

the time it hovers near the center. People, by and large, are not extremists and will not live indefinitely with extreme positions. They, or their children or grandchildren, will seek a more balanced outlook.

5) A religious Jew must be heroic; must have a deep sense of inner calm and confidence; must not be afraid to be different. It is valuable to draw on the ethical and moral guidance of our great Musar writers. I personally have found much strength in the *Pele Yoets* of Rabbi Eliezer Papo.

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DAVID BERGER

Sixty years ago, world Jewry was overwhelmingly European, with the sword of Damocles hanging over its head. On one end of the periphery stood the relatively young, religiously marginal community in the United States, poised on the threshold of the long-sought achievement of thoroughgoing Americanization. On the other was the tiny but vigorous *yishuv*, struggling for the normalization of Jewish existence without the torment of exile and without its God.

The sword fell, and the periphery became the core.

At this point, the preservation of authentic Judaism became contingent upon arresting and if possible reversing the religious trajectory of both Israeli and American Jewry. At first glance, we might reasonably assume that the Holocaust would have posed a major obstacle to the renewal and even perpetuation of faith. For some, particularly those who lived through the European hell and its horrors, this surely was the case, but on a massive scale, the abandonment of religion did not follow. Paradoxically, the Holocaust was too horrific an event to have such a consequence, and not for so grandiose a reason as the commandment not to bestow a posthumous victory upon Hitler. The ordinary human psyche cannot readily survive a sustained, unflinching gaze into the depths of the maelstrom; the Holocaust is a black hole that can suck up and utterly annihilate those who venture too close. Most survivors set up a protective shield, and those who knew of the terrors only from afar assimilated the catastrophe both psychologically and theologically into the long litany of Jewish suffering through the ages. By now, the challenge is how to remember, not how to forget.

In the United States, which is the primary focus of this sympo-

sium, Orthodoxy had withstood the dismissive contempt of both Jews and Gentiles to establish significant institutions well before the war, and we are guilty of a churlish lack of gratitude when we describe an undifferentiated spiritual wilderness which greeted the pioneers of the forties. At the same time, we exhibit a similar defect if we fail to recognize the transformation effected by Orthodox leadership in the last fifty years. It is precisely this success which shapes many of the difficulties which we now confront.

Cooperation between modern and traditionalist Orthodoxy in the early post-war years was to a significant degree a reflection of weakness. The traditionalist rabbinate needed support, and it also understood and appreciated what a beleaguered Orthodoxy, most of it modern, had accomplished in an unwelcoming environment. Whatever the differences, most streams of Orthodoxy stood together as partners against the dangers of secularism, assimilation, and alternative denominations which threatened the very survival of authentic Judaism in the United States.

As Orthodoxy has grown and gained confidence, the sense of external threat has waned, and internal differences loom larger. To the Orthodoxies of the right, the modern stream is depicted not as an ally against the Other but as the Other itself, not as an alternative means of spreading Torah but as a force working to dilute it.

The confidence that we have begun to experience is young and precarious, and our self-congratulation only partly deserved. Orthodox successes are a function not only of heroic self-sacrifice but of larger social changes that may or may not persist. Much as religious Jews may disdain the relativism of a multicultural society, we are among its beneficiaries. We are also a part of the unanticipated rise of religious fundamentalism in a presumably secularized world. We have benefitted, in short, from two opposing forces in contemporary America, each of which also confronts us with deadly dangers. On one level, of course, Orthodox Jews are aware of those dangers to the point that much of the “yeshiva world” rejects even an education aimed at comfortable employment by pointing to the unprecedented blandishments of the university and the street. At the same time, one senses a smugness which is unseemly and, I fear, unrealistic. Unity remains not merely a value but a necessity.

Within limits, the ideal of unity must also govern our relationship with non-Orthodox Jews. Aside from the evident political importance of mobilizing the largest possible Jewish community to support the needs of *kelal Yisrael*, there are compelling religious reasons to hope

that Conservatism and Reform retain their constituencies. At this point in history, these movements do not seriously threaten the loyalties of Orthodox Jews. For most Conservative and Reform Jews, the realistic alternative to their current affiliation is termination of their Jewish identity. In the absence of an acute threat, we must consider the religious preferability of a life of partial observance to one of radical estrangement; indeed, R. Moshe Feinstein argued that people brought up as Reform Jews may well be rewarded for their *mitzvot* while remaining free of punishment for transgressions that in the final analysis are not their fault.¹ Even the hope that non-Orthodox Jews may be won over depends on preserving their ties to Judaism until they or their descendants might embrace the Torah in its fullness. For the modern Orthodox, such Jews also provide a service we may be uncomfortable in acknowledging: a buffer against the outside world, the psychological comfort of feeling more religious than other Jews, protection against a naked encounter with a challenging environment.

The great deterrent to a policy of cooperation is the specter of legitimating deviationism. The problem is exacerbated by attacks against delegitimation from within and without. Orthodox advocates of friendship, civility, and engagement with non-Orthodox movements must liberate themselves by saying publicly, unequivocally and as often as necessary that we do delegitimate. Reform and even Conservative Judaism as currently constituted diverge in fundamental ways from Jewish belief or practice and are consequently not legitimate expressions of the historic faith. But they have religious value, their adherents are for the most part our fellow Jews, in their own way they care about the Torah, and their communal commitments often coincide with our own. We need not be embarrassed to embrace a policy of constructive cooperation and dialogue. As Reform Judaism expands to include a growing number of righteous Gentiles, this will become more difficult, but *dayya le-tsara be-sha'ata*.

The greatest danger to Orthodoxy, which is not likely to be mentioned in any other contribution to this symposium, comes not from the obvious “deviationist movements” or from secularism but from a group of non-Orthodox Jews who are widely perceived as Orthodox. Precisely because most of Orthodoxy sees them as within the fold, Lubavitch Messianists threaten to undermine a key element of the Messianic faith of Judaism by having us recognize the Second Coming as a legitimate Jewish belief. The Rabbinical Council of America has, thank God, formally declared that this doctrine has no place in Judaism; nonetheless, should we continue to treat Messianists as Orthodox Jews in good

standing, late twentieth-century Jewry may well be remembered as the generation which allowed a historic transformation of the Jewish religion to take place.

A significant segment of this movement now declares openly that the late Lubavitcher Rebbe is not only the Messiah but God. As of this writing in late 1997, the last year-and-a-half has witnessed various Lubavitch writings calling the Rebbe “our Creator,” “the Holy One Blessed be He,” the “*Ba'al haBayit* of all that occurs in the world,” “omnipotent,” “omniscient,” “our God,” “indistinguishable” from God, one who underwent an “apotheosis” on 3 Tammuz 5754, whose “entire essence is divinity” and to whom one may consequently bow in prayer. These formulations, complete with prooftexts, appear in publications in which Lubavitch educators participate and reflect views that can be found not only on the movement’s periphery but also at its core. Without serious investigation, Orthodox Jews are accepting the *shehita* and contributing to the educational institutions of a group containing a significant segment of idolaters. The central objective of Avraham Avinu’s migration from his land, his birthplace, and the home of his father is being undermined not with a bang but with a whimper.

Just as we must learn to delegitimize, we must learn to refrain from delegitimation. The effort in some circles to stigmatize modern Orthodoxy places a central stream of Jewish thought through the ages outside the fold by ignoring or willfully distorting the views of many *gedolei Yisrael* and entire communities of Jews.² Controversies over women’s issues have lately created a particularly great danger of fragmentation, and we must beware of making disagreements which do not touch upon fundamentals of the faith the cause of schism within modern Orthodoxy itself.

At this point, all segments of Orthodoxy, including our own, are vital and growing. But the future will be determined by our response to challenges ranging from the ideological to the economic to the political and by developments in the State of Israel, ignored in this brief contribution but standing at the center of Jewish destiny. In the final analysis, through all our angst and trepidation, and in all our celebration and triumph, we can only place our trust in the true Guarantor of the future of Torah, whose unequivocal assurance of *lo tishakab mi-pi zaro* is the only lodestar by which we can navigate through all the uncertainties of our encouraging but problematic state.

NOTES

1. *Iggerot Moshe, Even haEzer* 4 (New York, 1985), responsum 26c, p. 54.
2. On this issue, see Gerald Blidstein, David Berger, Shnayer Z. Leiman, and Aharon Lichtenstein, *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?*, ed. by Jacob J. Schacter (Northvale, N.J. and Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 1997).

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RIVKAH TEITZ BLAU

If a variation on Honi haMe'agel could happen and Rav Meir Shapiro and Sara Schenirer could return to us today, what would be their reaction to the world they found?

I think they would thank Hashem for allowing us to live in Israel. Instead of there being a "Jewish question," as it was called in the 1930s, we have an answer, a home of our own. From 1948 on, the *kibbutz galuyyot* of the Jews of Yemen, Ethiopia, Russia and tens of other countries has been in progress.

They would have to learn a new definition of *ba'al teshuva*. In their time, it meant a person who returned to the observance of his youth; there were so few in the early years of this century that Dr. Nossou Birnbaum was referred to as "the *ba'al teshuva*." Now, a person does not "return," but more accurately retrieves a family legacy that had almost been lost. The hunger of thousands is not for bread, their thirst not for water, but to hear the word of God.

They would be impressed with how much easier it is to observe *Shabbat*, *kashrut*, and other *mitsvot* today. They would be surprised that Conservative temples, which seemed to be the wave of the future in the United States in the 1930s, are now empty except for special events. I think they would be happy with the flourishing of the Daf Yomi and Bais Yaakov school system, and would rejoice at the number of people learning Torah in Israel and the Diaspora. I am sure that they would think of new ideas.

They would mourn for one third of our people, murdered between 1939 and 1945. They might wonder at our having difficulty finding appropriate ways to commemorate the major events of our time. Are picnics and children hitting each other with plastic hammers a fitting means

THE QUESTIONS

1 The program of the February, 1956, conference of the Rabbinical Council of America lists Rav Moshe Feinstein, z”l, and Rav Mordechai Gifter among the speakers. Rav Aharon Kotler, z”l, also addressed the RCA in those days. It is fair to say that today such invitations to luminaries of the Yeshiva world would neither be issued nor accepted. What has happened to effect this sea change in relationships?

2 a) What were the epochal events that shaped Jewry in the last sixty years, and how would you evaluate the response of Orthodoxy to these events? b) Related to this, what have been the greatest successes of Orthodoxy, and its greatest failures?

3 Which presents the more serious challenge to Orthodoxy: the deviationist religious movements, or secularism? Have our past strategies in relating to either of them been effective? If not, how should the strategies be changed?

4 Which of the various groupings within Orthodoxy—Centrist, Rightist, Hasidic, Yeshiva, Haredi or others—do you consider the most vital in the long term, and which the weakest? Why? Do you see further splits between them, or greater cooperation?

5 As a believing Jew, what facets of Torah life give you the most personal strength to thrive spiritually as an Orthodox Jew in a hedonistic environment that is not conducive to Torah values?