

Yirat Shamayim
The Awe, Reverence,
and Fear of God

EDITED BY
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THE ORTHODOX FORUM

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*Lechu Banim Shim'u
li Yirat Hashem*

*Alamedchem: Come,
Children, Listen to Me;
I Will Teach You How
to Revere the Lord. If
Only It Were So Easy*

Kenneth Auman

We are all familiar with the phenomenon: A Yeshiva high school graduate spends a year of Torah study at a Yeshiva in Israel, and returns home transformed. His parents and community hardly

recognize him. The cool teenager of last year, with his casual approach to life has been replaced by a serious and intense personality. Whereas in former years he might have ambled into *shul* on a Shabbat well after the service had begun, sat in the rear with his friends, and paid scant attention to the *davening*, he now is there at the start of the service, *davening* earnestly, clearly in serious conversation with his Maker. Very often the family and community, when they recover from their initial shock, are favorably impressed with the transformation, and feel that all in all, the change was for the better. They may not approve or agree with all of his newly held views – he may now espouse a world outlook that they consider to be excessively parochial or perhaps provincial – but they are willing to forgive him for this because of the many improvements in his character that they perceive. What they often cannot fathom, however, is why the “newfound religion” is often accompanied by a dramatic change in external attire as well, with white shirts and black suits replacing the much more casual dress of last year. And of course the ultimate symbol of the new look is the black fedora now sitting where the small knitted *kippah* formerly perched.¹

The family and friends are at a total loss when attempting to understand the religious motivation behind the change of attire. They can understand the *zehirut be-mitzvot* [care in observance of mitzvot] and the focus on *limud ha-Torah* [study of Torah] as outgrowths of the newly increased religious commitment, but they utterly fail to comprehend the need to dress in a manner that represents a Judaism quite different from their own. They are willing to admire increased commitment to *shmirat ha-mitzvot* [observance of mitzvot], but at the same time feel that this commitment ought not be paired with a mode of dress so foreign to the normal styles of American youth.

So what indeed is the idea behind the rather modern concept² in the Yeshiva World that legislates a style of dress that cannot be classified as halakhically required?³ Does dressing in a particular manner somehow serve to inculcate *yirat shamayim*? If it does, how is this feat accomplished, since the particular mode of dress promoted is in a sense arbitrary? I raise these questions neither

to criticize the Yeshiva World nor to defend it, but rather by way of introducing the difficult issues that we hope to address – issues inherent in understanding the concept of *yirat shamayim* not in a vacuum, but as a cause and as an effect in terms of changing people's behavior, hopefully for the better. A discussion of such issues, if it is indeed to be real, i.e., apply practically to our lives, must take into account the different models and philosophies within Orthodox Judaism that co-exist, sometimes peacefully but always uneasily with each other.

While this paper primarily addresses itself to what is generally called the Modern Orthodox community, we cannot view any one part of the Orthodox community as an island unto itself. There is often movement between the different groups, one example of which was described above. And within the large metropolitan areas of the United States that house the large Orthodox communities, members of the different subgroups dwell in close proximity, and cannot but be influenced by each other. The lines of distinction between the various subgroups in Orthodoxy are fuzzy rather than sharp, and there are entire segments of certain communities that could in fact be viewed as extensions of other communities.⁴ So we will be referring to and contrasting various subgroups in our comments. Furthermore, rabbis and *mechanchim* [Jewish educators] of all stripes agree that there is a great need to inculcate *yirat shamayim* within the members of their very varied constituencies. They are also in agreement that there is no sure proof formula or quick fix to enhance *yirat shamayim*.

Any discussion of attempts – be they successful or not – to inculcate *yirat shamayim* in a given population must begin by formulating a working definition of *yirat shamayim*. The term “working” is used advisedly, for the purpose of this particular paper is not to analyze or define rigorously the concept itself, but rather to discuss practical or real life issues that arise from attempts to educate or inspire the public towards *yirat shamayim*. In attempting to develop such a working definition, we must take into account that which we ideally seek to develop or bring out in people. In this regard we try to negotiate between two extremes. On one side there is the specter of

a *yirah* that consists of superstitious or pagan fear (as opposed to the *yirat ha-onesh* described by the classical sources⁵) of being punished by a vengeful deity who was angered by the individual's transgressions. This type of *yirah* effectively puts a damper on any attempt at forging a meaningful relationship with God. After all, who wishes to be close with a vindictive, angry deity? At the other extreme is no *yirah* at all but rather the image of God as a grandfather, who is at our service, and who nods approvingly at all our actions. This religious placebo type of approach obviates the need for any rigorous self-discipline or desire to improve one's *shmirat ha-mitzvot*.

Our working definition, therefore, should focus not on what *yirat shamayim* is or is not, but rather upon what it seeks to create. For our purposes we will speak of *yirat shamayim* as a motivational feeling, a genuine desire to create a relationship with God through the strict discipline of, and the joy and satisfaction in, *shmiraat ha-mitzvot*. While such motivation inherently assumes certain basic knowledge, e.g., God's omniscience and intimate awareness of our thoughts and actions, it is primarily a feeling – a desire, which creates the motivation. This type of feeling internalizes the aforementioned basic knowledge to make it an essential part of one's personality and behavior. This internalization of knowledge to create a strong feeling is expressed by the author of the prayer *Nishmat* with the phrase, "*kol atzmotai tomarna Hashem mi kamokha*," roughly translated as, every fiber of my body cries out, O God there is no one like you."⁶ It is not merely the mind or the intellect that acknowledges the uniqueness and greatness of God, but every fiber of one's being, creating an emotion far more powerful than something limited to the mind.

Defining *yirat shamayim* as a motivational feeling emphasizes that our discussion refers to promoting greater *mitzvah* observance as an outgrowth of this feeling. Increased *mitzvah* observance for other reasons may or may not be laudable, depending upon a number of factors.⁷ External manifestations implying piety that are inherently not *mitzvot*, such as the particular style of dress described above with regard to our born-again yeshiva student do not enter into our discussion at this point, although they raise interesting issues that will have to be clarified later on in this discussion.

Our working definition of *yirat shamayim* highlights for us the basic problem encountered when attempting to inculcate *yirat shamayim*. If *yirat shamayim* is indeed primarily a feeling or desire that becomes part of one's character, it cannot be "taught" anymore than happiness can be taught to a melancholy person. One can beautifully instruct the melancholy individual in the religious principle, "Who is truly wealthy? He who is happy with one's lot,"⁸ or if he himself believes it, in the Hassidic teaching, "It is a great *Mitzvah* to be constantly in a state of happiness,"⁹ but no amount of education will raise his spirits. We would rather recommend therapy to enable the emotions to feel what the mind already knows. And therefore the question for us is: what therapy can we employ to inculcate *yirat shamayim*?

For example, how does one "teach" what to feel when entering a *Bet Knesset*? Or, how does one "teach" *kavannah* [intent] in *tefilla*? One can explain the meanings of the words, one can explain the themes that they express, but these explanations in and of themselves do not guarantee *kavanah*. One can explain all the *halakhot* of *kedushat bet ha-knesset* [sanctity of the synagogue], but this does not teach one how to feel God's presence in the synagogue. The Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik of blessed memory, remarked in one of his *tshuva drashot* that he felt that while he had achieved some degree of success in passing on the legacy of Torah study that he received from his father and grandfather to his own students, he did not achieve a similar level of success with regard to transmitting the emotions that were as much part and parcel of his ancestors' heritage as their Torah learning. The meticulous analyses of Rav Chaim he had transmitted, but not Rav Chaim's feelings of encountering the holy on Yom Kippur.

Maimonides, in discussing the criteria for a Jewish king, evidently assumes as well that *yirat shamayim* cannot be taught. He states (*Hilkhot Melachim* 1:7): Once the king has been anointed, he and his descendants are forever entitled to the throne – for the monarchy is an inheritance...But this is true only if the son is his father's equal in knowledge and *yirah*. If he possesses the requisite *yirah* but lacks the knowledge, we appoint him to the position, and

we instruct him (in the knowledge). But one who does not possess *yirat shamayim*, even though he has great knowledge is not appointed to any position of authority...

The possibility that the candidate who lacks *yirat shamayim* can be instructed in it is not entertained by Maimonides. There is evidently no easy way to instill *yirat shamayim* in him who lacks it. Yet Maimonides, as he continues his discussion seems to imply that while humans cannot easily implant *yirat shamayim* into others, God Himself can, and indeed does so upon occasion. Maimonides continues, "Once David was anointed, he acquired the crown and it is for him and his sons for eternity...but he only acquired it for his meritorious descendants...but nevertheless the monarchy will never depart from his descendants; the Holy One Blessed be He promised him so as it states, 'If your descendants forsake my Torah and follow not in my laws I shall punish their sins with a rod, and with plagues their wrongdoings, and I will not remove my kindness from him.'" In other words, should the descendants of David lack the requisite *yirat shamayim*, they will be afflicted in different sorts of ways and these afflictions will motivate them to rekindle their religious feelings.¹⁰

The notion that *yirat shamayim* cannot be taught in conventional fashion appears to be contradicted by the simple sense of two biblical verses in two different contexts. In *Dvarim* 14:23, in discussing the laws of *Maaser Sheni*, separating a tithe that must be transported to Jerusalem and eaten there, the Torah offers as the rationale for this commandment, "So that you will learn to fear God your Lord all the days." The implication is that one can indeed learn to fear God. And the Psalmist implies this as well in the verse we quoted in the title to this paper, (Psalms 34:12) "Go children, heed me, I shall teach you the fear of God."

Most traditional biblical commentators, however, understand the term *tilmad*, in the first verse quoted above, which is usually translated as, "you will learn," to mean something else. After all, how does eating food, even sacred food, in Jerusalem teach one anything? Ibn Ezra and Hizkuni translate *tilmad* as, "you will habituate yourselves,"¹¹ and Rashbam appears to take it as, "you will be inspired."¹²

Nahmanides alone, amongst the medieval commentators accepts the literal interpretation, i.e., learning, and he understands it as referring to learning about the commandments themselves rather than the attitude of *yirat shamayim* about which we are speaking.¹³

With regard to the above mentioned verse from Psalms, “I will teach you the fear of God,” it is striking that in the subsequent verses in that chapter, there is no mention of how this teaching is to be accomplished. It is as if the Psalmist sets us up and then does not deliver. The message then, here too, is consistent with our sense that there is no easy way, or no way at all to provide instruction in *yirat shamayim*.

Herein lies the challenge of the *Rav*, the pulpit rabbi, or the *Mechanech*, the religious educator, vis-à-vis *yirat shamayim*. The rabbi or educator is oriented to regard teaching as the *modus operandi* of choice for communication between himself and his “clientele.” After all, Torah is communicated primarily through instruction. It comes as a rude awakening to the novice that simply giving a *shiur* is not necessarily going to make all that much difference in the religious lives of his congregants or students. The newly ordained rabbi, full of enthusiasm will most likely work very hard to create interesting educational programs, and yet he may discover, as time goes on, that while his congregants find these programs to be of great interest, no significant changes have taken place in their religious or spiritual lives. This initial disappointment has the potential to develop into cynicism as the young yeshiva student evolves into the polished pulpit rabbi or veteran *mechanech* over a number of years. Rather than reach for the skies as he did in his youth, the middle aged rabbi-educator might give up entirely, believing that nothing he will say or do will make any difference in the quality of the religious lives of his congregants-students. This self-perception of rabbinic ineffectiveness is a not insignificant factor in contributing to rabbinic burnout. And even when burnout does not occur, the failure of the religious leader to elevate the spirituality of his flock will negatively impact on him impairing his ability to function as a *Rav* or *Mechanech*.

There are two somewhat contradictory strategies that ought

to be employed when the religious educator inevitably realizes that despite his or her best efforts, he is seeing very few results. One strategy is to attempt methods of communication other than the standard teaching to which he is accustomed. The biblical text cited above, "So that you will learn to fear God your Lord all the days," can be instructive. We noted that while most of the commentators avoided understanding the word *tilmad*, as learning, they did take it to mean effecting a positive change in attitude – either by becoming habituated to *yirat shamayim* or by being inspired to it. Both habituation and inspiration can be important tools in the rabbi's or educator's communication arsenal.

The Talmud relates the story of the mother of R. Nahman b. Yitzhak who was told of potentially evil tendencies in her newborn son. To counteract these tendencies she kept his head covered at all times, and insisted (presumably as he grew older) that he do the same telling him, "Cover your head in order that you have fear of heaven."¹⁴ The idea of covering the head to induce *yirat shamayim* is an example of habituation. The constant wearing of the head covering serves to internalize the external message of God's constant presence in the world.

Similarly, one who observes the *halakhot* of proper behavior in the synagogue consistently will eventually internalize the concept of *kedushat bet ha-knesset*, leading to the ability to feel the presence of the Divine upon entering the synagogue. Two individuals entering *shul*, one reciting *Ma tovu* immediately, and then rigorously adhering to the prohibition of *sihat hulin*, idle conversation, while the other upon entering immediately striking up conversations with friends, experience the synagogue in significantly different ways. For the former, it is a truly religious experience. He is far more likely to feel the Divine than is the latter. But the issue for us is, how does one motivate one's charges to accept the necessary changes in behavior?

The other branches of Orthodoxy have used habituation to great advantage. Both Hasidic and Yeshiva Judaism have promulgated codes of dress for males that are difficult to justify on purely halakhic grounds. It is very difficult to make the case for the exis-

tence of a halakhic requirement to wear a *streimel* or a black hat on *Shabbat*, or white shirts and black suits at any time.¹⁵ Yet these codes of dress are strongly enforced or encouraged. They serve as a type of uniform; those who wear it identify with a certain philosophy or social group. Feeling part of a group provides strong incentive to follow the behavior patterns of that group as a whole. And if that group sees its philosophy as a true expression of *yirat shamayim*, adherence to the dress code is the first step to that ideal.¹⁶ This can explain the phenomenon described in our opening scenario – the born-again yeshiva student who dons the black hat – wearing that hat is a statement of allegiance to an ideology that sees itself committed to *yirat shamayim* at its most intense.

A major synagogue in the New York metropolitan area began a campaign a few years ago to eradicate *sihat hulin* [idle conversation] from the synagogue. The campaign was spearheaded by the rabbinic, professional, and lay leadership of the congregation, and has resulted in dramatic change in the synagogue environment and experience – all for the better. Innovative approaches were employed to achieve this turnaround, and while it is still too early to know whether the change will be permanent, what has been accomplished to date is impressive. A typical (unfortunately) large, Orthodox synagogue, where incessant chatter normally drowns out the sound of prayer, has become a model of proper and appropriate behavior.¹⁷ Indeed behavior can change, and habituation can be successful, albeit with great expenditure of time and effort, utilizing proper leadership.

In this particular case, the initial motivation was the result of two factors: the realization that the level of chatter in the synagogue had reached crisis proportions, and the knowledge that a smaller synagogue in the neighborhood was making a name for itself with its extremely spiritual, beautiful, and quiet service. However it was only through the extraordinary efforts of the rabbis, the executive director, and the *shul* administration, that habituation was achieved. Some of the effort involved motivational talks from the pulpit, but the major work was done on a different level – through meetings with small groups of members, through streamlining and shortening the

service, through reordering the service to create a feeling of greater flow, and through the public posting of the names of all those who pledged to refrain from *sihat hulin* in the synagogue.

The realization that we must often think out of the box and become innovative is both encouraging and daunting. It highlights for us the strengths and weaknesses of rabbinic authority in the modern era. Today's rabbi cannot rule by fiat. In the case of the aforementioned decorum project, had the rabbis decided to approach the problem with the premise that they could impose their will upon the congregation by the use of disciplinary measures, e.g., publicly castigating violators or issuing bans and *issurim*, they would have undoubtedly failed, and perhaps even endangered their own positions within the congregation.¹⁸ With innovative thinking, on the other hand, by creating a partnership with the congregation, they succeeded beyond their own expectations. The rabbi today may have less "power" than the rabbi of yesteryear whose word was law, but he does have considerable moral authority and influence. He can use this influence to move people to behavior that will habituate them towards *yirat shamayim*.

Returning to our term *tilmad*, which sparked our exploration of habituation, we noted above that Rashbam understood it to mean, "be inspired." This provides another method for us to analyze: what has the potential to inspire our people towards greater *yirat shamayim*? Or to phrase the question differently, are there role models available that can be models of inspiration to emulate their *yirat shamayim*? Are there individuals currently alive to whom we can point and reasonably expect people to look to them as models for proper behavior? Or are there famous figures from the past who can serve as inspiration?

My experience has been that people within the Modern Orthodox community are not overly impressed with tales of the righteous or *Maggid* type presentations. Perhaps due to the fact they have a greater secular orientation than those in the *Haredi* community, they tend to react cynically to the types of stories wherein everyone always was and continues to be a *tzadik*. Furthermore they tend to prefer more intellectual discourse, albeit not overly halakhically

technical. Those who are impressed by *sipurei tzadikim* can be inspired by them; those who react cynically cannot. Therefore what may very well be an effective tool in the *Haredi* world will not be successful in the Modern Orthodox one.¹⁹

It is perhaps these two different reactions to *sipurei tzadikim* that can account for the significantly different reactions exhibited in different parts of the Orthodox world to the biography of the early years in the life of R. Yaakov Kamentzky that was published a few years ago. The book, entitled *The Making of a Godol*, by his son, Rabbi Nosson Kamentzky, created a controversy shortly after it was published. It was criticized in the *Haredi* community by many (though decidedly not by all) and was even the subject of a ban, yet it is my impression that it was received much more favorably in the Modern Orthodox community. Precisely those points that troubled the *Haredim* – finding fault with *gedolim* or portraying them with the character traits that are common to most human beings – is what appealed to the Modern Orthodox. The point here is not to criticize or defend *The Making of a Godol*. Nor are we interested in commenting on the negative reaction to the book. However what is worth noting is that Rabbi Nosson Kamenetzky may well have hit upon a type of biography that does have the potential to inspire the relatively cynical Modern Orthodox community. While this community may scoff at the notion of stories of human beings portrayed as angels acting in heroic manner as having any relevance to them (or indeed any credibility at all) they will not similarly dismiss stories of ordinary human beings rising to great heights. This genre of biography – honest assessments of how ordinary people became great – might indeed serve to inspire even the more cynical amongst us. Perhaps some experimental work ought to be done with these types of biographies to determine whether or not they can be utilized effectively in promoting and inspiring *yirat shamayim*.

But it is not only the deceased that we ought to turn for inspiration. Another important difference between the *Haredi* and Modern Orthodox worlds is their respective willingness to place great leaders (currently alive) on pedestals. The consequence of placing them on pedestals is accepting their authority; for the *Haredim*

this is second nature. Whether it is the *Rebbe* for *Hasidim*, or the *Rosh Yeshiva* or *Posek* for the *Yeshiva* world, his pronouncements are accepted by his constituents with utmost seriousness. For the Modern Orthodox, this is not the case at all. We, in good democratic tradition, are reluctant to cede our autonomy by subjecting ourselves to someone else's jurisdiction. While this approach might make for good democracy, it does not make for good Judaism, and it prevents us from having living roles of *yirat shamayim* to whom we can look. It prevents us from being able to point out to our children wonderful role models. (And when our children often discover these role models on their own, they fault us for not having exposed them to these role models.)

The religious leader can attempt to counter this tendency to equalize by emphasizing the greatness of particular individuals. He can by his own behavior reinforce this message as well. If his congregation sees that he places his own teachers and mentors on a pedestal, perhaps they will be moved to do so as well, thereby having appropriate role models for *yirat shamayim*. Furthermore, the religious leader should attempt, by his own personal conduct, to be a model of *yirat shamayim* that can be emulated. This is no simple task, for it requires a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, the leader ought to be beyond reproach in every aspect of his personal conduct, both *ben adam lamakom* and *ben adam lachavero*. But on the other hand, he must appear as "normal" to his people – otherwise they will not view him as a realistic model for their own behavior.

To summarize: Rather than merely teach his followers, the leader can attempt to both habituate and inspire them towards *yirat shamayim*. He can promote certain desirable models of behavior, and he can provide role models for emulation. If he is even minimally successful, his teaching will fall upon newly attuned ears. He will have created a method of impacting upon others in a positive manner, and at the same time made himself feel good about his own work and accomplishments.

There is a second strategy that the young teacher or rabbi can employ if he begins to feel disillusioned when he perceives his teaching falling upon deaf ears. This strategy appears to be antithetical to

the models of habituation and inspiration that we have developed above. Instead of reaching for the stars only to be devastated by failure, perhaps the rabbi or teacher ought to lower his expectations. Perhaps he ought to measure spiritual improvement in millimeters rather than in inches. Perhaps he ought to follow the teaching of *Hazal*: *pruta upruta mitztarefet lecheshbon gadol*,²⁰ [penny after penny adds up to a large sum] and realize that over time millimeters will add up to inches. The young rabbi would do well to take the long term approach and begin his tenure softly rather than come out swinging.

The teaching of the *Mishna* in *Avot*, “It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to exempt yourself from it,”²¹ perfectly expresses the tension inherent in attempting to inspire and habituate on the one hand, and lowering one’s sights on the other. One must never despair of attaining the lofty goal of instilling *yirat shamayim*, yet one must be realistic enough to realize that it is a long, almost never ending process. And when even minimal improvement in his congregants’ lifestyles and behavior seems light years away, the rabbi can garner additional comfort from the fact that our prophets of old who were certainly capable and able, were not generally able to effect positive changes in the general Jewish populace during the entire period of the first Temple. At times they even despaired, but ultimately they never abandoned their mission.

The basic premise upon which we have been operating is that instilling *yirat shamayim* is more of a motivational than an educational process. To this end, we have focused upon the term *tilmad* in connection with *yirat shamayim* in line with those commentators who eschew the literal interpretation. Nevertheless, education does indeed play a role in the overall process, as a precursor to the inspiration or habituation that we have discussed. We might say that while education is not necessarily the method of choice for imbuing *yirat shamayim*, it is indeed a prerequisite for the process. Therefore Nahmanides’s understanding of *tilmad* which is quite literal should be understood in this light. Our rabbis teach, *Lo am ha-aretz hasid*,²² the ignorant cannot be truly pious or righteous, which in our context means that one must possess a minimal amount of knowledge as to

what is required Jewish behavior before being motivated to behave Jewishly. All the motivation in the world cannot be defined as *yirat shamayim* if that motivation does not lead one along the path of Torah and *Mitzvot*. And one who truly possesses *yirat shamayim* will be motivated to study further to learn what is required of him or her. Education therefore is both a prerequisite and a result of *yirat shamayim*. The true *yerei shamayim* will make sure to have before him a clear idea of what is expected of him, by engaging in Torah study. We must therefore devote some attention to the issue of education and Torah knowledge as it impacts upon practice.

Let me state at the outset that my observations in this regard are just that – observations. They do not constitute a sociological study of the Modern Orthodox community, but consist of my informal observations coupled with discussions with other *Rabbanim* and *Mechanchim* over the years. There is no doubt that a rough correlation can be drawn between levels of education and levels of observance in the Orthodox community. In general, the higher the level of knowledge, the more meticulous is the level of observance. Today's Orthodox community is significantly more learned than that of fifty years ago, and the level of observance has increased as well. While some might decry this as part of the oft vilified “move to the right” within contemporary Orthodoxy,²³ we laud it as a sign of greater commitment. Nevertheless, there is a significant divergence of levels of practice within similarly educated groups. Some people simply ignore what they are taught and practice the same Judaism that their less educated parents and grandparents did. The difference between those who assimilate their education into their practice and those who do not can be described as a function of different levels of *yirat shamayim*.

Hazal referred to a phenomenon similar to what we are describing, terming it being *moreh heter* [self-serving leniency]. Even though one has knowledge as to what the ideal course of behavior ought to be, he convinces himself that such ideal behavior is not really necessary. This phenomenon is particularly evident when the optimum standard of behavior is only observed by the few, while being ignored by the many. The power of *hora'at heter* was so great

in the eyes of *Hazal* that they did not deem individuals who violated prohibitions based upon it to be willful violators, but rather considered them as accidental transgressors.²⁴ In Talmudic times *hora'at heter* was generally based upon lack of knowledge; today it is often based upon attempting to evade the consequences of knowledge. In other words, if an individual learns of a particular requirement of *halakha* of which he was previously unaware, and notes that this particular requirement is not observed by a great number of people, he will be *moreh heter* by arguing that since it is ignored by so many, it must not be truly required.

While *hora'at heter* is by no means unique to the Modern Orthodox community,²⁵ it does have its own particular manifestations within this community. Today's Modern Orthodox community descends to a great extent from prewar American Jewish Orthodoxy. This group, for reasons to be discussed below, did not obey certain areas of Jewish law. Many of the neglected areas related to aspects of *tzniut* and appropriate behavior between the sexes, but included aspects of *hilkhot Shabbat* and other areas as well. This laxity of behavior did not indicate a lack of commitment on the part of the Orthodox Jews of those times; to the contrary, those Jews were extremely dedicated to their concept of *shmirat ha-mitzvot* and sacrificed a great deal to observe *Shabbat* and *kashrut*, for example. However, many areas of *halakha* were beyond their mindset of required *mitzvot*. Their vision of Judaism and its requirements was not based upon extensive learning or knowledge and therefore had significant gaps in it. Furthermore the desire to be as American as possible tended to cause certain *halakhot* to be unpopular since these *halakhot* ran counter to the norms of prevailing society at that time.

The advent of the postwar refugees and the subsequent development of the Hassidic and Yeshiva communities lessened the ability of the general Orthodox populace to be *moreh heter* with regard to many neglected *halakhot*. After all, significant numbers of observant Jews were now keeping *halakhot* that had heretofore fallen by the wayside. For this reason, many of the descendants of the prewar American Jews began to keep many of the areas of *halakha* that

their parents had neglected. And many of the parents changed their behavior as well, due to the education that their children received or due to the increased knowledge that they themselves had acquired.

However, a not insignificant number of the new generation continued to be *moreh heter*. They were comfortable with the “abridged version” of Orthodoxy that they had inherited, and were resistant to change, notwithstanding the education that they received. But as we stated, being *moreh heter* was now more difficult than before, since significant numbers of Jews were in fact observing these *halakhot*. What therefore began to develop was an ideology of *hora’at heter*.²⁶ It went something like this: Modern Orthodoxy differs philosophically from the newcomers’ Orthodoxy in a number of ways. It is more open to general culture and secular education; it is more open to Zionism and viewing the State of Israel as a religiously positive development; it is more open to working with nonobservant Jews whenever possible. These beliefs are adopted by way of sincere conviction rather than convenience. Hence, the other aspects that accompany Modern Orthodoxy as well, the laxity with regard to particular *halakhot* are also adopted by way of sincere conviction rather than convenience. They represent our way of being modern and observant at the same time. With this type of reasoning, sociological reality became ideologically justified.²⁷

This type of *hora’at heter* renders its protagonists impervious to change through education; if a previously unknown *halakha* is learned, it can be written off as being only for the “other” Orthodoxy with its different non-modern ideology, rather than for the Moderns. Just as *lehavdil*, a nonobservant Jew might state, “We Reform Jews need not observe *kashrut*,” our Orthodox protagonists might state, “We Modern Orthodox Jews need not observe the prohibition of *kol isha*.”

Notwithstanding the ability to be *moreh heter*, major strides have been made in recent decades to improve *halakhic* observance. There is today a much wider acceptance of many *halakhot* such as *bishul akum*, carrying on Shabbat, *tzniut* [modesty], and serious Torah study on a daily basis. On a communal basis as well, *halakhic* standards have been raised over the decades. For example, the

overwhelming majority of Modern Orthodox synagogues no longer sponsor social dances or New Years' parties although there are many individuals who continue to do so. Another example is that communal *kashrut* standards have risen significantly over the years.

What emerges from this description is that education does indeed play an important role in fostering increased Torah observance. The ability of people to be *moreh heter* is indeed a problem, but the past decades demonstrate that the problem is not insurmountable. What *Rabbanim* and *Mechanchim* ought to emphasize is that the ideology of Modern Orthodoxy not be misused as a defense against increased fealty to *halakhic* norms and strictures. Rather Modern Orthodoxy should be presented as a philosophical-ideological movement, not one which promotes laxity in observance.²⁸ And the religious leaders should, to whatever extent possible, not be ashamed to portray themselves personally as ideological adherents of Modern Orthodoxy – their halakhic pronouncements then cannot so easily be written off as religious fanaticism.

In conclusion: The barriers to fostering *yirat shamayim* are formidable. The religious leader staring at those barriers is faced with a number of different options. He can view the barriers as impenetrable and close up shop either literally or figuratively. He can attempt to bring down those barriers by the use of the rabbinic battering-ram, resulting in his defeat due to the lack of true force available to him. Or he can slowly, over the years wear down the barriers ever so slightly by a combination of humor, understanding, compassion, and insight, resulting ultimately not in the destruction of those barriers but in creating cracks through which the light of Torah and *yirat shamayim* will be able to shine with greater and greater strength, ultimately rendering the barriers useless.

NOTES

1. Not every young man who goes through this process adopts the *Haredi* mode of dress. Many remain firmly rooted in the principles and mores of the modern Orthodox community, albeit with heightened Torah observance.
2. The current mode of dress for Yeshiva students appears to have developed on these shores. There are many extant photographs of prewar yeshiva students who do not appear to have been dressed in any kind of uniform dress or headgear.

3. See below p. 9 and note 17.
4. There are large communities of ostensibly Yeshiva world Orthodoxy located in places such as Brooklyn, Queens, Monsey, and Passaic whose members are all professionals and are actively involved in the world at large. While they send their children to non-Zionist *yeshivot*, their own views on subjects such as Israel are not all that different from many in the Modern Orthodox camp.
5. *Mishne Torah Hilkhos Tshuva* 10:5. *Tosafot* to *Yebamoth* 48b s.v. *She'ein osin*
6. *Shabbat* morning prayers
7. The Talmud in *Psahim* 50b and in a number of other places quotes R. Yehuda in the name of Rav who urges people to be involved in *Torah* and *mitzvot* even for ulterior motives. The *Tosfot* there s.v. *kan*, based upon a contradictory passage of the Talmud in *Brahot* 17a. state that learning for the sake of self aggrandizement or to portray someone else in a negative light is wrong, and the "ulterior motives" discussed here are merely lack of wholehearted commitment. On the other hand, in *Sotah* 22b the *Tosfot* (s.v. *Prosh*) feel that all types of ulterior motives should be encouraged other than those who at the very outset of their learning are committed to violating the *mitzvot* and engage in *Torah* study for purely intellectual pursuits. Yet a third view is found in *Tosfot* to *Brahot* 17a s.v. *ha'oseh* where they differentiate between selfish ulterior motives (minimally acceptable) and ulterior motives designed to harm others (unacceptable). Also relevant to this discussion is the Talmudic statement in *Rosh Hashanah* 4a that if one gives charity with an ulterior motive in mind (e.g., the merit of the charity will cure his sick child) he is considered perfectly righteous. This becomes relevant in discussing individuals who may observe *mitzvot* without much religious conviction for purely social reasons (i.e., to be part of a particular social group) or to give others the impression that they are very righteous.
8. *Avot* 4:1
9. *Likutei Etzot* of R. Nahman of Breslov, *Helek Simcha*, Paragraph 30.
10. We all witnessed a phenomenon along these lines in the wake of September 11th, when there was a religious revival of sorts in the New York Metropolitan area. Though it was short lived, it does point to the fact that catastrophes do have the potential to awaken dormant feelings of religiosity. See *Megillah* 14a, *Gedolah hasarat taba'at* [greater was the influence of removing the ring] that indicates that the specter of impending catastrophe can be a powerful motivational force as well.
11. Ibn Ezra presents two interpretations. His first is probably in line with that of Nahmanides and the second, which he prefers, is that *tilmad* here is akin to Hosea 10:11, *egla melumada*, a trained or habituated heifer. Hizkuni concurs, and adds an additional verse that supports this interpretation, *Pereh limud midbar*, a wild donkey accustomed to the wilderness (*Yirmiyah* 2:24).
12. Rashbam states, "When you will see the place of the *Shekhina* and the *Kohanim* at their worship and the *Leviim* upon their platform [singing] and the Israelites at their stations." This is clearly an inspirational rather than educational process.

13. He states that "The *Kohanim* and the Judges who stand there before God, [those who are] the teachers of Torah will teach him to fear Him and will instruct him in the Torah and the *Mitzvot*." Nahmanides appears to understand fear of God in the context in which it is used in this verse to be instruction in *Torah* and *Mitzvot* so that they can be properly observed.
14. *Shabbat* 156b. See also *Kiddushin* 31a that R. Huna b. R. Yehoshua never walked four cubits with his head uncovered stating, "The Divine Presence is above my head."
15. Other than the requirements of *tzniut* [modesty], there are no guidelines that *halakha* establishes to govern the particular style or mode of one's dress. Of course, there are certain restrictions that preclude particular types of clothing. The prohibition of either sex wearing garments meant for the opposite one will impact upon what a person cannot wear, but does not impose any particular requirements of what one must wear. Similarly, the prohibition of *hukat akum* (if indeed it applies at all to Western style clothing – see for example *Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah*, Vol.1, no. 81) might be restrictive in terms of particular styles of clothing, but does not mandate any particular style.
16. There are no guarantees. There have been reports of individuals in Hassidic garb sighted in places that should not be mentioned, let alone visited. But the mere fact that such sightings cause a sensation indicates in general how the dress code does work positively. For a fascinating argument against exclusivity in clothing, however, see the commentary of *Netziv* to *Vayikra* 21:6 in both his *Ha'amek Davar* (s.v. *kedoshim yihyu*) and his *Herchev Davar* (note 1)
17. Telephone interview with Rabbi Kalman Topp, then acting Rabbi and currently Rabbi of the Young Israel of Woodmere, Woodmere, New York.
18. See the well known comments of *Hazon Ish* to *Yoreh Deah* 2:16 and *Even Ha-Ezer* 118:6 that coercion in the modern age is not only ineffective, but counterproductive.
19. There are for example immensely popular inspirational speakers in the *Haredi* world who draw large crowds, but who are virtually unknown in the Modern Orthodox world. On the other hand, if one looks at the rosters of the scholars in residence of Modern Orthodox synagogues, one will find popular speakers there who are virtually unknown in the *Haredi* world. It is not merely from whence the speakers come, their styles and content are entirely different.
20. *Sotah* 8b.
21. *Avot* 2:16
22. *Avot* 2:5
23. See below page 18.
24. *Sanhedrin* 26b, *Hanhu kvura'e*..., *Hoshen Mishpat* 34:4.
25. There are types of behavior popular in both the Hassidic and Yeshiva communities which are widespread, and run counter to halakhic requirements. The continuation of these types of activities is a manifestation of *hora'at heter* as well.
26. I do not believe that this ideology developed deliberately. It was probably a sub-conscious reaction to the change of events described.

27. More than twenty years ago, when I was in the process of interviewing for a rabbinic position, one interview began with the following question: "Rabbi, what do you think of Modern Orthodoxy?" I responded by presenting my views on the importance of viewing one's self as part of the larger world, and being involved in it. After my lengthy presentation, the questioner responded, "But Rabbi, what do you think of mixed swimming and women wearing pants?" For years I referred to this as two different ways of viewing Modern Orthodoxy – the philosophical-ideological, and the sociological. I now believe, however, that the one is an outgrowth of the other, and that the philosophical was used to justify the sociological.
28. We, of course, are referring to leniencies for which there is no halakhic basis. There are leniencies with regard to certain *halakhot* that are followed by many in the Modern Orthodox camp that do indeed have halakhic justification, such as using non-*halav yisrael* milk on the basis of government inspection, mixed seating at weddings, shaving on *Hol Hamoed*, or women studying Talmud. Furthermore, as mentioned above, there are leniencies without much halakhic basis that are prevalent in other groups as well.