

SYMPOSIUM

On Modern Orthodox Day School Education

Abstract:

This special Meorot symposium focuses on both classical and contemporary issues in Modern Orthodox education. The questions and responses address a range of topics relating to curricular, ideological and affective elements in the educational system in high school education both in North America and Israel. They also touch on issues that emerge in post-high school settings in Israel such as *yeshivot* and *midrashot*, where many of our graduates study after completion of high school in America. The participants in the symposium include both well-known and new voices.



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The following ten questions were sent to twenty five prominent Modern Orthodox educators (fifteen men and ten women) from the United States and Israel for their responses. Participants were given freedom to answer as many or as few questions, and in whatever fashion, they chose. Their responses follow. (ed.)

1. What should the ideal educated Modern Orthodox high school graduate look like in terms of practice, knowledge, and skills as well as his or her affective relationship to Judaism and *Kelal Yisra'el* in the 21st century?
2. What elements in the fields of *limmudei qodesh* and *limmudei hol* are missing in the curriculum of the average Modern Orthodox school?
3. Do you consider that present proportional allocations of time to *Humash* versus Talmud versus Jewish History versus Hebrew to be correct? What would be your ideal allotment of time?
4. What role should Israel education/experiences play in today's curriculum and school context? What should Israel education entail in Modern Orthodox day and high schools?
5. How should sexuality be addressed in the Modern Orthodox day school and how in the Modern Orthodox high school? How should issues related to homosexuality be discussed, if at all?
6. What areas of the post-high-school year in Israel need revamping and why?
7. What curricular, affective or experiential elements should be explored in sensitizing and making Modern Orthodox students think about their relationship to the "other," i.e. other gender; Conservative, Reform, and secular Jews; gentiles?
8. What should be done and how much time devoted to preparing students to thrive in non-Orthodox and pluralistic environments, such as college, the professions, and suburbia?
9. What skills among faculty and administrators should be strengthened to ensure the success of educating Modern Orthodox students for life and the continued success of the Modern Orthodox day school educational system?
10. What should be done in Modern Orthodox education to instill confidence in its graduates that they are not religiously inferior in knowledge or observance to *haredi* graduates?

Scot A. Berman:

Participants in this symposium have been asked a series of questions aimed at identifying and probing areas of improvement within Modern Orthodox education. All of the questions posed focus on the student. This is both logical and intuitive. After all, the purpose of the entire educational enterprise that we engage in is for the student. And yet, I believe that an argument must be made that in looking to systemically improve Modern Orthodox education we must initially place the emphasis elsewhere.

In 2005 I conducted research for the Seryl and Charles Kushner Family Foundation focused on the challenges facing Modern Orthodoxy. I carried out over fifty extensive interviews with leading professionals, policy makers, lay leaders, and academics—some of them included in this symposium. I posed the following question: “What are the major issues and challenges facing Modern Orthodoxy?” My working hypothesis was that a consensus would emerge regarding the identity of the core issues facing the Modern Orthodox community. That assumption was in fact borne out.

Without a doubt the most critical issue facing Modern Orthodoxy identified by interviewees in this study was a matrix of concerns centered on leadership. Three major layers of leadership were identified: rabbinic, educational, and communal lay leadership. Within both educational and rabbinic leadership, there is simply a shortage of qualified individuals identified strongly with Modern Orthodoxy to fill the ranks. This shortage spans the gambit from school heads, to principals and administrators, to teachers. Many Modern Orthodox schools unable to fill their positions with like-minded professionals feel compelled to turn to *haredi* teachers and administrators.

The effects of these decisions have enormous implications. In the classroom, teachers exert considerable influence over their charges. A teacher from Lakewood, for example, will provide a very different kind of educational experience for students, exuding particular attitudes about religion and the world, than will a teacher committed to Modern Orthodox values. A written mission statement cannot begin to compete with the effect of a real life teacher in the classroom—especially a dynamic one. This is all the more true for students exposed to *haredi* or right-leaning teachers over years of schooling. Even in the best of circumstances, given teachers who are being respectful of their environment and steer clear of engaging discussion around ideological issues such as religious Zionism and secular knowledge, attitudes cannot help but be conveyed. Although these teachers may not directly or consciously work to indoctrinate their students to accept their interpretations of Judaism, they perforce are not actively promoting or modeling Modern Orthodoxy. For Modern Orthodoxy to sustain itself it must proactively provide an educational experience that educates towards the values it believes in. To do so requires a cadre of teachers who embrace those beliefs in the classroom with the students.

Why is there a shortage of Modern Orthodox educators in the field? In answer to this question we can look at the relatively low status accorded by our community to the Jewish educator. The pejorative attitude associated with the adage “those who can—do; those who cannot—teach” pertains no less to the Modern Orthodox community. Young men and, to a lesser degree, young women are woeful about entering a field in which the community will wonder about one’s talents because one selected such a low paying

profession. Parents often discourage their children from entering the field, concerned about their success and wanting to protect them from communal abuse.

Success in the Modern Orthodox community is often measured by earning power, and it will be interesting to observe whether the current economic downturn leads to a change in prevailing attitudes on this matter. Jewish educators—teachers in particular—earn very low salaries. Administrators and school heads are paid quite well relatively speaking. However, most administrators begin their careers as full time teachers, and only after several years of service work themselves up into higher paying administrative positions. The reality of low pay over many years is still the fate of the majority of would-be principals and school heads. For most, the allure of higher paying administrative positions sometime off in the future is not a sufficient incentive to draw enough potential talent into the field.

Educators, including administrators, are not always accorded the highest communal respect. As well, those individuals who plan to become principals and heads of school witness huge rates of turnover within the field. Usually, the removal of a lead administrator is a highly publicized event within the community, generating much attention and further scrutiny. Many individuals are not willing to risk subjecting themselves to such possible eventualities.

With all the problems outlined above regarding the human resources issue, there is still reason for optimism. Despite the challenges facing young people considering Jewish education as a career, there seems to be a rise in interest in the field. Over the last several years, Azrieli School of Education boasts of significantly increased enrollment in its graduate programs, including its doctoral division. Other graduate programs in education around North America

are also realizing higher enrollments of individuals from our community pursuing higher degrees. With heightened interest in the field, we will soon see better trained and more highly qualified individuals ready to assume educational roles within our institutions.

Another phenomenon must be taken into consideration. We are witnessing changing values amongst “Millenials” (or “Generation Y-ers”). Emphasis has shifted from defining success purely by material gain to finding an occupation that also provides for a meaningful life. Therefore, in spite of lower salaries, a career in Jewish education may be desirable because it affords the opportunity for someone to make a meaningful contribution to his or her community and therefore lead a more fulfilled life. Defining the motivation to enter the field of education in general and Jewish education in particular as a response to a “calling” is by no means new. In fact, this has been the primary explanation for why talented people have pursued the field of Jewish education in spite of the required financial and social sacrifices. What is different now, however, is that a new generation is emerging where part of its ethos is to pursue endeavors that are inherently meaningful and contributive to society. Simply put, more people are hearing the call. With a larger pool to draw from, some of the burden in filling positions with desirable candidates is lightened.

We must also consider the impact of the economic crisis on this question. Enrollment in “alternative route” programs that allow individuals trained in one field to retrain as teachers is widely reported to have skyrocketed. Many professionals out of work or unable to find work in their chosen fields are retraining for careers in education. Although these jobs command considerably lower pay, they provide for steady income, good benefits, and job security. The same may be true for Jewish education as well, especially as it relates to the General Studies divisions

within schools. It is often noted that in order to model a *Torah u-Madda* philosophy, it is ideal to provide students with Modern Orthodox science, history and English teachers as well as rabbis and teachers of Jewish studies.

It behooves school boards to insist that their heads of school and administrators are ideologically aligned with the school's philosophy. The professional leadership is given the responsibility to promote and advance the school's mission. Therefore, it is obvious that the leadership must embrace and advocate the values of the school. Without such personal commitment on the part of the professional leadership, there is little chance that the school program will promote Modern Orthodoxy and its values. In spite of the obvious, we observe numerous schools throughout North America whose school boards have compromised on this essential matter and have selected *haredi* or *haredi*-leaning educators to lead their institutions.

Second, once in place, the professional leadership must ensure that the members of its faculty are individuals who meet the ideological criteria set by the school. This is an area about which a school head or principal must be vigilant. Probably the most important decisions any administrator makes throughout the course of his or her career are whom (s)he decides to hire. With a cadre of Modern Orthodox individuals on staff, the faculty is able to advance a consistent message.

The argument is sometimes made that our faculties should mirror the general makeup of the Orthodox community, thereby exposing students to a plurality of views and voices. We, therefore, should intentionally hire *haredi* teachers to offer alternative models and provide balance within the staff. I concede that it is important that our students be exposed to different points of view. I even

admit that they should be exposed to these diverse points of view directly from people who espouse them. However, the value of plurality of opinion does not require that we dilute the fundamental message of our education. Therefore, it is important that the primary role models our students interact with within school on a day-to-day basis be individuals who embrace the very values of the school. Exposure to *haredi* individuals and their thought can be accomplished by inviting them into the school as guest lecturers from time to time to address an assembly or special program or by meeting with such individuals as part of a field trip.

Prior to any discussion about the ideal graduate, curriculum, informal educational experiences, Israel education, the "post-high school Israel gap year", issues of gender, sexuality, or pluralism comes the question of personnel. Whom are we charging with the primary responsibility of educating our students? Who are we placing in front of those children? Who are our children's most significant role models? If we cannot be confident that our teachers are in sync with our fundamental religious philosophy, then the best conceived and finest developed curriculum is for naught. If we insist, on the other hand, that the educators we set before our students are ideologically committed individuals consistent with the core values of Modern Orthodoxy we will then, and only then, be in a position to begin addressing issues of the content and the substance of that education.

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Todd Berman:

Question 8: *What should be done and how much time devoted to preparing students to enter and thrive in non-Orthodox and pluralistic environments, such as college, the professions and suburbia?*

Having served as a rabbi on a college campus for several years, I am constantly asked by high school teachers and administrators for the Solomonic wisdom to solve the great riddle of our times, namely: how can yeshiva high schools prepare their students best for the religious challenges of secular college? Given that according to a recent study, "one-quarter of the students who come to college as Orthodox Jews...changed their denominational identity while at college," (Avi Chai Foundation, "Particularism in the University: Realities and Opportunities for Jewish Life on Campus," Report, Jan. 2006), Orthodox educators are correctly nervous about how to improve their programs before students arrive on campus. Without a doubt, Yeshiva University remains for many a safe haven; yet more and more yeshiva high school graduates are bound for secular campuses. The critical solutions, it seems to me, lie in understanding the real challenges, avoiding wasting time and resources where they are not really needed, and, most importantly, promoting key social networking on campus while at the same time maintaining the life changing connection educators develop with their students.

I. Be Aware of the Real Challenges.

During our tenure as the Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus (JLIC) directors at Brandeis University, my wife Nomi and I analyzed what seemed to be the three critical difficulties Orthodox students faced: academic, cultural, and social. Academically, the critique of tradition put forth in both Judaic studies and in more subtle and formidable ways in secular courses can be exasperating. The campus culture, while ostensibly "celebrating

pluralism," often lacks tolerance for what is seen as xenophobic tribalism. Orthodox students are sometimes made to feel odd for maintaining religious observance at the expense of partaking fully in the smorgasbord of cultural delicacies offered. However, both of these issues, while not insignificant, pale in comparison to the social pressures and realities of campus life. As one junior put it, "it is hard to be 'shomer negi'ah' when a girl sits down on your lap during orientation." From the promiscuous parties sponsored by the university to the open support of binge drinking, to the small things like the experience of living in an openly coed dormitory, students are made to feel, as one student told me, odd for not being sexually and socially active. A former student once remarked that just as the State of Israel lowered the red line on the Kinneret Sea, pretending that the water level had not yet declined to the danger zone, so do students redraw their own red lines, or even worse, forget why they were there in the first place. It is quite difficult to describe the tsunami of social-sexual pressure crashing down on the religiously oriented student. These social pressures, and not the academic or even the cultural, are the most difficult to withstand. If the problems stem generally, though not exclusively, from social issues, then the best defense should also come from the social sphere while on campus.

II. Stop Tilting At Windmills

There are three fallacies sometimes entertained by parents and educators that only muddy the waters and waste critical opportunities: over-emphasis on the academic challenge together with near disregard of the social; wasting precious resources by aiding students where they don't really need help; and assuming that somewhere (maybe in Israel) there is a silver bullet which will inoculate students from life on a secular campus. I have often heard

educators express their disdain for Judaic studies courses on campus or the fear of indoctrination in Middle Eastern studies courses. In fact, an entire industry has cropped up preparing students to meet these intellectual obstacles. I have to admit that rarely, in over 10 years of teaching, have I met a student who decided to quit keeping kosher because of what he or she learned in a course on Deuteronomy. I have met students, however, who, despite twelve years of yeshiva education followed by one or more years in Israel, quit the kosher meal plan that their parents paid for. This sometimes happened before the student began his or her first semester. More often, however, the red lines are erased slowly. A student once pointed out to me that there was a clear drop off of students attending *minyan* or learning after the junior year. This seems to have less to do with particular courses than the slow erosion of a spiritual connection.

I have taught in post-high-school programs in Israel for several years. Every winter former high school educators pour in—former teachers, principals, Israel advisors. They visit the *yeshivot*, take the students out for dinner, meet with the *rabbanim*, meet with each student individually, etc. The high schools are understandably concerned about several issues: the quality of education in the *yeshivot*, whether or not they should recommend future students to this or that institution, and whether their former charges are growing in positive ways. We should not belittle the many challenges of the year in Israel, (drinking, unsupervised weekends in parents' apartments, prolonged intervals between semesters, educational messages in some schools in conflict with Modern Orthodox values etc.), but we can still honestly say that there are many excellent *yeshivot* with a multitude of rabbis, female role models, and stellar educators in Jerusalem, Beit Shemesh, Gush Etzion, etc., and that many, many students benefit from them. In contrast, in my three years at Brandeis, only one high school educator visited—Rabbi Yaakov Blau of Frisch. With the help of the Board of Jewish

Education of New York and Yeshiva University, Nomi and I contacted numerous high schools asking for lists of students who were planning to come to Brandeis the following year. The response was absolutely underwhelming. This is the ultimate example of what seems to me to be totally missing the boat. The students in Israel will be taken care of – maybe not everywhere and maybe not perfectly – but there are plenty of educators to go around. Where our kids are being ignored is the campus. Even campuses with a JLIC program or the like have one rabbinic couple (and maybe a *Habad*) for hundreds of Orthodox students. The problem is especially acute for the students who did not spend a year in Israel. Their only connections to Jewish educators are to those they encountered in high school. They don't come with the experience or resources of their peers returning from even the "least successful" year. We found these students to be the most at risk for dropping off, and if they don't have previous support, they are not likely to make a connection with the campus Jewish educators.

The final mistaken assumption seems to be that many educators are looking for an absolute solution—the silver bullet to prevent "good *frum*" kids from falling into that 25% category of drop offs mentioned in the Avi Chai study. That is why I mentioned the students who quit before college ever begins. Nothing works for every student and nothing works for every environment—including Israel and even including Y.U. We need to examine where we can improve. We need to concentrate on social ties, to use our resources before and during the college experience, and to be realistic about what we can do to improve the success rate on college campuses.

III. Do What Can Be Done

The key is to help orient our students' social world in a direction that will help them grow positively in college by giving them the tools

and desire to connect to the local support systems, by maintaining and strengthening previous connections, and by emphasizing positive social networking. Yeshiva high schools need to inculcate a halakhic sensibility within their students. Not only because halakhic observance is central to our lives, but also because a student with a halakhic sense will seek out other peers and the professional campus leadership. At Yeshivat Eretz Hatzvi I teach a college preparatory seminar in which we examine many of the key halakhic, social, and moral dilemmas which will arise while on campus. The goal is not to answer every question, but rather to raise awareness of the issues in general before the students arrive on campus. It also is vitally important to push students to make a connection with a local educational figure. In fact, when asked halakhic questions by my former students who are now on campus I always first suggest that they ask the local rabbi or JLIC educator. The Israeli yeshiva and former yeshiva high school are far away both physically and in many ways emotionally. The local rabbi and student Orthodox community serve the most important role. We can help them fulfill their mission by supporting them and creating a desire within our students to utilize them.

In addition to pushing students to relate to the local support structures, the high schools should also maintain close contact with their students while in college. Most yeshiva high school graduates study in a limited number of locations in the country. One can only imagine the excitement they would feel if a former teacher or educator came to visit. One probably shouldn't expect college students to coordinate the program any more than they do for the visits to Israel, where the teachers generally make the arrangements. But with a bit of due diligence on the part of the high school, the impact of periodic visits, dinners, "shmoozes", or other events can make the difference between a student setting foot into Hillel or the kosher dining hall or avoiding it. I

have seen it happen with representatives of *yeshivot* in Israel. Coming to the *beit midrash* to meet with a cherished teacher can be the life changing event that breaks the ice and gives the student a natural opening to become an active member of the Orthodox student community.

I used to be skeptical about the importance of the year in Israel for many students. From the point of view of learning Torah, in some cases, delaying such an experience would be best. However, for the social reasons I mentioned above, I believe it is critical, and I think the schools need to encourage students to go. Freshmen in college who did not attend a yeshiva in Israel will enter without a strong group of peers. On the one hand, many of their former high school peers are in Israel and on the other, those returning from Israel already have a strong social network. Students who did not learn in Israel often find it difficult to break in to the inner group of Orthodox students. Since on a campus there exist many other social outlets, many students will opt out of the Orthodox community rather than go through the awkward struggle to become a part of what they see as an insular and cliquish group.

Question 6: *What areas of the post-high-school year in Israel need revamping and why?*

This brings me to a frequently overlooked problem. Students returning from the Israel experience often come with a positive social network in place. As I mentioned, this network is often intimidating to outsiders. Well meaning students who have shared this wonderful experience sometimes selfishly do not leave room for others. A student who went straight to college will often feel pushed aside. I often heard from the "non-Israel" students and their parents how neglected these students felt. If we are to cater to all our kids, we need to emphasize before, during and after the Israel experience that returnees need to be self aware. I lecture at several schools in Israel on the

the topic of college life. This is a key piece of my presentation: Those returning from Israel can make or break the religious experience of students who did not go. We as educators must relay this message loud and clear.

I would like to extend this idea a bit. Not only should we open our students' minds to becoming positive social role models within the greater Orthodox community, but we should push this further. Unfortunately, I have often heard educators take a more isolationist approach, suggesting that their students avoid Hillel and stay within the confines of the Orthodox community. The assumption seems to be that Orthodox students who participate in programs with Jews who do not share their background, experience, and worldview will inevitably lose their Orthodox identity. In my experience, those students from the Orthodox community who found a voice in Hillel and took upon themselves leadership positions had an impact on the campus as a whole and grew religiously themselves as well. Rarely did I find that participation in Hillel negatively affected a student's religious sensibilities; almost always the opposite occurred. By participating in the once-in-a-lifetime Hillel community, students learned about the beauty of the tradition they

were blessed to receive from their youth; an education that many of their peers in Hillel did not benefit from. By developing a more open approach within the Orthodox community to Hillel, we are, again, fostering a sense of social connection to the Jewish world and enabling our kids to develop feelings of responsibility and personal pride in their Jewishness.

I once heard from an educator in Israel that his job was to inoculate his students against the secular college experience. I can't disagree more. It is incumbent upon the community to empower our students to succeed in the college environment. We can achieve this goal if we keep several issues in mind: the positive social networks in place in high school or Israeli yeshiva should be maintained through developing programs for our alumni, refocusing our expenditures of energy on what is happening on the campus, promoting key social networks in college, and being realistic about what we expect to accomplish.

Rabbi Todd Berman served as the founding director of the Jewish Learning Initiative at Brandeis University. He currently serves as Rosh Yeshiva (Ram) and associate director at Yeshivat Eretz Hatzvi in Jerusalem.

Shlomo (Myles) Brody:

Question 1: *What elements in the fields of limmudei qodesh and limmudei hol are missing in the curriculum of the average Modern Orthodox school?*

In developing an agenda for Modern Orthodox education, we must distinguish between two different objectives: spiritual growth during the educational process, and the desired communal results. The former concerns matters of teacher selection, dilemmas of coercion and personal autonomy, and other central questions related to inspiring religious commitment. In this agenda, the educator

focuses on how well he or she has helped the student develop spiritually. The latter option, on the other hand, refers to the sociological impact of our graduates and the way that they shape and color our community. Here we measure our success against an ideal model for what we believe is necessary to positively advance our community.

The two agendas, of course, are at times intimately intertwined. If one believes that our community needs greater knowledge of Jewish history, for example, that will obviously affect our curriculum. At other times, however, the

two factors must be separated, and, in particular, when it comes to setting educational priorities.

One immediate consequence of this distinction relates to the exercise of depicting the "ideal educated Modern Orthodox high school graduate." The Modern Orthodox community, and certainly its educational system, is far from monolithic, and therefore it is futile to speak of any form of ideal graduate or product. Clearly, we would like all of our graduates to be fully committed to the ethos and norms of a halakhic lifestyle, passionate about *talmud Torah* and *shemirat ha-mitsvot*, and possessing knowledge commensurate to their intellectual capacities. Moreover, we hope that they understand that these values also encompass care for all of *Kelal Yisra'el*, religious Zionism, an appreciation of all human science and wisdom (*Madda*), and a general openness to engage contemporary life from a Torah perspective. Yet to speak in these generic, idealistic terms simply dishonors the valorous high school educators who struggle to inspire in a diverse and complex environment, and equally importantly, obfuscates educational agendas.

A quick glance at Modern Orthodox high schools shows the wide range of family backgrounds of their students. Some draw from homes that are quite observant and religiously passionate; others come from less committed but more-or-less observant families; and some kids leave school on Fridays to environments where one minimally feels the presence of Shabbat. One might characterize different schools by the backgrounds of their students, but I think that these distinctions appear within any individual school, both inside the New York City metropolitan area and outside of it. I have encountered, for example, multiple students, graduates of more "right wing" institutions in the New York area, who had within their families one parent (of a happily married couple) that was not observant, intermarried siblings, and anti-

religious grandparents. Obviously, the challenges of teaching such students are complex, demanding varied pedagogical approaches and criteria for success.

I stress this point because I believe the diverse family backgrounds of our students reflect one of the larger challenges in Modern Orthodox education. We make very little demand of our students' families when it comes to their own commitment or observance, and even allow (and frequently encourage) all families to assume lay leadership roles in our schools. At best, we request that they guarantee kosher food in school lunches and at out-of-school birthday parties. To a certain extent, this is a virtue of the Modern Orthodox community, in that we are willing to accept a wider range of people within our ranks, understanding the complexity of faith and commitment in the contemporary era—and the fact that there are worse alternatives for them to choose. In a few (but certainly not all) circumstances, the family's weaker commitment might reflect an incomplete "*ba'al teshuvah*" process, which, given their own background and circumstances, should be seen as nothing less than heroic. (I occasionally will chastise a student, recently inspired to greater levels of observance, for criticizing the religiosity of his or her own parents, whose own religious journey entailed much greater sacrifice and dedication.) Many times, it simply reflects the sociological phenomenon that the Modern Orthodox community contains members of various ranges of commitment.

While, as I stated, this phenomenon has its advantages, it also means that the parents and teachers of our schools frequently do not completely share religious assumptions or aspirations. High schools do not exist in a vacuum; they sprout from the communities that support them, and their potential growth stems from the quality of sunshine, oxygen, and water which they are provided. Given this reality, teachers, qua educators, need to set their goals in terms of how much they can

accomplish with individual kids and the school as a whole, and not focus on their image of "ideal graduates." Similarly, the quality of teaching should be judged on the students' development from where they started, and not necessarily the final result. The teacher who gets a nominally Orthodox student to become more committed and observant, albeit at less than an ideal level, has achieved more, as a teacher, than one who simply guides more observant students on a spiritual plateau.

I realize, of course, that as a community, we need to be concerned with the final product as well, and educators, qua communal leaders, need to be aware of where our community stands. Nonetheless, we sometimes create generic goals for our schools which are, quite simply, unrealistic—and therefore counterproductive—because they do not take sufficient account of the larger cultural context. Moreover, these unrealistic standards lead to unfair criticisms of educators, from community members and even, alas, colleagues at different schools, who do not sufficiently appreciate the challenges of a given community.

Question 3: *Do you consider that present proportional allocations of time to TaNaKH versus Talmud versus Jewish History versus Hebrew to be correct? What would be your ideal allotment of time?*

Focusing on improvement within given realities, as opposed to ideal products, might also help us with curricular priorities. Talmud, TaNaKH, Hebrew language, and Jewish history are all important and worthy of intense study. I would hope that it would be possible to teach all of these topics well, and a few select schools do indeed succeed, to a certain extent, in all of these areas. Nonetheless, budgetary and time restrictions make it difficult to allocate sufficient resources to these enterprises. It does not make sense to teach four subjects poorly. We are aiming to increase our students' religious commitment, not to build ideal curriculums. If a school, for example, cannot find skilled Hebrew language

teachers (as opposed to people who happen to speak Hebrew fluently), then it is better to drop the class entirely than to waste the period.

Given limited resources, emphasis should be placed on Talmud and TaNaKH, at the (unfortunate) expense of Hebrew language and Jewish history. Within *gemara* classes, greater emphasis should be placed on subject material that has practical ramifications, such as those in *Masekhet Berakhot* and *Seder Mo'ed*. There is no shortage of conceptual paradigms, "lomdut" or interesting halakhic and aggadic material in those pages, and I cannot understand why we shouldn't prefer topics that will more naturally engage a wider range of students and provide halakhic instruction as well. Regarding TaNaKH, overemphasis has been placed on Joshua and Judges, at the expense of *Nevi'im Aharonim*, which are central in instilling religious values. While the literary prophets' Hebrew is more difficult, those texts must be taught, even if that means studying the text in English.

Questions 9 & 10: *What skills among faculty and administrators should be strengthened to ensure the success of educating Modern Orthodox students for life and the continued success of Modern Orthodox day school educational system? What should be done in Modern Orthodox education to instill confidence in its graduates that they are not religiously inferior in knowledge or observance to haredi graduates?*

The most important thing to help Modern Orthodox graduates feel less inferior in knowledge and observance than their haredi counterparts is to change the reality that this is the case.

As a card-carrying member of the Modern Orthodox community, I believe fully in its ideals, and dedicate many *shi'urim* to showing my students its firm basis within the *masorah*. I have no illusions about the "yeshivish" school system, and understand that it has its own share of problems. Yet we simply cannot ignore the fact that many of our students do not possess the textual skills, feel the same

passion for Torah study, or strictly observe *halakhab* to the same extent as many graduates of more yeshivish communities. Our students have other definitive advantages, but shortcomings in these central areas cannot be ignored. One recent student, himself a graduate of a respected day school in a firmly Orthodox community, highlighted this point when he summed up his yeshiva experience in Israel, "This was the first time that I was ever in an environment fully committed to *halakhab*."

Some might argue that this problem stems from the energy invested in secular studies. Perhaps this is partially true, particularly with regard to intellectual knowledge. I think, however, that the larger problem stems more from the time wasted with "low culture." Or as someone once put it to me, the problem is *bittul zeman*, not *bittul Torah*. Our students' obsession with MTV, Sportscenter, and *Seventeen* highlights the fact that our communities do not succeed fully in taking the best of secular culture while winnowing out its excesses and crudeness. This obsession with popular culture, moreover, not only occasionally instills negative values, but also precludes greater engagement with Judaism.

This problem, which at its root is related to the complex engagement of Orthodoxy with modernity, will not be solved with more formal education training for teachers. Solutions will stem from faculty and administrators recognizing this unfortunate reality and doing what they can, given the circumstances, in making a halakhic lifestyle attractive. The most important method is to lead by example, and therefore it is an imperative to find (and cultivate) educators whom the students will relate to and respect.

One indication of this unfortunate reality, which is ripe for improvement, is the summer camp experience. Many of these camps succeed in the more informal elements of education (Shabbat experience, singing, Zionism, etc...), and are invaluable in helping

to build greater religious enthusiasm. Yet there is no reason why daily camp learning should consist of forty minutes, in a hot gazebo, reading from *Shlomo's Stories*. Our youth will survive with one less period of hockey or wall-climbing. The first two hours of the morning, as well as optional afternoon or evening slots, should be dedicated to Torah study, defined in its broadest sense to include text-based *shi`urim* in Talmud and TaNaKH as well as classes in Jewish history and philosophy. The camp, moreover, must grant time to the counselors and support staff to learn so that they can lead by example. Camp directors, of course, need to be realistic about the desires of their clientele, but such Modern Orthodox summer camp *options* must exist.

Similarly, for students already more inspired to learn, our community must create summer learning programs, both in Israel and North America that instill love for Torah and employ teachers and counselors who believe in Modern Orthodox values, something that is desperately missing today. Many of our most committed youth begin their path away from Modern Orthodoxy when they are exposed, for the first time, to a highly motivated summer learning environment led by staff members ambivalent or antagonistic toward Modern Orthodox values.

Question 5: *How should sexuality be addressed in the Modern Orthodox day school and how in the Modern Orthodox high school? How should issues related to homosexuality be discussed, if at all?*

Given our students' exposure to decadent values that are widespread in the media, it is an imperative for high schools to have open and honest discussions about sexuality. These discussions (not lectures) should include halakhic and philosophic insights relating to appropriate gender interaction, pre-marital sexual activity, marital intimacy, pornography, masturbation, and *tsni`ut*. I have no illusions that these discussions will fully combat a popular culture of sex, sexting, and rock n'roll. Nonetheless, it is an imperative for teenagers

to recognize that God is in the bedroom, that Judaism has, generally speaking, a positive attitude to sexuality, and that we offer a viable alternative to contemporary mores. Moreover, they must see teachers as people who understand their challenges and temptations, and in whom they can confide in more private conversations. At the very least, our teenagers need to recognize that relationships entail commitment and sharing, as opposed to treating the opposite gender as an object, exemplified by the scourge of promiscuous and non-committal "special friends" or "friends with benefits" relationships.

Question 6: *What areas of the post-high-school year in Israel need revamping and why?*

The options for Modern Orthodox *yeshivot* in Israel have greatly (albeit belatedly) increased over the past few years in two important ways. Firstly, the number of institutions in which the vast majority of the staff believes in religious Zionism and *Torah u-Madda* has increased. Secondly, many more programs, for both men and women, offer a more varied curriculum that meets the needs of a broader range of students.

High schools must take advantage of this positive development and relate in the following ways to the Israeli *yeshivot* and seminaries:

The programs must succeed in inspiring their students religiously in a significant way. We cannot afford to waste this opportunity of intense study, and it remains irresponsible for high schools to support programs that do not succeed in their missions, even if personal, political, or ideological affiliations exist between the institutions.

High schools must demand honest presentations of the philosophic values of the institution, and follow-up to make sure that the *yeshivot* actually espouse the promised ideals. If an Israeli institution promises a "range of perspectives within the Orthodox world" (i.e.

Modern Orthodox to *haredi*), but its most influential and inspiring teachers (whatever their own personal backgrounds) send their own children to *haredi* schools, the effect on the yeshiva's students is predictable. When the foreign students' program of an Israeli Zionist yeshiva has many graduates who don't celebrate *Yom Ha-Atsma'ut*, one must recognize that an Israeli flag on the building doesn't indicate the values being taught. When a significant portion of a yeshiva or seminary's graduates believe that attending Yeshiva University is *be-di-`avad*, or a compromise for their parents, or that attending a secular university is always an unmitigated tragedy and of no redeeming value for certain students, then high schools must draw the necessary conclusions. It is perfectly reasonable for a high school teacher to decide that his or her student would benefit from a more "yeshivish atmosphere," or that given all other options, this particular yeshiva would benefit him or her the most. What remains unacceptable is the false marketing of certain *yeshivot* and seminaries, and the negligence of high schools to recognize it as such.

All things being equal, Modern Orthodox high schools should encourage their students to choose Israel options that share their ideology. Israel advisors must take into account the individual needs of each student, and guide them toward the most appropriate school for them. That being said, when multiple options exist that reasonably fit the applicant's needs, I cannot understand why a Modern Orthodox school would not encourage the student to attend a similarly-minded program. On a number of occasions, I have met educators who regularly bemoan the "shift to the right," yet do not properly distinguish among the different *yeshivot* in their recommendations to students. They frequently rely upon out-of-date reputations, or alternatively, make suggestions based on long-time friendships and loyalties. Does it not behoove our community to support institutions that inspire religious

passion within the Modern Orthodox framework?

Thank God, the Modern Orthodox community and its school systems have progressed in many ways over the past decades. Its continued flourishing will depend on our

commitment to advancing our cause and ideals, as well as having enough self-awareness to understand our challenges and opportunities.

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Yitzchak Etshalom:

Question 10: *What should be done in Modern Orthodox education to instill confidence in its graduates that they are not religiously inferior in knowledge or observance to haredi graduates?*

Before seeking answers, we need to clarify the contours of the problem by exploring its roots and symptoms:

Is the self-perceived inferiority a real phenomenon?

Is this inferiority, if it exists, at all significant to the graduate of the Modern Orthodox institution?

Are graduates of Modern Orthodox institutions truly inferior in religious standards and commitment (which, arguably, might not be assessable at all) or in scholarship (much more easily measured)?

If we conclude that the answers to each of the first two questions is affirmative—but not the final one—then the work we need to do is internal and attitudinal. If, conversely, we conclude that there is a real and objective gap in scholarship and commitment between the typical “haredi” graduate and the typical “Modern Orthodox” graduate, then the issue is no longer instilling confidence but revamping both curriculum and environment, with far-reaching implications for community and family education.

Parenthetically, if there is a perceived inferiority but it doesn’t matter to the graduate, we have a very different problem to contend with. In the case where he or she is bothered by the sense of deficient ability or weak commitment, the angst is existential and speaks to identity. If, on the other hand, he or she feels apathetic about the “distance,” there is a great educational hurdle to overcome, such that our students need to be inspired, indeed urged, to maximize their potential in all areas of their education and development.

For argument’s sake, let us assume a perceived inferiority that matters to the student. For instance, when he or she meets neighbors or relatives in synagogue, at a *sim^hab* etc., the cousin who is a graduate of a more insular yeshiva seems to be more comfortable with his or her own religiosity, quoting sources to support contentions and demonstrating religious fidelity and a predilection for stringency—which is impressive to the casual onlooker. Our graduate then, in this scenario, feels small in both knowledge (“he knows why he’s doing this”) and commitment (“look how serious he is about his *frumkeit*”).

One of the reasons for this range of perceptions lies in one of the ills of modern man—one that we, as Jewish educators, should be battling. Western man of the twenty-first century has been trained to judge based on sound bites and messages of 140 characters or

less. “Twitter Man” has become accustomed to judging circumstances, actions and even people based on immediate, rushed and split-second impressions. As such, it isn’t surprising that superficiality begins to pass for substance and stringency for commitment.

The antidote is not to address the “*frum* cousin” problem; rather, it is to deal with the larger question of how to build a world-view and sense of self within that world slowly and methodically. Once students are accustomed to taking issues apart and seeing them from various angles—be they different ways to understand a technical halakhic issue such as *yi’ushb she-lo mi-da’at* or the arguments in favor of and against implementation of martial law and suspension of civil liberties in times of national panic—they should be used to seeing circumstances, actions and people as essentially deeper and more nuanced than first impressions allow. In other words, this should translate into meeting a neighbor or relative with a different orientation (or, perhaps, the same orientation but more severe garb!) as nothing more than just that—implying nothing about commitment or scholarship.

In sum, the approach we must take is one that is a core part of our tradition: teaching Torah analytically and training our youth to think analytically should help them not only navigate through this potential storm of self-perceived inferiority, but also through the larger and real challenges they will face “out there.”

If, on the other hand, our answer to the third question above is positive, and students from *haredi* institutions typically come out with a stronger sense of commitment, greater scholarship and a more secure role in the future leadership of the Jewish people, we need to step back and ask the necessary questions:

Are we using accurate measures to gauge the “superiority” of *haredi* education? I recall, years ago, hearing a teacher recount his own temporary shock that was soon resolved. As an MTA student, he had studied thirty challenging

pages of *Masekhet Qiddushin* by the time Passover came around. He went to a *matsab* factory just before *Pesah* to buy *matsot* and stopped in at a *hasidic beit midrash* where he discovered that the young men were completing *Masekhet Pesahim*—all 120 pages. He was horrified, wondering why it had taken him and his classmates so many long hours of hard work to complete one-fourth as many pages in *Qiddushin*—until he spent a few minutes observing the superficial manner of study in which these young men engaged and he understood the difference, to paraphrase the old adage, between going through a *sefer* or having a *sefer* go through you. We ought not allow ourselves, nor our students, to judge superior education based on apparent, rather than real, accomplishments.

Even if we cede that, in some cases, *haredi* education in *limmudei godesh* is stronger, that certainly comes at the expense of any one of—or a combination of—other considerations.

The first, and most obvious, is secular studies. The very real disparity between the liberal arts and science education at *haredi* schools (where it exists at all) and that provided at the typical yeshiva high school is well known and easily documented. This, of course, doesn’t imply a value judgment on one system versus the other, but—to paraphrase R. Yisrael Salanter—you can’t sleep eight hours a night and also be a *baqi be-shas* (expert in the entire Talmud). If secular studies are an inherent value as well as a strategic necessity, that will, by definition, eat into time that could otherwise be devoted to Torah study.

Another area which many yeshiva high school students are devoted to is community service—what may loosely be called “*hesed*.” It is, in many Modern Orthodox schools, not only an encouraged activity but comprises part of a student’s obligation and is seen as part and parcel of his or her education. This is a part of an ideological commitment to the Jewish people as a whole in more than a theoretical or occasional sense that the Modern Orthodox

community has integrated into its ethos. To be sure, the haredi community has an impressive record of organizing itself and coordinating relief efforts of all sorts, from Tomchei Shabbos to *biqqur holim* societies; however, this has not been formalized within the educational structure in nearly the same way that it has in the Modern Orthodox community. It should be noted that this last point is one where a gender-differentiated curriculum is strongly evident; in the realm of *hesed*, *haredi* girls' schools have impressive programs, yet these are nearly unheard of in boys' *yeshivot*.

Extra-curricular pursuits, from sports teams, to Yeshiva University's Model United Nations gathering, to debate clubs and on and on...these are the programs for which many of our schools are famous. They enhance a sense of school pride, teamwork, meeting others, logic and rhetoric, and it hardly seems necessary to promote the value of maintaining and encouraging these programs—all, of course, within a well-defined balance. These are, nearly to a one, programs that are hardly considered (if at all) at most *haredi* schools.

If after all of this soul-searching, introspection and prioritizing, we still come to the conclusion that what we are offering and teaching is falling short of what we want, we

Yoel Finkelman:

The organizers of this symposium have presented readers with a list of ten questions to answer, each one pointed, insightful, and central to the agenda of North American day-school education. I want to make a seemingly tangential observation about those questions, which I think is indicative of how Orthodox educators talk and think about their field. It is interesting to note that, in the course of those ten questions, the word "should" appears no fewer than ten times. Where that word does not appear, other *prescriptive* terms such as

may need to take a further step back and ask a more painful question: Is the constituency that we are serving as committed, by and large, to the study and observance of Torah as other communities? If our answer is negative; if we find that the lessons we teach at school run up against implicit or explicit messages at home, then we have to redefine the question and modify our expectations. If our priorities are not—or cannot be—the same as the “other community’s,” then measuring ourselves against them is a fruitless exercise, doomed to frustrate. In that case, we will need to bite the proverbial bullet, roll up our collective sleeves and widen the net of our educational enterprises so that the goals which the school endeavors to promote are understood, accepted, confirmed and adopted within the larger community. To stake a claim as a community of vision, of ideals and of commitment, we need to be able to take an honest look at our challenges, not in contrast to other communities but against what we could be—and work to build an incentive for continued growth in Torah study, *yir'at shamayim* and halakhic observance.

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"need," "are missing," and "correct" take its place. That is, the subject of this symposium is what we ought to be doing, what our educational systems "should" look like.

Absent, however, are questions that are *descriptive*, that ask what the current state of affairs actually is, how or why they got that way, and how we know. That is, this symposium is not particularly focused on questions about the current state of Orthodox Jewish education; the historical, cultural, or

economic forces that have created that reality; and what methods we, readers and contributors, use to ground those claims. Of course, it is not possible to talk about what things ought to look like in the future without implicitly or explicitly saying something about what things are like at the moment. Still, I wonder why, in the perennial tension between the "is" and the "ought," Orthodox education seems to put so much systematic attention on the "ought" and downplays systematic attention on the "is." There seems to be some implicit assumption that the descriptive questions require less energy and attention.

Perhaps this is because in education the primary reason to ask "is" questions is to serve as a ground for figuring out how to better realize the "ought." I want to know if my graduates can read, write, and think today primarily so that I can figure out how to help them do those things better in the future. At the end of the day, Jewish education should center on the "ought," but it seems to me that we would be better able to focus on the "ought" effectively if we knew much more than we do about the "is."

For the sake of an example, it is worth examining Lookjed, the online discussion forum for Jewish educators that has done so much to professionalize Jewish education since its founding over a decade ago. Take two of the most developed and lengthy discussions in that forum in the past few years, on virtually identical topics: the 2009 discussion of the so-called "illiteracy epidemic" and the 2000 discussion of "functional illiteracy" in Jewish education. I cut and pasted those discussions into my word processor, and it came in at 50 pages and over 27,000 words. The conversation proceeded on the basis of anecdotal evidence, intuition, and personal experience. There was a glimmer of more data-based evidence early in the 2009 conversation, when an article in a Jewish student newspaper

¹<http://media.www.yucommentator.com/media/storage/paper652/news/2009/02/06/Opinion/The-Illiteracy.Epidemic.Is.There.A.Scandal.Of.Orthodox.Indifference-3615875.shtml>. The author also cites Faranak Margoles' book, *Off the Derech*, which suggests that those "who cannot understand *Humash* and the *Siddur*... [are likely to] abandon Jewish observance in their 20s." While the book is interesting and thought provoking, it is not based on systematic data collection or analysis.

(which sparked that conversation) cited an internal study performed at Yeshiva University that "confirms the widespread nature of the problem." Unfortunately, however, this study is not public information, so readers have no way of knowing what, precisely, was measured, how, and against what benchmarks. And even with this evidence, the article went on to suggest, without citing sources, that, "In the last thirty years, the Jewish day school system has burgeoned, but its graduates are progressively less and less literate."¹ Is this true, or is it a nostalgic longing for a past that never was?

The conversation continued on Lookjed, with authors jumping from anecdotal evidence about the nature of the problem to proposed solutions. Notice that there was no consensus about either the nature or extent of the problem, nor on the proposed solutions. To oversimplify, many of the contributors to the discussion fell into one of two categories: (1) those who claim that the study of text skills is likely to come at the expense of Jewish enthusiasm, and therefore, in the grand balance, schools should prefer to inspire students rather than teaching them text and skills; and (2) those who claim that the study of text skills is in and of itself inspiring, or is at least a pre-requisite for inspiration, and therefore a systematic study, beginning in an early age, of Hebrew language, grammar, and text will lead to more enthusiastic Jewish participation in the future. These two camps are, in many ways, diametrically opposed to one another in terms of their assumptions about both the reality and the effectiveness of various educational strategies.

In these conversations, some writers grounded their proposed solutions in an anecdote – their own personal learning history, students they know, a visit to an Israeli school, their experiences with an inspiring teacher, the pedagogic ideology of the institution in which

they work. Some didn't even do that much. Not a single author in these fifty pages of discussion cited actual hard evidence about (1) the nature and extent of the problem, (2) the causes of the problem, (3) the historical dimensions of the problem (Were things ever better, and when?), or (4) the effectiveness of the proposed solutions.

Participants did not cite this information primarily because it is not available. We just don't know all that much about what Orthodox day school students know and don't know, can and cannot do, and what they feel about all that. Nor do we know how that has changed over time. In consequence, we know very little about which educational strategies, pedagogic programs, and curricular materials are most effective in achieving various goals. It seems to me that conversations about the literacy or lack thereof of our day school graduates and the suggested solutions would be more effective if we had such data.

Furthermore, in the absence of such data, we have no realistic benchmarks for or agreement about what qualifies as success and failure, literate and illiterate, acceptable and exceptional. Does literacy mean an ability to translate a simple narrative section of *Humash*? To unpack the medieval *parshanut* on that passage? Or to make sense on one's own of a previously unseen passage of *gemara* with Rashi and Tosafot? Each of these very different standards was mentioned respectively by various participants in the conversation, and trying to teach toward those goals would produce radically different curricula. Which, if any, of those suggestions is a realistic measure

of success or failure? Presumably, it would be easier to talk about solutions if we knew with some measure of precision what we *expect* of our students.

Truth be told, not all of Orthodox educational discourse proceeds on the basis of anecdotal evidence. Individual schools do keep records, though they understandably prefer not to share those data with the general public. (If the student body is as illiterate as some suggest, publicizing such data could be decidedly embarrassing.) The Lookstein Center's magazine, *Jewish Educational Leadership*, does include important descriptive articles about what is going on in the field, but for the most part they take the form of individual educators describing what they are doing and how it is working, on the theory that successful programs from one context might be imitated or modified in another context. ATID fellows have conducted some small-scale studies, mostly focused on Year in Israel programs.² And Yeshiva University's Institute for University-School Partnership is beginning, by way of its graduate students and school-partnership programs, to gather data on a network of questions (though those data and their analysis have yet to be fully gathered or published). Furthermore, Orthodox educators have access to some information about Orthodox day schools by way of studies sponsored by non-Orthodox Jewish organizations, such as PEJE and Brandeis University.³ Unfortunately, however, these studies often lump Orthodox education together as one category, which makes it difficult to distinguish between different educational strategies and practices that appear

² See, for example, http://www.atid.org/journal/journal00/ziegler_sum.asp, and <http://www.atid.org/resources/beyond.asp>.

³ See, for example, Adam Gamoran, *The Teacher's Report* (New York: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, 1998); Fern Chertok et al., *What Difference Does Day School Make?* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, 2007), available at <http://ir.brandeis.edu/bitstream/handle/10192/22974/ACF2D9E.pdf?sequence=1>. Also see PEJE's studies of educational and administrative benchmarks for Jewish schools that allow for comparison, http://www.peje.org/knowledge/yardstick/Benchmark_Report.php. That only 20% of schools that participated in PEJE's yardstick project are Orthodox, while students in Orthodox institutions make up 80% of the American Jewish day school population, is certainly indicative. (Regarding the numbers of Orthodox and non-Orthodox day schools, see Marvin Schick, *A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States* [Avi Chai, 2005].)

along the very varied spectrum of Orthodox education. Presumably, an internal Orthodox study would be more sensitive to these distinctions.

And so, we are a long way from having a real, high-level, data-based foundation of information upon which to build, and we are even further from having that data base fruitfully affect how we talk, think, and act pedagogically. After all, not only does information have to be gathered, but it has to be made available. Not only does it have to be made available, but it has to be read and processed by administrators, educators, parents, and other stakeholders, even those who do not have access to academic journals or unpublished dissertations. Not only does it have to be read and processed, but we need to undergo a paradigm shift in how we think about things, such that we are increasingly wary of generalizations that are made without evidence. That paradigm shift would involve an awareness of the limits of anecdotal and intuitive educational planning, and would help make our conversations about Jewish education more aware of when we are speculating and when we are not, when we know the reality and when we do not, and how much personal experiences can be generalized to other people and contexts.

I realize that data will not replace, and should not replace, educational judgment and vision. Even with data, there will still be plenty of room for debate and disagreement regarding the means and ends of Torah education, since people would approach the data with different commitments and values. And we certainly do not want to reduce Torah education to some kind of competition to see who can score higher on a standardized test. But we will be much better off the more we know about what

we are doing, whom we are doing it to, and what influences it is having (or not having).

Question 6: *What areas of the post-high school year in Israel need revamping and why?*

This question assumes that something is wrong with the Israel programs, and that what we need first is to articulate those problems before moving on to solutions.⁴ And, it is easy to list some issues that have occupied the collective imagination of parents, educators, and community members: high costs; increasingly watered-down programs that look too much like summer camp and not enough like full-time study; Israel fatigue in which students who have been on too many summer trips and too many *Pesah* vacations in Israel are no longer moved by the reality of living in the Jewish State; isolation of students in “American” institutions that all but shield them from the “real Israel.” All of these are, to my mind, serious issues that are worth discussing.⁵

Clearly, however, the issue regarding Israel programs that has gotten the most attention in Orthodox public discourse (and probably one of the unstated subtexts of this symposium's question) is the fear of the phenomenon of so-called “flipping out.” Here, as is well known, we actually have some data, in the much-discussed and important book *Flipping Out?*, authored by Shalom Berger, Dan Jacobson, and Chaim Waxman. But notice two things. First, as far as I can tell, this is the *only* recent book occupied with data-based research on a major component of Orthodox education in a reader-friendly format. And, as important as the book is, look at what we know and what we still don't know about the year in Israel programs. The book takes a quantitative picture of the collective religious growth during the year, takes an in-depth qualitative

⁴ It should be noted that it may be more difficult than educational planners imagine to institute needed changes, both because the changes will have to be implemented by the administrators of the Israel programs, who may or may not agree with the proposed changes, and more importantly because, at least to my experience, Israel programs are a market driven industry, in which the customers (students and parents) have a great deal of say in the product that they receive. One would have to convince students and their parents that these changes are necessary.

⁵ These issues come up in various contributions to a symposium that I edited, *Teaching Toward Tomorrow: Setting an Agenda for Modern Orthodox Education* (Jerusalem: ATID, 2008).

look at students who say of themselves that they changed dramatically during the course of the year, and looks at the phenomenon of the year in Israel from a historical perspective in terms of American Jewry's changing relationship to Israel. This is all very important research, and the publishers and authors should be commended for producing it. But look at what question has *not* been answered, a question that ought to be central in any discussion of "flipping out." How many students flip out during their year in Israel? The answer, simply put, is that we do not know. This is not only because the term "flipping out" is too vague—if educators and anthropologists put their heads together, they could come up with a functional working definition. Rather, it is because nobody has studied it. Everybody, of course, knows a cousin's neighbor who switched from Columbia to Ner Yisroel, but how many kids have flipped out and what percentage of the total student body is that?

This is only the most obvious lacuna in data without which any discussion of flipping out is hard to conduct. But the questions go on and on. What personal, interpersonal, psychological, familial, or educational factors correspond with flipping out? What tools do Israel programs use to influence their students? How do those different strategies manifest themselves in classrooms and extra-curricular programming? How effective are those various strategies? What percentage of Israel-program educators push toward flipping out, and what percentage do not? How long do behaviors associated with flipping out last after the year is over? What do students think about their own flipping out? What do family members and friends think about it? What impact does flipping out have on the long-term relationships between students, their families,

their teachers, their community rabbis, their yeshiva *rebbe'im*, and others. How different is student change during the course of year in Israel programs compared with other middle class Americans during their first year out of high school?

More than that: all the public attention on "flipping out" may blind us to other ways of thinking about religious change during the year in Israel. I would like to suggest a hypothesis: it may be more helpful to look at continuity between students before and after Israel than it is to look at radical difference. My suspicion is that only a very small percentage of students "flip out," and that, overall, students who enter the year in Israel religiously strong emerge religiously strong, and those who enter religiously weak emerge religiously weak. That is, I suspect that there is great correlation between "input" and "output" during the year in Israel. Indeed, in a suggestive study conducted by ATID recently, students themselves used language of continuity, rather than break with their pasts, to describe their experiences and religious growth during the year.⁶

Under these circumstances, I suggest, we are handicapped in our ability to make intelligent modifications to our educational programs, because we just don't know the reality. We can suggest changes and alterations, but unless we have a richer understanding of the reality on the ground in schools and educational institutions, we are severely hampered in our ability to choose wisely among the options available to us, and to translate our educational vision into a reality.

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⁶ <http://www.atid.org/resources/beyond.asp>

David Flatto:

Below I offer my impressions about whether to address the subtleties of Modern Orthodox faith within day school education. In addition, I consider the specific, related question, of the role of critical studies in a Talmud class in a Modern Orthodox school. My overall contention is that the role of critical studies should be circumscribed, for precisely the reasons that Modern Orthodoxy's profound and complex ideology also has to be contained in early education.

I am well aware that others, whom I respect, disagree with the traditionalist dimension of my position. Further, I embrace this stance even though much of what engages me about Modern Orthodoxy is its openness to non-traditional components. Therefore, my viewpoint needs to be explained and justified. I believe an instructive paradigm emerges from an essential trope found in Maimonides' writings.

Two opposite ideas are manifest in the opening of Rambam's *Mishneh Torah, Hilkebot Yesodei ha-Torah* (HYT), each provocative in their own right. When joined together, they generate an almost paradoxical effect, and suggest a fundamental lesson about pedagogy. The first derives from Rambam's emphatic anti-anthropomorphic orientation. Given his absolute conviction that God has no physicality, Rambam must rationalize the proliferation of physical descriptions in the Torah. Here Rambam famously explains:

If so, what is the meaning of the expressions employed by the Torah: "Below His feet" [Exodus 24:10]... and the like? All these [expressions were used] to

relate to human thought processes which know only corporeal imagery, for the Torah speaks in the language of man. ...All these are merely expressions of prophetic vision and imagery and the truth of this concept cannot be grasped or comprehended by human thought. ... (HYT 1:9)

In other words, human beings cannot readily comprehend God's incorporeality, and therefore are taught about God through language that is more accessible to them. In his *Haqdamah le-Perush ha-Mishnayot*, Rambam emphasizes a similar notion, and particularly stresses the educational motivation behind this idea: "popular education can only be by way of riddles and parables..."¹

Beyond asserting that the Torah employs metaphoric language to help digest abstract concepts, Rambam here is making a far bolder claim. For Rambam famously objects to anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the most categorical of terms. In *Hilkebot Teshuvah* 3:7 he states that those who believe in God's physicality are heretics (*minim*), and in *The Guide for the Perplexed* I:36 he concludes that anthropomorphic notions of God are worse than idolatry. Taking all of this into account, the Rambam, then, is advancing the following—well known, but insufficiently appreciated—thesis: in order to educate properly and facilitate human comprehension, sometimes information must be misrepresented, even employing language that is literally false and can corrupt one's apprehension of the truth.²

Yet, in the same opening volume, Rambam simultaneously promotes an almost opposite

¹ See also *Perush ha-Mishnah Hagigah* 2:1; introduction to *Helek*; and *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Introduction and I:34.

² Rambam would of course interpret these physical descriptions as metaphors, but the uneducated person whom the Torah is accommodating—even assuming that he or she is aware of the metaphoric nature of the Torah's language—will only be able to conceptualize God in a manner that distorts God's essence. See also note 10.

attitude. The subject matter of the first four chapters of *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* are the recondite and elusive topics of metaphysics (*Ma'aseh Merkavah* in chapters 1-2) and physics (*Ma'aseh Bereshit* in chapters 3-4)—topics which are not only extremely challenging, but whose public study is forbidden. Regarding metaphysics (*Ma'aseh Merkavah*) Rambam writes:

... The subject matter of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* should never be expounded upon—even to a single individual—unless he is wise and capable of understanding; [then] he is given fundamental points.... (HYT 4:11).³

And even *Ma'aseh Bereshit* has circumscribed rules (Ibid). Explaining the rationale behind these limitations, Rambam writes:

Why are they not taught publicly? Because not every person has the vast knowledge necessary to grasp the interpretation and the explanation of these matters in a complete manner (Ibid).

Notwithstanding these restrictions and their compelling justification, Rambam openly discusses these topics in these chapters. Moreover, Rambam explicitly addresses his *Mishneh Torah* to a public audience (see the introduction to the *Mishneh Torah* where he writes, “[This will make it possible] for all the laws to be revealed to both those of lesser stature and those of greater stature”).

As Rambam himself acknowledges, the likelihood of mastering these subject matters is slim:

The matters discussed in these four chapters concerning these five commandments are what the Sages of the early generations termed the *Pardes*, as they related: "Four entered the *Pardes*..." Even though they were great men of Israel and great Sages, not all of them had the potential to know and comprehend all these matters in their totality (HYT 4:12).

In other words, not only does ‘not every person ha[ve] the vast knowledge necessary to grasp the interpretation and the explanation of these matters in a complete manner,’ even most of the “great men of Israel and great Sages” failed in this endeavor. Still, Rambam teaches these matters publicly, despite the counter-pressures. Essentially then Rambam here is willing to gamble with great risks in order to teach the truth—resisting a prohibition, hazarding miscomprehension, and ignoring the perils of exposing all challenging ideas.⁴

Taken together, Rambam’s gestures here seem paradoxical. In order to educate the masses, Rambam affirms that the Torah deliberately conceals truths. But in order to expose truth to the masses, he challenges the Torah’s necessary restrictions and reveals a synopsis of profound concepts. In order to teach the foundations of the Torah, Rambam claims, one must both simplify its complexities, as well as carefully expose its profundities as a way of inspiring further study and pursuit of rarefied knowledge.

It seems to me that this duality offers a striking model for the ideal balance one should aim for in Modern Orthodox education. As primary

³ See also HYT 2:11-12.

⁴ Rambam is careful to distinguish between different forms of teaching *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*—hinting and scratching the surface of these topics is different than offering a full exposition or mastering them entirely. Nevertheless, Rambam is certainly pushing the boundaries of the prohibition on teaching this material by openly summarizing its core concepts in the opening chapters of a work that is deliberately pitched to as wide an audience as possible. It is difficult to differentiate between what Rambam presents in these chapters, and what is permissible to teach to that rarest of initiates (*hakham u-mevin me-da'ato*) according to HYT 2:12 and 4:11. In a similar vein, the very endeavor of Rambam to expose the metaphoric nature of the Torah’s anthropomorphic language is aiming to expose the true metaphysics that underlie vocabulary deliberately aimed to conceal such truths.

education, it must present straightforward lessons in order to be intelligible to students. At the same time, the nuances, intricacies and synergies of Modern Orthodoxy should also be taught, albeit in a calibrated manner.

A unique challenge of Modern Orthodoxy is the subtlety of its theology. Expressing steadfast commitment to traditional faith, it also engages modernity, with all of its challenges and rewards. This encounter generates profound tensions, ambiguities and even conflicts. Therefore, Modern Orthodox education needs to cautiously approach the teaching of its tenets.

I am not saying that Modern Orthodox education should not express Modern Orthodox ideals—it surely must. In fact, I am uncomfortable with post-denominational institutions because they do not project a clear enough message about what they stand for. But that is exactly my point. Modern Orthodox schools need to articulate a clear, tangible, consistent message, and that is not easy given that what they believe often defies such simple classifications. Therefore, I believe that Modern Orthodox schools must reduce their creeds to basic, coherent ideas, and must emphasize the same sturdy foundation in their educational content.

Let me illustrate by way of two examples from Modern Orthodox ideology. Many of us believe that the traditional Zionistic narrative is too sanguine, and what we were reared upon glosses over many factual complexities that have recently been underscored by revisionist historians. Still, I reject the conclusion of many (especially Israeli) schools that have discarded their old history books. I think we need our elementary Zionist narrative or myth to strengthen our core commitment as Diaspora Jews to the Promised Land. This version reinforces our basic covenantal theology and ethical duty of Jewish responsibility (and has a sufficient degree of accuracy too). I support the use of Zionist films, events, celebrations, even if we all know

that the story they tell is incomplete. As Maimonides says, foundations require simplifications, even distortions.

Similarly, turning to the realm of theology, consider the fundamental belief in revelation at Sinai. Obviously the traditional understanding of revelation raises difficult philosophical, textual, and empirical questions. Indeed, even if one canvasses *Haʿazal* and traditional commentators one finds a plurality of approaches. Yet, I have no problems teaching Maimonides' Eighth Principle, and think that this supplies a stable cornerstone for Modern Orthodoxy's core education. It is largely beneficial that children are taught one basic account of revelation.

Yet in both cases, as students mature, teachers can, and should, introduce more nuances in discussing these subjects. Students should be made aware of revisionist contentions about Zionism, and non-Maimonidean attitudes about revelation. If these thicker accounts are carefully presented then they can even reinforce students' sense of the richness and candor of the Jewish tradition. Hopefully, they will then investigate these matters further as they grow older.

Moving to the content of *limmudei qodesh* classes, I would apply a similar approach to teaching Talmud (in a high school). When I teach a *sugya*, I embrace a fairly traditional methodology. My basic educational goals are to enhance a student's proficiency in reading and understanding the Talmud and the traditional commentators. On a more advanced level, I hope to impart to students the Talmudic way of thinking—engaging the dialectic of a Talmudic passage, and analyzing the concepts embedded within it. I hope to enhance both their *beqiyut* (breadth) in Talmudic knowledge, and their *iyun* skills in evaluating a *sugya*. On an experiential level, I wish to convey to them the pleasure and challenge of learning Talmud. Ideally, I hope they will dedicate themselves to future study, and minimally I want them to appreciate the

great spiritual and intellectual achievement of rabbinic literature, and to realize that serious discourse about Jewish ideas demands familiarity, even fluency, with this literature. On occasion, I introduce them to the critical apparatus of the synoptic study of rabbinic literature, alternate recensions recorded in various manuscripts, and the redaction of the Talmud (among other scholarly hypotheses and tools). I explain such tangents clearly and also hold them accountable for this secondary material on exams. My purpose here is to make them more literate, pique their curiosity and demonstrate that there is much more to study down the road. More, I wish to offer them a glimpse of the fact that some of the fundamental ways in which we study are too simplistic, and that there is evolution, adaptation, and transformation in Jewish tradition.

One recent emphasis in Modern Orthodox Talmud study that I oppose is underscoring the various layers of the Talmud (separating out the Tannaitic, Amoraic and anonymous editorial traditions recorded in the Talmud). While my own academic research often distinguishes among strata in rabbinic literature, I do not think that this should be a primary focus in *shiur*.

Although I will familiarize my students with the presence of layers in the Talmud—mainly because they are right there in the text before them—I often do so in the context of “defending” the Talmudic way of reasoning. For instance, I ask my students why the Babylonian Talmud (in the Amoraic or anonymous strata) tends to reinterpret Tannaitic sources in ways that seem so forced? I think it is crucial to acknowledge this fact

with more advanced students (especially if a clear example of reinterpretation comes up in the course of studying a sugya). Otherwise, Talmud may come to be seen by students as the epitome of fantastic interpretations and strained mental gymnastics.⁵

I emphasize the Talmud’s goal of preserving multiple earlier Tannaitic traditions, harmonizing them with one another, and balancing the literal words of a given Tannaitic source with a wider sense of plausible semantics given the larger context of other rabbinic traditions and values. This, in essence, is defending the Talmudic way of reasoning. But I will rarely say that later rabbinic generations revised or distorted earlier teachings. Even though I believe that this transpires at times, I do not see sufficient educational value in making such comments. Moreover, even a more neutral approach which emphasizes the various layers of the Talmud deconstructs the text’s integrity to the point where it can undermine the text’s holistic meaning, which is the essence of traditional study.

The core objective in Talmud *shiur* should be to offer students some picture of coherence, continuity, and systematic development. Rupture and revolution are potent ideas, but I think they are too subversive within the context of day school education. Further, in my experience mentoring high school seniors about where to go to yeshiva in Israel, I have been more impressed with Modern Orthodox *yeshivot* that espouse a more traditional approach rather than those that initiate the students into a novel course of study. Perhaps if Modern Orthodox day schools did a better

⁵ Similarly, if Rashi on the Torah adduces an eccentric *midrash*, then it is crucial to explain its textual cues and the fact that this is not intended as *peshat*. Moreover, it is necessary to highlight the moral and spiritual values promoted by the *midrash*.

job at achieving the goals described above, students would be ripe for a fuller range of critical studies in Israeli *yeshivot*.⁶

In essence, then, I view the role of *limmudei godesh* in Modern Orthodox schools as laying a classical foundation, affording students with fluency and hopefully instilling in them a love for learning. Along the way, one should introduce the complexities, problematics, evolution, transformation, and plurality of opinions within the Talmud.⁷

What distinguishes Modern Orthodox education from traditional study most for me is its broad emphasis on Modern Orthodox values, including the significance of secular ideas and modernity, its egalitarian orientation to education, the role of Zionism, and so on. These themes should pervade the school and the classroom, although they may not influence the content of a Talmud *shiur* very much on a

daily basis (except in so far as these values organically affect the teacher and students' interpretation and understanding). In addition, I hope that the rabbi or teacher is proudly Modern Orthodox, and that students observe his or her commitment to its ideals. This should serve as a model for students, and invite further discussions (in and out of classroom, during school and after graduation) about our robust traditional past, and our challenging and ambitious future. Ultimately, what may make the most lasting impression on students—and what will serve as their greatest inspiration—is that their Modern Orthodox mentor has such passion and reverence for traditional study, and a profound belief in its ongoing vitality and relevance.

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Zvi Grumet:

For many Yeshiva high school students, the post-high school year in Israel is a *sine qua non*. During the worst years of the *intifada*, when summer programs in Israel were reporting dramatically lower registration, and some closed altogether, anecdotal evidence suggests that the Israeli post-high school program experienced no more than a 10% drop in enrollment.

Despite the singular importance of this experience, most post-high school programs

(for men) could best be described as modern interpretations of either a traditional Lithuanian yeshiva or a traditional Hasidic one. It is either mastery of *gemara* or religious devotion (or both) which remain the benchmarks of success, and the course of study and the role models reflect those ideals. The bulk of the day is spent studying Talmud; the emphasis on *musar* discourses or *sibot* remains one's personal devotion and commitment to *mitsvot*.

⁶ While soon after high school students will likely encounter critical studies in one form or another in university, I still do not think that this fact should change the overall approach adopted in Modern Orthodox education. Its primary goal should be to provide students with a solid foundation in traditional study, even as it gradually exposes them to nuances and complexities. This delicate approach is obviously not foolproof, but seems to me to be the most optimal way to promote knowledge, respect and dedication to tradition. Still, students should not be entirely blind-sided when they reach university, and they should have mentors to discuss challenging questions as they arise. Of course this remains a formidable educational challenge for our community, and may require rethinking and revising in specific situations.

⁷ In terms of revising Talmud study in Modern Orthodox schools, the main adjustments I would consider are selecting *masekhtot* and *sugyot* with more “relevance” to modern students, and seeking to elicit more values from the text. I only allude to these briefly, since others have elaborated on these suggestions at greater length.

One can easily identify the "successful" products of these *yeshivot*. They dress in the "yeshivishe" two-tone, speak a language that has been described as "FrumSpeak," and relate to secular studies, at best, as a *be-di-`avad* endeavor justified in order to make a living. A significant number will expect to "remain in learning" for an unspecified number of years, expecting their parents and others to support them unconditionally, while others will reluctantly consider secular education.

On some level this represents a continuation of the American Jewish religious experience. Five and ten years down the line many of these same students will look and behave outwardly like Modern Orthodox Jews. In their world view, they will resemble many of their parents' generation—those who were taught that the ideal Jews are those who most resemble the idealized Eastern European Jews, and that their own lifestyles are a compromise between that ideal model and one that they are comfortable with.

From a different perspective, however, this needs to be seen as a profound failure in Modern Orthodox education. I use the following conceptual model to explain:

Tradition-based societies are grounded in preserving the past. It is that past which represents an ideal, and it is the re-creation, or approximation, of that past which is the ultimate goal. Change is to be regarded with suspicion, because it threatens tradition. On the other hand, progressive societies are, by definition, forward-looking. They embrace change and shun the past as outdated and superseded by societal and technological advances. The strength of tradition-based societies is in their roots; the danger to them is in their fear of change. Conversely, the strength of progressive societies is in their embrace of change; the danger to them is in their lack of rootedness. Put differently—traditional societies have a past with little sight of the future; progressive societies have a future but no past.

Modern Orthodoxy can be defined as an ideology torn between these two paradigms. Its Orthodoxy binds it to a *halakbic* system and adherence to principles formulated in the past; its modernity challenges it not only to adapt to change, but to embrace it, even as it adheres to its Orthodoxy.

The past decades are witness to profound changes in the definitions of what constitutes Jewish learning and Jewish religious experience. These include the revival in the study of *TaNaKH*, the methodology of the study of *TaNaKH*, sophistication in the understanding of Jewish history, grappling with the continually changing religious meaning of the State of Israel, greater understanding of the development of the talmudic discourse, the changing role of the Jew in the world, the place of women in Jewish life and learning, and more. The challenges faced by the current generation of Jews are different from those of the Emancipation and the first generation of emigration from Europe. Yet the educational messages of most post-high school *yeshivot* hark back to those of previous generations, and the models and learning approaches remain the same.

The implications of this are two-fold. First, it suggests that *yeshivot* are preparing students for the challenges of past generations rather than for the contemporary ones. Second, it suggests that we are missing an opportunity for what Eliezer Berkovits called the redemption of *halakbah* from its exile. In other words, the triumph of reclaiming roots is freezing the Torah somewhere in past centuries (mid-twentieth?, late nineteenth?), robbing it of its opportunity to become uniquely meaningful for the twenty-first century while remaining firmly rooted in its past.

And here I struggle with a quandary. If Modern Orthodoxy is to be identified by the dialectic between its roots and progress (a dialectic the Rav referred to frequently, albeit in different terms), that struggle is frustrating, even infuriating at times, and requires

considerable emotional and religious effort to maintain. The very nature of dialectic is that both values, in conflict with each other, need to be upheld. That tension cannot be resolved; it must be constantly and vigilantly managed.

As an educator I am aware that most people cannot live with that tension; they need resolution, clear guidelines, answers. That is why the traditional approach is so appealing—it does not require struggle, sophistication, complexity, or deep knowledge. The traditional model simply requires adherence and obedience.

In light of that I question whether a genuine Modern Orthodoxy is appropriate for the masses, or only for the intellectually or religiously gifted. Should we, can we, be satisfied with a "populist" Modern Orthodoxy for the masses, which is essentially a moderate (or mediocre?), accommodationist version of traditional Orthodoxy, with traditionalist role models and values and the guilt associated with "not being as good as 'really religious' Jews?" Or is it possible to create an authentic Orthodoxy, struggling with the dialectic of past and future, which can be taught, reinforced, internalized for a broad audience?

This is the educational challenge I believe that post-high school *yeshivot* professing to be Modern Orthodox need to begin to struggle with. I offer here some initial thoughts which I believe should be the guiding principles in Modern Orthodox education. Every activity, every learning opportunity, every message delivered explicitly or implicitly, must reinforce these in such ways that a graduate of the yeshiva who participates in its activities will understand that these are the yeshiva's guiding principles. These principles necessarily imply some primitive definitions of Modern Orthodoxy—those definitions are my own. A full explication of each of these is necessary, but cannot be explored here. You, the reader, should read between the lines and imagine the possibilities.

In the broadest possible statement, Torah is a system of ideals, obligations and commitments which provide guidelines and opportunities for individual Jews and for the Jewish people in their relationships with themselves, God, other people, and the world.

1. Man* is an active partner in the creation and maintenance of the world. That is his primary function. Man's work in the world is considered valuable by God, and should be valued by Man. God relies on Man, as God's partner, to do that work. For every human being, that work includes protecting the world and developing its potential, and the creation of society based on justice. For Jews, this *tiqqun olam* is extended (but not limited) to *letaqqen olam be-malkhut Shaddai*—introducing godliness and divine values into every facet of human behavior and thought.

Needless to say, this has profound implications for the inherent value of work, for the relationship between Jew and non-Jew, and the attitude of Jew toward non-Jew. It also has profound implications for the role of Man in advancing history, including the rise of the State of Israel and the cultivation of its institutions and society.

2. *Halakhab* is not the sum total of Judaism, although it is an important expression of it, guiding our ritual, religious and ethical practice. *Halakhab* is not a single opinion, and it must be recognized that multiple opinions are based on the processes of *halakhab*. Those processes include the textually based legal tradition as well as the mimetic traditions of family, community and popular practices. Both of these traditions are part of the *mesorah*; as such, they will often lead to conflicting practices and opinions. Even the textual, legal tradition often yields less than unambiguous guidance, as it includes "extra-halakhic" considerations such as financial loss, personal and communal dignity, *shalom bayit*, and more.

* "Man" is used to refer to all humanity—both men and women—ed.

3. Intellectual pursuit and intellectual honesty are an integral part of the striving for *Emet*—Truth. Properly pursued, they will ultimately lead to encounter with God, unless they are interfered with by external (personal, emotional, etc.) influences. Study of God's universe, whether from a scientific or a human perspective, and even the study of many of the humanities, are in one form or another study of God's indirect revelation to humanity (as opposed to the study of Torah, which is God's direct revelation to the Jewish people). While *yeshivot* should not be substitutes for universities, their message should be one of affirming the religious nature of the pursuit of knowledge.

Intellectual honesty necessarily includes encountering academic study of Torah side by side with a religious study of Torah. Additionally, dogma and intellectual pursuits are mutually incompatible, so that a program of study that demands a high level of intellectual honesty will necessarily be prepared to challenge many dogmas. This has significant implications, particularly for Orthodoxy in which the mass of believers have historically adhered to dogma, and perhaps even increasingly so in recent decades. Dogma is often the fearful response to uncomfortable ideas or perceived external threat—a response that is appropriate for a traditional Orthodoxy but not for a modern one.

This may be the most sensitive and emotionally laden area for Modern Orthodox Jews and their institutions to grapple with, and must be approached with great care and consideration for messages which may be appropriate for different ages, developmental levels, and knowledge levels. While this topic deserves a lengthy exploration on its own, I will state unambiguously that the level of engagement with the academic study of Torah should not exceed the level of religious engagement with Torah, and needs to be guided by the intellectual and religious sophistication of the students. That being said, this consideration

must not become a veil behind which to run and shy away from engagement with the challenging questions.

4. Religious passion is necessary for Jewish life to thrive. That passion is difficult to foster in an environment in which intellectual engagement is taken seriously and in which the moderating effects of dialectic struggle is ever-present. Nonetheless, passion for Judaism, for Jewish learning and for the Jewish people must be the fields in which Jewish learning takes place. *Ahavat ha-Shem, yir'at ha-Shem, ahavat Yisra'el*, commitment to *halakhab* and Jewish values, and more, need to become part of the daily formal and informal discourse.

5. The study of Torah needs to be a lifetime pursuit, but that does not mean that all need to become Torah scholars or dedicate their lives to its full-time study. As we mature, so too our Jewish learning must mature, even as it becomes a part-time occupation. Further, changes in society, in its norms and values, will necessitate periodic revisiting and re-evaluation of our learning and its application. One contemporary example of this is the role of women in religious life. The norms and expectations of past centuries must be re-examined in light of the changed status of women in society in general, the renewed variety of religious expression available to women, and the opening up of Jewish learning on all its levels to women.

This, too, has practical implications in, for example, the role models presented to students in *yeshivot*. Prof. Nehama Leibowitz z"l was a trailblazer in teaching Torah in select *yeshivot*, but despite the availability of many learned women, that trail remains mostly untrod by followers. Similarly, role models in *yeshivot* tend to be, and understandably so, those who have devoted their lives to full-time study and teaching of Torah. *Yeshivot* need to ensure that their students are exposed to role models of a learned laity proudly working and proudly committed to a lifelong pursuit of Torah study and engagement with contemporary challenges.

The principles I briefly sketched out above present a formidable challenge for any educational institution, even for any long-term educational system. The institutions on their own will be hard-pressed to achieve those goals without communities which foster and reinforce them. That, too, is part of the failure of Modern Orthodox education, and part of its challenge—to create communities that represent these ideals, so that the yeshiva and the community form a seamless unit in which students see the values they are taught finding concrete expression in daily life and discourse.

They present an additional challenge, one which I mentioned earlier. I have no doubt whatsoever that these goals are achievable for the select few who are driven by intellectual curiosity and religious seeking. I can think of many of my own students in whom I believe I have been successful in inculcating many of the above values. The real question is whether

these values can be translated and instilled in those who are not part of the intellectual elite—in the everyman, the *amkehab*.

This is the educational challenge I believe the post-high school *yeshivot* in Israel should be struggling with. With rare exception, I do not believe that they are. I am not convinced that there is a simple answer. But I do believe that when the *yeshivot* begin to struggle with the question, the results will be apparent in their students. And it is perhaps those very students who will create the core of a meaningful Modern Orthodoxy for the masses.

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Naftali Harcsztark:

Introduction

As Modern Orthodox Jews, we strongly affirm engagement with modern society and culture. This affirmation is reflected in our schools through a range of educational decisions that both symbolically and substantively reflect this commitment. Some of the most popular symbols of Modern Orthodoxy are (1) unwavering support of the State of Israel, (2) women engaging in Torah study and (3) the pursuit of secular knowledge. While these issues clearly reflect a Modern Orthodox orientation, focusing on *issues* in which we believe can get in the way of much-needed focus on behavior. Critical discussion of Modern Orthodox behavior often focuses on halakhic observance, challenging the integrity or consistency of Modern Orthodox halakhic practice. That analysis is necessary and has its

place. I would like to focus on a different aspect of socio-cultural practice in the Modern Orthodox community that is in serious need of change in order for Modern Orthodoxy to flourish. I refer to our understanding of the obligation to study Torah and the importance of creating a culture that prioritizes and invests time to study Torah. I will argue that in order for Modern Orthodoxy to succeed, we must breathe distinctly Modern Orthodox life into the idea of *batmadab* (studying Torah regularly), or being a *matmid* (one who studies Torah regularly). While the notion of Torah study and *batmadab* is crucial for maintaining the perpetual growth of Torah in the Jewish community in general, it becomes vital on a number of levels for meeting the challenges of Modern Orthodox education in particular.

The Challenges of Modern Orthodoxy

Consideration of the stated ideals of Modern Orthodoxy and their implementation in practice brings to light significant dissonance between the supposed aspirations of the Modern Orthodox community and their concrete manifestations. This dissonance has symbolic, behavioral, and psychological impacts. On the symbolic level, our community's mantra is some formulation of the *Torah u-Madda* idea. As Alan Brill has correctly pointed out, there are but a few people whose Modern Orthodox lives are shaped by the study of Maimonides and Aristotle.¹

For most, *Torah u-Madda* has translated into being halakhically observant while engaging modern American culture. For example, for many people, this means Torah and *mitsvot* on the one hand while being a movie-goer or a sports fan on the other. There is a stark disconnect between the nobility of *Torah u-Madda* and the more common blending of observance with contemporary American living.

Behaviorally, the positive embrace of modernity by our parents' and our generations has helped shape a Modern Orthodox youth culture that accepts the media culture of sports and movies as part of "being a normal kid." This creates two problems. First, in the current context, our children lack guidelines for critical reflection and decision making regarding their exposure to and appropriation of popular culture. But that is not my focus here. Second—and this is the point I would like to emphasize—it is unreasonable to expect adolescents to independently balance the amount of time that they invest in popular culture without strong direction and guidance from parents and educators. At present, as a community, we do not articulate strong standards and commitments in this regard in a way that can engage a wide enough range of

students.

Psychologically, the Jewish self image of many Modern Orthodox students is weak. They are not self confident in their Jewishness. This is not to say that Modern Orthodox students are not self confident. They are. But in relation to their Jewish self image, many students feel they are less religious than more right-leaning Jews and that much of what the community does is rooted in convenience rather than idealism. This psychological issue is intertwined with the symbolic and behavioral weaknesses such that what we need is an overhaul that will re-structure all of these areas in an interconnected way.

Torah and the Human Condition

It has become commonplace to claim that there are more people studying Torah and more Torah being studied today than at any point in the history of the Jewish people. This is likely true. But to deal productively with our issue, it is important to focus on what it means to study Torah today, what is being accomplished, and what need is being filled for a person engaged in Torah study. It brings to mind a peer who was studying Talmud with his son in preparation for a *siyyum* in honor of the son's bar mitzvah. When I asked him how the learning was going, he replied, "Great! The only problem is that my son thinks that *gemara* should make sense the way that other things make sense." He was referring to rabbinic biblical hermeneutics as well as amoraic interpretation of *mishnayot*.

This story reflects a largely unarticulated issue around the obligation of Torah study. Although we believe that Talmud has a rigorous conceptual logic, our understanding of the conceptual nature of Torah is internal to the Torah. By this I mean that we compartmentalize Torah as having an inner logic of its own that does not necessarily deal with the broader issues of the human

¹ Alan Brill, "Judaism in Culture: Beyond the Bifurcation of *Torah U'Madda*", *Edah Journal* 4 (2004), pp. 8-13.

condition—certainly not the challenges of the Jew confronting modernity. As Rav Shagar has demonstrated so powerfully in a number of essays, Torah study is often compartmentalized from daily life precisely in order to maintain its “otherness.”²

This ensures that the Torah that we study is not tainted by the uncertainties of daily life; that we are in contact with the divine through Torah; that we create Torah that is always ideal and only sometimes real; that if the ideas that we generate are not applicable today, then perhaps in a more perfect world, in Messianic times, they will be applicable. This compartmentalization infuses Torah study with sanctity precisely through its separation from daily life. And by “separation from daily life,” I do not mean to suggest that this approach posits that there is no application of Torah to daily life. Of course there is. But it sets an expectation whereby Torah is not assumed to respond to the human condition in all its dimensions. This approach might work for a segment of the Orthodox population who incline towards this orientation or disposition. But for those who seek a greater integration—for Modern Orthodox Jews who believe in a grand conversation between Torah and the world—this orientation makes the study of Torah an obligation to be fulfilled through set allocations of time, but not a vehicle for the passionate exploration of life’s questions.

Were we to orient Torah study to these larger questions, many political, economic or social issues would become Jewish—or Torah—questions in a profound way. Immigration policy in the United States, the values of capitalism and international trade would be more readily connected to portions of TaNaKH and *sugyot* in the *gemara* that inform how Jews should think about these issues. Of particular importance for high school life, this approach would afford an opportunity to meaningfully engage issues of contemporary

sexuality both before and after marriage, an ethics of pleasure and desire and the challenge of homosexuality. Many people would develop

a commitment to Torah based on a belief that Torah is the language that Jews speak and the place from which we become empowered to think Jewish thoughts regarding the central issues of the day.

Torah Study Today

This aspiration suggests a particular understanding of the purpose of Torah study that is different in a nuanced—but significant—way from some of the other understandings of the *mitsvah* of Torah study. Although there is agreement that studying Torah is a positive commandment, Jewish thinkers have posited numerous explanations as to the purpose of Torah study. Following are four examples of the purpose of Torah study in traditional thought.

(1) *Hasidim* of the eighteenth century championed Torah study as a spiritual experience. Contact with the words of Torah—whether the Bible or the Talmud—was contact with the divine. More significant than the halakhic meaning of “*beitsah she-noledah be-yom tov*” was the connection to the divine that these words afforded (see, for example, R. Meshulam Feivush Heller, *Yosher divrei emet*, pars. 6-8).

(2) Alternatively, R. *Hayyim* of Volozhin believed that Torah must be studied for its own sake—to understand the meaning of the words. At the same time, he maintained that it had significant impact on the cosmos and that Torah study kept the world functioning (*Nefesh ha-hayyim, sha`ar* 4, chaps. 3, 11).

(3) Both of these approaches differ significantly from that of Rambam, who saw the Torah as the basis—alongside Aristotle and

² *Kelim shevurim* (Efrata: Yeshivat Siach, 2004), pp. 29-44; *Nehalekh br-ragesh* (Efrata: Machon Kitvei Harav Shagar, 2008), pp. 59-74; *Be-torato yehgeb* (Efrata: Machon Ktvei Harav Shagar, 2009), pp. 13-45.

related texts—for the proper understanding of the natural and divine sciences—an epistemological goal (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkebot Yesodei ha-Torah* 4:13; *Hilkebot Talmud Torah* 1:11; Guide, Introduction).

(4) The *Hazon Ish* understood that the purpose of Torah study is to clarify the will of God in the interest of the proper observance of *halakhab* in the world (*Emunah u-bittabon*, chap. 3).

Torah study for the contemporary Modern Orthodox Jew must, first, deal with the larger questions of the human condition. With proper training and focus, teachers will find that *sugyot* in the *gemara* throughout the major tractates of *Nashim*, *Neziqin* and the rest of the Talmud are actually masterfully organized texts portraying how significant questions of values, practice and halakhic change were discussed throughout the generations. For example, the opening *sugya* of *Qiddushin*—a seemingly strange passage with unusual interpretive strategies—becomes a fascinating text struggling with the status of women in Jewish betrothal. The *sugya* is a savoraic commentary on the first four words of the *mishnah* focusing on issues of grammar – why the text is written from the perspective of the woman rather than the man or whether the word ‘*derekeh*’ is masculine or feminine. In fact, an analysis of the *sugya* reveals that the thrust of the argument is to demonstrate the significance of *qiddushin* as a ceremony that demands the agreement of the bride, giving it a different emphasis than the language of the *mishnah*, which refers to *qinyan* (acquisition), would suggest.

Another example: the discussion in *Ketubot* (5b-6a) regarding initial intercourse on Shabbat following a couple’s marriage becomes an exploration of Hazal’s understanding of the goals of marital intimacy. R. Yehuda Brandes explains the relationship between the laws of Shabbat and the purpose of first-time sexual intercourse. If the “purpose” is to verify that the bride is indeed a virgin, then the

prohibition of creating a wound is intended and the act is a first-degree violation of Shabbat. But if initial intercourse is a preparation for subsequent intimacy that will lead to procreation, then the intent of the act as it relates to the laws of Shabbat changes. Furthermore, if intimacy and pleasure are themselves the purpose of the act, then the relationship to the laws of Shabbat might change again. This analysis adds a dimension to the discussion, broadening the question from solely relating to the laws of Shabbat to a question that also informs the issue of Jewish sexual ethics.³ This broadening of focus allows the Talmud to serve as a model for confronting significant questions, showing how *tanna'im* and *amora'im* creatively interpreted the texts to which they were loyal. This can be achieved in Talmud study and certainly in other disciplines of Torah study as well.

Second, learning must become interdisciplinary. Extracting the larger questions from a discussion entails broadening the scope of one’s exploration so as to better grasp the social, religious or economic issues that are being wrestled with in the text. For Maimonides, studying philosophy was not an enhancement or a supplement to Torah study. It was essential to developing an accurate understanding of what Torah is trying to teach. The essential questions have changed from Maimonides’ time to today. For him, the questions were theological and epistemological. For us, the questions are more social and psychological. Although the questions are different, the same should be true for our community in developing Torah that will confront the large questions of our society.

Third, Torah study must be shaped as the vehicle for self-understanding and the basis for self-actualization. Because our society is focused on the self—self-awareness, self-fulfillment, self-actualization and self-esteem—learning for the Modern Orthodox community should embrace that reality and attempt to fill that need. That, in turn, should extend into

³ *Madda toratekha* (Jerusalem: *Ha-machon Ha-yisraeli Le-pirsumim Talmudiyim*, 2007), p. 32.

seeing Torah as a basis for social and community action. Because our contemporary society and much of contemporary education begin with a focus on the self and proceed outward to deal with societal issues, we should develop an orientation to Torah study that would respond to this dual need as well.

The work of Rav Shagar and Rav Brandes serve as examples of this type of learning emanating from the world of the *beit midrash*. In the academy, some of the work of Yitshak Gilat, Moshe Halbertal, and Daniel Boyarin serve as examples of such an approach. While this type of learning has existed in the academy for a while and is now infiltrating certain *batei midrash*, it has not yet been developed as an educational approach for developing high school graduates with a strong Modern Orthodox identity deeply rooted in Torah and the broader culture within which they live, nor is it a strong component in shaping or inspiring the learning of Modern Orthodox laypeople.

Modern Orthodox Education

For Modern Orthodoxy to emerge in all its power as a model of committed, self-confident engagement with modernity, Jewish educators must (1) develop curricula that elaborate and clarify an interdisciplinary, this-worldly engagement with Torah texts and (2) develop a cultural norm of *hatmadah* that will reflect the strong intellectual and religious commitments of the Modern Orthodox community that manifest themselves in a strong time commitment to Torah study. Both of these ideas demand a cultural paradigm shift that would need to take on “movement-like” proportions.

To achieve the first goal, the Modern Orthodox community must undertake a project similarly modeled on the achievements of Artsroll to develop both popular and school-based educational materials—*sefarim*, actually—that will reflect this orientation. Elementary and high schools, as opposed to higher institutions of learning, serve as the

locus of learning that shapes the members of future communities. In order for this learning to move into the communal sphere of Modern Orthodoxy, it should significantly shape the learning environment of schools. This entails an investment of resources that will support educators in such an effort.

The second goal brings to mind a young professor of literature who is a passionate Modern Orthodox person. Literature and Torah combine in an exploration of questions of great human significance. To me, he is a *matmid* of a new sort. He learns constantly. Much of the time, it is literature. Some of the time, it is Torah. He is not a *yeshivah bokhur*. He is a passionately engaged Modern Orthodox person who spends the majority of his day reading, writing and teaching about the great issues of life. He is an inspiring person. Developing a language that describes the importance of Modern Orthodox *hatmadah*, pushing the concept strongly in our schools and helping our students—and even our faculty—see the range of role models of this type of learning can create a movement-like momentum around the growth of Modern Orthodox learning. To be sure, the goal here is not to take people out of the *beit midrash* in order to read literature. This is a path to broaden the scope of learning so as to involve the entire Modern Orthodox community of all professions and dispositions to view Torah learning as a mode of growth that is personal and meaningful and will present Modern Orthodoxy as exemplary in living a deeply meaningful life of service to God through the engagement of modern life.

It is my hope that with vision, passion, dedication and commitment, we can proudly assert ourselves as a community with deep knowledge of and commitment to Torah, to the culture within which we live and to making the world a better place.

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Rivka Kahan*:

Question 10: *What should be done in Modern Orthodox education to instill confidence in its graduates that they are not religiously inferior in knowledge or observance to haredi graduates?*

There are two components to the question of how to instill confidence in Modern Orthodox students who they are not religiously inferior in knowledge or observance to their haredi counterparts. First is the issue of how to make sure that their religious experience in day school is, in fact, richly fulfilling and authentic. We can only address their feelings about their experience if we are certain that their experience, by all rights, deserves to be a source of pride. Even in that case, however, there remains the question of how to educate our students to view Modern Orthodoxy as a compelling religious ideology and lifestyle, rather than as a dilution of a more rigorous religiosity. I will deal briefly with the first question, since it requires a highly individualized response within the context of each school, and at greater length with the second question, which I believe lends itself to broader generalization.

In the context of a Modern Orthodox day school, we seek to create a religious culture that communicates and fosters passion and depth of halakhic commitment while instilling a multi-faceted appreciation of the world around us. We want to help our students develop a sincere sense of being one commanded by God as the basis for an authentic, personal encounter with the Torah in a context that encourages individuality, is deeply respectful of differences, and fosters thoughtfulness and reflection. I find it to be a continuous challenge as an educator to develop passion for Judaism without any trace of

intolerance, commitment without single-mindedness.

The challenges that we face in creating a vibrant, growth-oriented, Modern Orthodox religious school culture are unique and require creativity and constant reflection. It is, of course, of paramount importance to hire *limmudei qodesh* teachers who are Modern Orthodox role models of serious Torah learning and religious devotion. In addition, it is crucial to create an ongoing dialogue about Torah that permeates school life. One way to create this type of dialogue is by developing Torah guidance programs in which students are paired, on a voluntary basis, with teachers with whom they can discuss religious issues of their choice. There are other, more innovative ways to develop forums for religious discussion as well. For example, Ma'ayanot launched a Judaic Studies blog this past year, which serves as a forum for questions and discussions between students and teachers. These are just two examples of the ways that religious dialogue can be fostered in a school community. The most important element in developing a vibrant, reflective religious culture in a school is making sure that it is collaborative, dynamic, and fundamentally student-centered, which means that it will take different forms from school to school, and even from year to year within a given school. Creating such a culture requires dedication, creativity, and ongoing re-evaluation on the part of the faculty, and is the first step in fostering confidence and knowledge in our graduates.

Even within the context of a school that has a rich religious culture, graduates are likely to feel inferior to their haredi counterparts if they

* I would like to thank my colleagues at Ma'ayanot with whom I discussed these ideas, including Tamar Appel, Tova Sinensky, Shifra Schapiro, Dena Knoll, Donny Besser, Devorah Wolf, and Shira Schiowitz.

lack understanding and appreciation of the tenets of Modern Orthodoxy, or if they develop a sense that religious devotion is structured as a continuum, with unaffiliated Jews falling at one end of the continuum and *haredi* Jews falling at the other. Both of these pitfalls can be overcome by developing an organized, cross-curricular approach to teaching Modern Orthodoxy as a comprehensive, multi-faceted system of Jewish thought and values that informs lifestyle. This requires introducing students to historical, ideological, and philosophical perspectives on Modern Orthodoxy, as well as implementing more experiential modes of values education.

Over the years, I have heard from both colleagues and students that their first substantive exposure to Modern Orthodoxy as a school of thought transformed the way they felt about being Modern Orthodox. Often, this happened in the context of learning some of the writings of the Rav, either in high school or, more often, in a post-high school Israel program. Against this backdrop, it is clearly beneficial for students to explore the ideology of Modern Orthodoxy in an organized way in high school. While articles representing Modern Orthodox thought can and should be integrated into the Talmud and TaNaKH curricula.¹ I think it is also important to teach Jewish Philosophy as its own subject in either tenth or eleventh grade in order to help students explore many fundamental areas of Jewish thought and belief in the context of a well-defined curriculum. The Jewish Philosophy curriculum should include an introduction to the fundamental beliefs that define Modern Orthodoxy, through the writings of leading Modern Orthodox *Gedolei Torah*, including the Rav and Rav Lichtenstein.

Additionally, it is crucial for students to develop a sense of the historical development

of Modern Orthodoxy. This should take place within the context of the Jewish History curriculum. Specifically, it is key for students to understand that Modern Orthodoxy and contemporary variations of *haredi* Judaism both originated as responses to the Reform movement, with Modern Orthodoxy representing the response of R. Hirsch and *haredi* Judaism representing the response of the Hatam Sofer. I find that my students typically view Modern Orthodoxy as a modern-day dilution of a more rigorous and historically authentic approach to Torah observance. Education about the historical context of Modern Orthodoxy helps them understand Modern Orthodoxy and *haredi* Judaism as two alternative responses to the challenges of modernity. This can pave the way for substantive discussion about the encounter between Judaism and general culture that all of our students experience in multiple ways in their own lives.

In addition to the organized study of Modern Orthodoxy as an ideology and as a movement, Modern Orthodox principles can be communicated explicitly and implicitly across all areas of the curriculum. In TaNaKH and Talmud classes, teachers should be transparent about the methods and values that inform their approach to teaching their subjects, such as the value of honest, open dialogue and creative engagement with the text. For example, we read and teach Torah through a variety of different lenses as Modern Orthodox educators. We delve into the interpretations of the *rishonim*, while also adopting a literary, structural approach to analyzing TaNaKH, and being willing to entertain new questions, ideas, and methodologies. The variety of approaches that we integrate into our classes is profoundly enriching, and it is educationally beneficial for our students both to be exposed to this mode of study and also to be aware that it represents a

¹ Rav Soloveitchik's writings on *Humash* can be taught with great success in the context of a high school TaNaKH class. For example, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, *Abraham's Journey*, and *The Common-Sense Rebellion Against Torah Authority* have immediate relevance to some of the parts of *Humash* that are often taught in high school. My students have also loved reading Rav Lichtenstein's *The Source of Faith is Faith Itself* in the context of learning about Amalek and other difficult topics in *Humash*. Additionally, the Rav's *Talmud Torah and Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim* can be taught within the context of the Talmud curriculum and *Kol Dodi Do'efeq* is applicable to many different areas of study within TaNaKH and Jewish History.

unique approach that leads to a particular depth of understanding.

Aside from developing students' awareness of the ways that Modern Orthodox values shape our approach to Torah study in general, it is also important for them to develop a sense of the way that their Jewish education prepares them for being a member of general society. For example, in my tenth-grade Isaiah class, my students complete a short research project on Christological interpretations of biblical texts. I make it explicit that the goal of the assignment is to equip them to encounter ideas of all sorts in general society that may challenge their Jewish beliefs. The assignment is meant to provide them with a model for responding to that type of challenge by turning to Jewish texts and thinking deeply about the issues involved in order to strengthen their understanding and religious commitment.

At Ma'ayanot, we are in a unique position as an all-girls school in which *gemara* is a major part of the curriculum, and we are explicit in speaking with our students about why we as a school are strongly committed to making *gemara* such a serious part of their education. Part of our tenth-grade curriculum is a unit on Women and Torah Study, which includes in-depth source-based study and invariably leads to important halakhic and philosophic discussions about religious identity. A few years ago, Ma'ayanot's approach to *gemara* education was criticized on a website geared to Orthodox teenagers, and our Talmud Chair, Mrs. Dena Knoll, wrote an extensive response to the moderator of the website. The initial post, as well as Mrs. Knoll's response, have become part of our tenth-grade curriculum, and form a dramatically effective teaching tool. Addressing philosophic issues explicitly, passionately, and directly is of paramount importance in communicating knowledge and pride in Modern Orthodoxy.

Halakhab classes, in educating students about the halakhic system, also play an important role in helping our students understand what practices constitute the core of halakhic Judaism and what practices are expressions of *minhag*,

humsra, and extra-halakhic religious identity. This provides another valuable context for helping students think about religious devotion in a more nuanced way than simply as a continuum of "more *frum*" and "less *frum*."

As in all areas of education, transparency is paramount in transmitting Modern Orthodox values. Students should be made aware of the ways that their education in all spheres is shaped and enriched by the principles of Modern Orthodoxy. Science classes should explicitly address the relevance of science to our students as Jews, not only by addressing points of conflicts between faith and science but also through discussions of the relevance of secular learning to an Orthodox Jewish life. Cross-curricular assignments are invaluable in communicating the relevance of Modern Orthodox values in all areas of academic life. For example, Mrs. Esther Herzfeld, chair of the English department at Ma'ayanot, assigns her tenth graders a paper in which they bring together ideas from *The Scarlet Letter* and the Rav's *Al ha-Teshuvah*. Communication and collaboration among teachers in different departments are invaluable in ensuring that certain aspects of Modern Orthodoxy pervade the curriculum, so that Modern Orthodoxy is not just a topic covered in school, but a vibrant ideology and lifestyle.

It is also crucial for Modern Orthodoxy to be taught experientially. Students need to be exposed to Modern Orthodox *gedolei torah* and *talmidei hakhamim*, both in writing and in person. For example, our Talmud department often brings in a representative from the Beit Din of America to address our students and give them a window into an area of religious leadership that is unfamiliar to them. In a somewhat different vein, I recently heard that Rabbi Kenneth Schiowitz brought some of his students at Ramaz to observe a physicians' meeting about medical ethics at Mount Sinai Medical Center. It gave his students a new understanding of the ways that religious and ethical values are pivotal in all areas of life, and a new type of appreciation for the intersection of Torah and general culture.

Creating a vibrant religious school culture is the first step in ensuring that our graduates feel confident and committed in their practice of Modern Orthodoxy. That challenge must be addressed with creativity and energy in the context of each individual school. Beyond that, I think that the keys to teaching Modern Orthodoxy are the keys to good education in all realms: commitment, transparency and organization. In addition to being taught within the Jewish Philosophy and Jewish History curricula, Modern Orthodox beliefs and values should pervade all areas of school life, and be

explicitly modeled and taught in all academic areas in both Jewish and General Studies. By creating a well thought-out, cross-curricular approach and by being explicit in communicating our values and goals in both academic and experiential contexts, we equip our graduates to live fully committed, proud lives as Modern Orthodox Jews.

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Miriam Reisler:

The questions posed in this symposium are themselves a clear indication that Modern Orthodoxy is facing deeper and more complex issues than those I faced as a teenager. Not only are the seductions of modern society more readily available, but adolescents are exposed earlier to more complex issues which pose challenges to their faith. Developing a respect for and commitment to a way of life that demands unflinching honesty and a perpetual balancing act in thought and behavior is not something that will happen of its own, and our educational institutions need to be proactive in providing students with the knowledge, skills and role models that will increase their pride and confidence in this way of life. In an age of new challenges, new ideas and approaches should be explored.

In that light, I would like to present an outline of one element, the Israeli *mehanekebet* (general educator assigned to each student) system, that can help address some of these challenges and help develop healthy, self-confident and committed Modern Orthodox youth emerging from our high schools. My firsthand experience in education has always been in girls' schools and therefore this article will focus on the role of the *mehanekebet* in a girls' junior high or high school. The description I will be giving for the role of the *mehanekebet* may

parallel the role of the *roshei yeshiva* in boys' schools in the Diaspora, though I suspect that the broad definition of the *mehanekebet* in Israel includes elements that would be new to most Diaspora *roshei yeshiva*.

As a teacher in the yeshiva day school system in New York, I was twice asked to be the *mehanekebet* for a girls' junior high or high school class. Looking back, I realize that both requests were attempts to adopt an important and vital element from the Israeli public school system, but in both cases the role of *mehanekebet* was poorly defined; not surprisingly, the work I did in that capacity did not come close to resembling the Israeli model upon which the idea was based. When I came to Israel, I discovered that the word *mehanekebet* doesn't simply mean "teacher," or someone "working in *hinyuch*." I discovered that the *mehanekebet* in the Israeli school system are the foundation upon which the education of the student is built. While other teachers work on subject matter as their text and (in the best case) personality development and values education as their subtext, *mehanekebet* see the development and maturation of the student as the primary challenge. The job description for a *mehanekebet* in Israel is as demanding as it is broad, but year after year, this is an institution that works—and changes students' lives.

***Meḥaneḳbet*: A Job Description**

A first look at the role of a *meḥaneḳbet* might be through her daily and weekly schedule. Especially in a school in which *tefillah* is the first activity of the day, the *meḥaneḳbet* will often begin the day with her class. In addition to teaching her class a subject in her field of expertise, the *meḥaneḳbet* has one or two periods a week dedicated to “*ḥinukh*” during which she teaches, usually through informal methods, a curriculum built to address issues of identity, community and the pressures of student and adolescent life. For example, in the seventh grade the *meḥaneḳbet* might address issues of group dynamics, the importance of volunteerism, and how to deal with the pressures of testing and increasing academic demands. In older grades the “*ḥinukh*” classes might deal with understanding secular and *ḥaredi* Jews, the place of a woman in the home, the workplace and the community, or how to identify and deal with an abusive relationship. In addition, the *meḥaneḳbet* of the school meet weekly with the principal or assistant principal in order to discuss school-wide projects, trends and challenges. These scheduled requirements alone create a school environment in which the *meḥaneḳbet* play a key role, bringing the vision of the administration to the daily work of developing a meaningful rapport about personal and religious growth with the students.

The connection that the *meḥaneḳbet* develops with her students is strengthened through additional programming over the course of the year. Some of the extra activities, such as the annual class excursion and the extravagant Purim *shpiel*, are pure fun, and they bring the *meḥaneḳbet* and her students together through shared experiences. Other activities are content based, and in those cases the *meḥaneḳbet* has additional opportunities to teach

her students about matters of importance. For example, the *meḥaneḳbet* are heavily involved in the preparation of their students for the March of the Living and often accompany them on the trip to Poland. Another example is the work and guidance a *meḥaneḳbet* provides to her class in preparation for one of the various yearly ceremonies (*teqasim*) that are scripted by the students, and then staged before the student body. Because ceremonies address core values in Israeli society¹, they provide yet another opportunity for a *meḥaneḳbet* to discuss with her students issues of ideological and theological significance. These moments are not only educational in the ideological sense. A good *meḥaneḳbet* will also use these opportunities to bring out the strengths of different students, and to teach them about their responsibilities towards one another, their ability to give and their need to take.

However, the job of the *meḥaneḳbet* includes more than that which is written in her weekly or yearly schedule. The *meḥaneḳbet* also has responsibility towards every individual student in her class. She functions as an academic advisor, guidance counselor, mediator, and cheerleader rolled into one. In addition to the time she spends with her class as a group, the *meḥaneḳbet* is expected to invest additional time in following each student. Academically, this includes keeping track of trends in a student's attendance and grades in all of the various subject areas, identifying students in need of a psycho-educational assessment, initiating contact and following up with parents when the need arises, and, in the older grades, encouraging, trouble-shooting and helping each student on her way to acquiring a certificate of matriculation (*te'udat bagrut*). Some of the work involved in following students academically can be done remotely, particularly now that so much of the record keeping is computerized and centralized. However, a good portion of the work requires time spent with the student, other

¹ On *Yom Ha-Qaddish Ha-Kelali* (*Asarah Be-Tevet*), *Yom Ha-Shoah* and *Yom Ha-Zikkaron*, Israeli schools have schoolwide ceremonies (*teqasim*). The honor and responsibility for these three important *teqasim* are usually given to the three oldest grades. The students combine dramatic readings, moving songs, short skits, video clips and other media in order to teach the lesson of the day, connecting distant and recent events in Jewish history to their identity and values today.

teachers, parents and administrators; and the *mehanekebet* is the one who coordinates the transfer of information and mediates between the various players for the good of the student.

Of course, working with students is not only about working with the academic side of their lives, and the *mehanekebet* recognizes this as well. Teenagers face multiple issues—from the normal family tensions to tragic cases of illness and divorce, from social pressures within the class to manipulative boyfriends, from teenage experimentation to addictions or other self-destructive behaviors. Sometimes, academic problems are but a symptom of other issues in a student's life, and the job of the *mehanekebet* is to integrate the academic help and the general support she provides to the student. If she succeeds in gaining her students' confidence, the *mehanekebet* is often a first address for a student suffering from a crisis large or small (and sometimes for her concerned classmates or parents as well). This being said, the educational system recognizes that the *mehanekebet* is not a social worker or therapist; rather she is expected to refer students to professional help when necessary.

It is possible for the various roles of the *mehanekebet* to be distributed among a number of people, but the usefulness of the *mehanekebet* is derived from the fact that she sees so many of the pieces of the picture for each of her students. The benefits of this integrated, multi-faceted view in the hands of one person dedicated to the task can be seen in many ways, large and small. Most *mehanekebet* are more than academic advisors; they generally feel close enough to their students to call the weakest or least motivated among them the day before an exam to make sure that they are studying steadily, and not getting distracted by life. On the day that the *mehanekebet* distribute report cards to their students, the unique relationship between the *mehanekebet* and their respective students is in the air. Not only does each student receive a comment or short letter from her *mehanekebet* as part of her report card,

but the *mehanekebet* also spends a few minutes with each student handing her the report card and reviewing her progress and grades in the context of her personal development. In the twelfth grade, the special relationship between the *mehanekebet* and her student is even more useful as she helps the students in their decisions about the national or military service programs in which they will enlist for the following one to four years. These decisions require broad knowledge of the myriad of choices available to the students. The fact that the *mehanekebet* knows her students' strengths and weaknesses both academically and socially allows her to help them navigate through this complicated process with its significant ramifications. In other words, the role of the *mehanekebet* in the Israeli school system could be described as one in which the total is most certainly greater than the sum of its parts.

***Mehanekebet* and the Challenges of Modern Orthodoxy**

When I tell my Israeli colleagues that in the United States, there are no *mehanekebet*, they are dumbstruck; they simply can't imagine an educational institution functioning without someone whose job description includes the responsibilities outlined above. Even though many American private yeshiva high schools provide academic advisors, guidance counselors, a special Israel guidance counselor, and advisors for a variety of extracurricular activities, it is hard for people raised in Israel to imagine school without a *mehanekebet*. Even if various people were in fact following and acting upon all of the information regarding individual students, the question my colleagues would still ask is: "But who does the '*hinnukh*'?" By this they express the conviction that the ultimate purpose of the *mehanekebet* is to be involved in *hinnukh*, the teaching of values and the development of identity. The various organizational and administrative roles of the *mehanekebet* are critical for the functioning of the system, but what the system is after, and what the *mehanekebet* believe in, is not just technical—

mehanekebot do their jobs with passion and commitment because they believe in the value of *hinukh*.

Looking back on my own high school career, I wonder if the technical aspect of the *mehanekebet* was truly absent. Indeed there were complex choices in high school, but my friends and I managed to make clear decisions about our classes and futures, took initiative about our college applications, and really ran with the ball when given responsibility for extracurricular activities. It was always possible to speak to the principal or assistant principal if I had a problem. I was responsible for myself, and the fact that no one else in school was following me in the broader sense didn't seem to pose a problem. Of course, it may have been more of a problem for students struggling in school for academic or other reasons, and I want to believe that the principal or other faculty members dedicated time to addressing the issues of those students.

What I can say was missing from my high school experience was *hinukh*. I had some wonderful teachers, and I still recall a number of *yemei iyun* and events that made an impression on me, but I know that when I had theological questions, there was no forum for them. There was no clear address for teenage confusion. *Hinukh* was something that all teachers did, or were supposed to do, in every subject—but issues of religious and personal development were not part of any official curriculum so they weren't addressed in an organized way. Of course, I could always seek out a warm and knowledgeable teacher for a personal discussion, but that was dependent upon my initiative and my willingness to open up to someone who probably didn't know

much about me beyond my participation in his or her class.

A number of questions come to mind in light of the differences cited above between my own experience as a yeshiva high school student in the United States and the Israeli system in which I have been working for the last decade. Is *hinukh* as defined in the Israeli system a powerful tool—or a waste of time? Is the *mehanekebet* a resource worthy of compensation, or is it unnecessary? Even if the concepts of *hinukh* and a *mehanekebet* seem beneficial in Israel, if the American yeshiva system has successfully managed until now without them, is there a need to consider them now?

It seems to me that in an era in which information is more available than ever, the people with whom a student interacts in meaningful ways are ever more important in the development of her values and convictions. In this light, there can be great value in the *mehanekebet*, a teacher whose job is explicitly defined as developing a rapport with her students on the broad issues in their lives, seeing them through trying times both out of caring and out of obligation, and taking a continual, all-encompassing view of their academic, social and emotional progress. Merging the institution of *mehanekebet* with a *hinukh* curriculum appropriate to each school, community, and age group can both provide a forum (*hinukh* classes) and an address (the *mehanekebet*) for the complex task of raising the next generation of Modern Orthodox yeshiva graduates.

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Jeremy Savitsky:

Much ink has been spilled in the effort to offer a coherent definition of Modern Orthodoxy. In this context, it is crucial that we focus attention on what might be the most vital link in the chain: day school education. To address this matter, it will prove instructive to compare the essential nature of the Modern Orthodox educational philosophy with that of the *haredi* school system—as evident in the following anecdote.

Last year, an attempt was made to organize a joint learning session for students of the Himmelfarb High School (a Modern Orthodox institution for boys) and the neighboring Yeshivat Kol Torah, Jerusalem's elite *yeshivah qetana*. Regrettably, the latter refused, even though the proposed curriculum was *Masekhet Bava Batra*! Instead, the Himmelfarb boys were invited to a talk with the *mashgiach*, who succinctly communicated the viewpoint of the ultra-Orthodox community: the world is suffering from a terrible deluge—and our responsibility is to hide in Noah's Ark, as it were. To paraphrase, in an environment that is contaminated with sin, the only protection can come through submersion in the study and observance of Torah.

Are we, as the proponents of Modern Orthodoxy, courageous enough to offer an alternative to this isolationism?

At its core, the difference between a Modern Orthodox education and that provided by the *haredi* system revolves around the issue of the proverbial “other.” Indeed, there are many “others” to consider. The first category is comprised of those Jews who are not observant. Do they exist? The question, of course, is not one of physical existence but of whether they exist in such a way that we can relate to them—beyond just trying to bring

them into the fold? This issue has become all the more complex within the last two hundred years, as the majority of Jews have abandoned a traditional Jewish lifestyle. In Israel, Orthodox youth confront this stark question in the IDF, within whose ranks they meet and befriend secular Israelis who are no less willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the Jewish people.

To wit, can we gain a true appreciation of those Jews who do not perceive their Jewish identity through the exclusive prism of *halakha* observance? Are we even interested in having any interaction with them? Rav Kook answered in the affirmative, joining the Zionist movement and adopting the approach that the labors of the secular *halutsim* bore a redemptive quality.

A second “other” is the non-Jew. Do we wish to cultivate a relationship of trust and respect with Christian/Muslim society, or are we resigned to eternal animosity between us? Needless to say, our answer to this question has specific implications—both in Israel and the United States. What attitude do we take toward Muslim prayer services? Are they a respected manifestation of Abrahamic monotheism, or merely the supplications of our fiendish enemy? What about welcoming Muslims into our schools for the purpose of a dialogue between faiths?

In the United States, encounters with gentiles occur on a daily basis. Should we be inviting their clergy to address day school audiences, or pretending that there are no Christians in America? Do our school administrators relate to non-Jewish faculty and staff as “alien” or as fellow persons created in God's image? I am always struck by the insularity—indifference?

—of the Orthodox community at large when it comes to the suffering of the homeless and poverty-stricken who visibly populate all large American cities. Are we sufficiently conscious of bereaved families, mostly lower- or middle-class, whose sons have fallen in Iraq, in the course of a war that many Jews supported? If they are in the business of inculcating values, would it not be appropriate for Jewish day schools to support the families of the fallen American soldiers?

Thirdly, there is “other” knowledge and scholarship. Should we be investing time, resources and energy to study and even appreciate the vast expanses of science and the arts, or must we not stray from the study of Torah, narrowly construed? This is not simply a question of secular study to earn a livelihood. Do we discern fundamental, religious value in researching quantum physics or listening to Beethoven—or do we regard these occupations as a waste of time? Are we ready to follow in the footsteps of *Rambam*, who took upon himself the challenge of integrating Aristotelian philosophy into our notion of God?

The last “other” is represented by contemporary culture and its political structures. Is the democratic tradition an insignificant construct or, conversely, an integral part of *tiqqun olam*? Is the modern world nothing but a source of corrupt temptations, or does it also afford multiple avenues for spiritual growth?

On this note, we should be encouraging our youth toward political activism in both Israel and the United States. Modern Orthodox Israelis should be at the forefront of efforts to strengthen civil society in Israel. And those who have chosen to reside outside of the Jewish state should be motivated to action by a sense of duty—not only to the Jewish community, but also to the broader population. Educationally, too much emphasis is placed on

achieving economic success, at the expense of ethical responsibility and moral fulfillment. As an ethnic group that has so greatly enjoyed the benefits of life in the United States, American Jewry should play a prominent role in the area of public service. Our educational frameworks should highlight “giving back” through civic involvement as a way to serve both the Jewish and general communities.

Current economic hardships and the Madoff scandal should prompt us to, once and forever, break the paradigm of affluence as a precondition to Jewish learning. How do we make Jewish education affordable to all Jews, without regard to their income statements? This is perhaps the biggest test facing the lay leadership of Modern Orthodoxy. In this regard, they can learn from their *haredi* co-religionists, who employ a lower economic bar to entry. Our institutions should not be elitist Jewish “prep schools,” but should admit the entire community. And, again, they should educate toward public service; a year of volunteer work in either Israel or the United States might be a good place to start.

A number of years ago, I hosted a group of American principals at Himmelfarb and asked them to walk the halls during recess. Most of them stood in awe of our social diversity, having encountered students of varying socio-economic backgrounds and even color. In my experience, while it is certainly difficult to manage such a multi-faceted school, it is commensurately rewarding. It is difference that makes Himmelfarb such a rich environment. This internal diversity, of both students and teachers, forges stronger personalities that are better trained to succeed in today's world. Accordingly, we must enhance our capability to view the “other” not as a threat, but actually as a source of enrichment. Is this not precisely the idea of twelve separate tribes combining to constitute *Kelal Yisra'el*? How do we create schools which mirror *Kelal Yisra'el*?¹

¹ One could argue that the root of Israel's internal schism was David Ben-Gurion's acquiescence to the establishment of four distinct educational networks: secular, religious, *Haredi* and Arab.

The real dilemma facing our schools is not simply how to foster greater inclusiveness or social consciousness, but how to communicate the significance and vitality of our Jewish tradition. And make no mistake, this is not a purely intellectual issue. We can expect our youth to continue observing traditional Jewish ritual only if they feel a deep connection to Judaism. Interestingly, over the past ten years, there has been a renaissance of *Hasidic* thought and practice within the Israeli high school system. There is recognition of the thirst for new forms of expression in both prayer and learning. Students need not only conform to Torah strictures, but also understand how they speak to their own individual needs and concerns. Our tradition offers clear direction and meaning in a chaotic universe.

In order to transform this agenda into reality, we need to enlist the finest educators. Only teachers with a profound link to Torah—role models who personally feel that Torah has enlightened their lives and made them better people—can serve as mentors for our children. Furthermore, the above-described program requires that we interface with all the "others" among us. Here too, only the most gifted, inspiring and Torah-devoted educators can be qualified to manage the confusion and shepherd our children through this process.

Being committed to Torah while respecting Christians and Muslims, studying Talmud while being well-versed in the classics of Western civilization, *davening* three times a day while

maintaining the ability to think critically, assuming responsibility for the future of the Jewish people while sympathizing with the plight of the homeless in Jerusalem or New York is a complex task—emotionally and intellectually. But if we believe that the objective of Judaism is to improve our world, we don't have the privilege of shirking this responsibility. To quote Rabbi Tarfon: "The work is not yours to complete, but neither are you free to abstain from it." Great educators can facilitate this work.

The Function of Judaism in the World

The BeSHT claimed that Torah belongs not only in the *beit midrash*, but in the entire world. In fact, the virtual destruction of the yeshiva world in the last century was only partially due to the competing forces of socialism, communism and even atheism. The yeshiva world did not have the tools or the energy to deal with the challenges these ideologies presented. Today, it is incumbent upon us, as Modern Orthodox Jews, to package a vibrant, attractive and authentic Judaism, one that is not frightened by modernity, rather one that can engage and embrace change while remaining focused on Torah and its mission of making the world a better place. Advancing this strategy should be the *raison d'être* of our day schools.

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