sitting in heaven and having himself a good chuckle over all idolatrous practices. But the concern is rather that these practices have a negative effect on mankind.

We may not donate any funds towards the furtherance of any other religion, nor advise or help in any other way to maintain any other religion. It is well known that certain religions encourage their clergy to engage in dialogue with the Jewish clergy in order to further conversion. It is obvious that we may not aid the clergy of any other faith in furthering their religion in such a fashion, or in any other fashion. There [*sic*] mere comparison of the Jewish religion with any other religion already constitutes an affront to the Jewish G-d, as if to imply that there is something substantial shared in common between the two.

Schachter supported these decrees by copious footnotes referring readers to a variety of Talmudic sources and discussions of Rabbi Soloveitchik's thinking as well as that of Samson Raphael Hirsch, the great avatar of German modern Orthodoxy; there was even a reference to an article in the *New York Times*. Clearly this message was directed to an Orthodox audience identified with the putative modernism and culturally integrative values associated with it, a population that reads and is familiar with Torah sources but also reads the newspaper and watches television. This is not a message for Haredim. Yet it is a Haredi message, for it clearly resonates with the religious sectarianism, insularity, and sense of superiority that is taken for granted among the Haredi Orthodox. The reference to the Holocaust, in terms common among the Haredim, is also there when Schachter adds, "The chosenness of our people is everlasting, even during periods of churban and after." On another occasion, the same Rabbi Schachter, speaking at a suburban centrist Orthodox synagogue, asserted in an even more religiously chauvinistic tone, "[W]e believe that the *neshama* [soul] of the Jew and the *neshama* of the non-Jew are made of different material," adding in a kind of pseudoscience that Jews "have it in our genes" that they are the chosen people.¹²⁵ Here is outcasting raised to the level of theology.

This assertive exclusivism and sectarianism, so essential to Haredi Orthodoxy, has increasingly made inroads into the rest of Orthodoxy. What were once common aspirations among the modern Orthodox—such as living in areas that were not exclusively populated by Orthodox Jews like themselves, having engaging relationships with non-Jews, passing as non-Orthodox, and even the once high-cultural goal of attending an elite university in order to pursue a professional career not at all tied to Judaism—are no longer expressed without reservation. When the university, American culture, and the non-Orthodox are all outcast as leading to the endangerment of Orthodox survival, it becomes difficult to continue to embrace them enthusiastically. The demand in the late 1990s of five centrist Orthodox Jewish undergraduates at Yale to be exempt from residence in the co-ed college dormitories because they argued that by living there

in a pluralist and permissive environment they would be exposed to lifestyles and practices that undermined their Jewish commitments exemplifies these reservations.¹²⁶ The comments by Rabbi Herschel Schachter that the religious requirement to avoid “idol worship” must be understood as a prohibition by Jews to have supportive interaction with Gentiles or to even learn about Christianity (including even watching a mass on television in the privacy of one’s own home) likewise illustrate this turning away from anything that is not exclusively Orthodox Jewish. Indeed, as Schachter continued, the moment the Jews were given “equal rights” with the Gentiles, they took the step away from the sectarianism and exclusivism that alone would save them.¹²⁷ Even the democratic principles of Americanism are suspect in the new enclavist Orthodox worldview.

Perhaps one additional and important factor helped support the tilt in favor of a more assertive traditionalism and Haredi Orthodoxy. During the opening years of the current century in America the notion of the superiority of secular society began to come under increasing attack by a rising national appreciation and idealization of religion, a phenomenon that some have dubbed the “Third Great Awakening,” a religious revival to rival the so-called Great Awakening of 1735–44 and the Second Great Awakening of 1790–1830.¹²⁸ This had been building throughout the last quarter of the preceding century with the rise of the Christian right and its success in infiltrating mainstream American society and culture. During these same years in America, Christian fundamentalism was becoming ever more public in its demands on the culture. In the spring of 1980, for example, a huge prayer vigil was held on the Mall in Washington, D.C. Believers were expressing the desire for their churches to become more assertive in determining the direction and character of American life and to preach about every issue, including politics, social issues, and education. Some saw this as a belated response to the upheavals of the late 1960s and the decade that followed. As enthusiasm built for a nationwide Christian movement, Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority, a multidenominational political organization, came to prominence. Falwell then undertook an ambitious recruiting campaign, speaking in all fifty state capitals. Other leaders also used the media to spread their message of conservative Christianity. Indeed, already in 1966, the Christian Broadcasting Network began airing Pat Robertson’s 700 Club, among the most influential programs in the spread of this sort of message. By the 1980s soon-to-be President Ronald Reagan was endorsing the methods and many of the views of the Moral Majority when he addressed a group of Christian leaders in Denver, and in 1985 on the Robertson program Rea-

gan would assert, "I am convinced this is a nation under God. And as long as we recognize that and believe that, I think He'll help us."¹²⁹

By the year 2000 a November Public Agenda poll, for example, demonstrated that, by overwhelming majorities, "Americans want religion to play a greater role in public life" and that large numbers believed (perhaps with an exaggerated utopianism) that if Americans were more deeply religious they would do more volunteer work, be better at raising their children, engage in far less crime, and even diminish greed and materialism.¹³⁰ This was an environment in which being an openly Orthodox Jew for whom religion was very important was acceptable, even admirable, no less than being openly evangelical. In this atmosphere of a newly assertive religion that expressed attachments to fundamentalist-like faith, traditionally Orthodox Jews could easily say they felt no less convinced. Indeed, in these days they may have even begun to feel more common cause with their Christian counterparts than with their liberal co-religionists.¹³¹ In short, when Christians are more assertively Christian, Orthodox Jews of all stripes can be more assertively Jewish. That is what seems to have happened in recent years.

The journey from post-Holocaust survival to a rightward inclination among American Orthodox Jews is seen in a variety of concrete ways. It displays itself in demographic trends, however subtly. It reveals itself in the way that going by the book has begun to dominate Orthodoxy in America, and in the transformation of Orthodox Jewish education. It even shows itself in the posters the Orthodox put on the walls of their neighborhoods, in their communications among themselves. But this trend does not go on unimpeded. There are points of resistance. For the Haredim resistance comes in the economic realities that this kind of Orthodoxy imposes upon its adherents. For the contrapuntalists, the resistance comes in the lives of some recent college graduates and adolescents. We shall turn to these issues in later chapters.

First, however, let us turn to the numbers. How many Orthodox Jews are there in America? Have these numbers shrunk or expanded? How many of these Jews are what have been called enclavists or Haredi, and how many are contrapuntalists? Finally, what do the numbers tell us? These concerns are next.