

# The Hareidi Option

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Many students from Modern Orthodox homes learn from Hareidi teachers at some point in their educational journey, an influence that plays a role in the “move to the right.” There are frequently not enough Modern Orthodox educators available, especially in schools outside of the American Northeast, such as those in Memphis and Chicago. Secondly, parents often lack the ideological awareness required to identify subtler Hareidi positions held by staff members. How many parents understand hashkafic differences among *yeshivot* and seminaries?<sup>[i]</sup>

Beyond the above factors, some do understand the choice and make a pragmatic calculation. In the challenging times of our postmodern condition, a more Hareidi institution may be a safer bet for keeping children in the Orthodox orbit. Though the Hareidi dropout rate is larger than often acknowledged, we will assume here that Modern Orthodoxy has an inferior batting average. Understandably, parents and educators think that the Hareidi voice will keep their children more religiously observant.

Children who turn Hareidi will still share our love of Shabbat and Talmud Torah; they will appreciate the solemnity of Neilah and the joy of Purim. They can support one of the many Hareidi *hessed* organizations, such as those that provide meals at hospitals. If one lives in America, issues of avoiding army service and not receiving a secular high school education cease to be problems.<sup>[ii]</sup> Why not adopt this strategy?

The ensuing pages will explain potential perils in this plan; indeed, no risk-free options exist in this world. We will explore various Hareidi positions that many Modern Orthodox Jews will find extremely problematic. I admit at the outset that some of this essay's examples highlight more extreme ideas in the Hareidi world. To counter the critique that I am cherry picking, I offer the following

responses.

I am not actually utilizing the most extreme voices such as Neturei Karta, Satmar hassidut, R. Menashe Klein, and the like. The voices I do cite are usually either significant rabbinic authorities (such as R. Wasserman, Hazon Ish, the Steipler, R. Dessler) or teachers at mainstream institutions (such as Chaim Berlin, Toras Moshe). The ideas surveyed have a place in conventional Hareidi discourse. Even if competing visions exist in the Hareidi orbit, someone joining the Hareidi world may not adopt more moderate versions. Furthermore, one cannot find other Hareidi leaders explicitly criticizing the positions outlined here. Thus, the risk of our children becoming attached to a harsher Hareidi view remains quite real.

A second critique of this essay could claim that the surveyed opinions have a basis in *ma'amarei Hazal* (talmudic and midrashic statements) and can be justified as is. I think that this will be true for some examples and not for others. In any case, my argument is not that none of this has rabbinic backing but that these are not positions congenial to Modern Orthodox Jews. For example, one can find traditional sources stating that, after a thousand years, the edict against polygamy has run out but we would think poorly of someone who relied upon that position.

Many of the sources involve disciples or family members citing prominent rabbis. I assert at the outset that I do not assume the accuracy of all of these stories. If the stories are true, my argument becomes stronger since it turns out that famous rabbis affirmed these ideas. If the stories are false, they still reflect a mode of discourse in the Hareidi world that goes unchallenged. Thus, the problem remains intact, albeit in less-intense form. We shall now explore Hareidi attitudes toward women, gentiles, Zionism, divine providence, faith, as well as other categories. This exploration reveals dramatic difference between communities.

## Women

Modern Orthodox Jews resist the notion that men bear a higher ontological worth than women, but this idea appears in Hareidi literature. R. Dovid Kastel, a Rosh Kollel in Yerushalayim, writes that “a big portion of a woman’s purpose is to be a helpmate; therefore, men are more fundamental than women.”<sup>[iii]</sup> In his portrayal of the ideal Jewish family structure, R. Avigdor Miller, *mashgiah* in Yeshivas Chaim Berlin for 20 years, writes, “There cannot be two kings....The wife is submissive.... He is the captain, but she is the First Mate whose counsel is respected.”<sup>[iv]</sup> When Rav Michel Shurkin, longtime *rebbe* at Toras Moshe, was disappointed about the birth of a daughter, R. Moshe Feinstein consoled him by saying, “What difference does it make to you if someone else raises the *iluy* (talmudic prodigy) who marries your daughter?”<sup>[v]</sup> Note that the consolation relates not to the worth of the daughter but to the cognitive capabilities of the son-in-law.

Modern Orthodox Jews would not denigrate the intellectual capabilities of women in the way that some Hareidi literature does. R. Yisrael Eliyahu Weintraub, a one-time *mashgiah* in Yeshivas Chaim Berlin who moved to Israel and became a close confidant of Rav Eliezer Menachem Shach, writes that “men need to develop their knowledge and wisdom” but women were not given this role; rather, they have the ability “to be fully dedicated to someone higher than them.”<sup>[vi]</sup> He counsels husbands not to explain deep matters to their wives but to go with simplicity. A little fear of judgment never hurt anyone.”<sup>[vii]</sup> R. Miller concurs. He advises women to look good for their husbands and not talk too much: “Talking and talking, you’re advertising that you have nothing in your head at all.”<sup>[viii]</sup>

These themes find powerful expression in additional stories told by R. Shurkin. He relates a story from his youth in which his older sister asked their father to learn some gemara together. His father’s face turned white and then the father gave his daughter a 10-dollar bill and told her to go buy a new dress. Note that he did not distract the sister with Tanakh or with works of Jewish thought but with clothing. Men study the depths of Torah whereas women like pretty dresses. R. Shurkin subsequently asked why the sister could not learn and his father told the following story. The father met a European Rav with a single daughter to whom he taught Torah. However, this learned daughter was unable to find a *shiddukh* since she considered every fellow too weak in learning for her. According to the elder R. Shurkin, this episode shows the perils of educating women.<sup>[ix]</sup> What kind of world makes their peace with the idea that bright and educated women cannot forge a healthy relationship with a husband?

More extreme versions of the need for *tzeniut* are rampant in the Hareidi world with the inability to show women’s pictures a prominent contemporary example. A book recording practices of the Steipler provides numerous examples. In his later years, he refused to read notes handwritten by women and would insist that the husbands write out the requests.<sup>[x]</sup> He would be careful not to walk between little girls in the street.<sup>[xi]</sup> He cites the Hazon Ish as saying that, in the times of the Sanhedrin, they would have killed women who wear pants.<sup>[xii]</sup> I think we can safely say that these sayings and practices convey an exaggerated sense of women as sexually charged individuals.

## Gentiles

R. Kastel writes that “gentiles only have seven mitzvot because they are truly nothing but only as a drop in the bucket and [exist] to help Israel.”<sup>[xiii]</sup> R. Miller affirms that the function of the nations is “to supply Israel with opportunities to gain Perfection.”<sup>[xiv]</sup> Many mainstream Hareidi works assume that gentiles are incapable of great acts. R. Itamar Schwartz’s popular *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh* states that non-Jews never perform acts of selfless love.<sup>[xv]</sup> Similarly, R. Moshe Dan Kestenbaum’s impressive *Olam Ha-Middot* affirms that gentile acts of compassion are truly self-serving.<sup>[xvi]</sup> The same attitude spills over into approaches to secular studies. If gentiles bear such little worth, they would obviously not produce great works of wisdom. Rav Shurkin relates that a discussion once broke out in his *shul* questioning if culture has any value. His father overheard the conversation, lifted his eyes, and said “Culture, *nivul peh*” and the debate ended.<sup>[xvii]</sup> R. Shurkin cites a Maimonidean ruling that the gentiles hate us and pursue us and, his father wondered, given such animosity, how even

secular Jews could involve themselves in gentile culture.[\[xviii\]](#) The irony of basing such opposition on Rambam, who wrote that Aristotle almost achieved the level of prophecy, is lost on Rav Shurkin. I think this approach to gentiles and their wisdom is quite foreign to Modern Orthodox Jewry.

## Zionism and Secularism

Both R. Elchanan Wasserman[\[xix\]](#) and the Steipler associate Zionist leaders with Amalek.[\[xx\]](#) According to R. Shurkin, a yeshiva fellow considering army service consulted with R. Moshe Feinstein who cited a tradition in the name of R. Chayim Soloveitchik that the Zionists are suspect of murder and one should not enlist.[\[xxi\]](#) The Klozenberger Rebbe sketched a contrast between the rest of Jewish history and the modern era. For some 1,900 years of exile, great rabbis led Am Yisrael and the Jewish people did not face total destruction. Since secularists took over the leadership, we lost 6 million Jews in the Holocaust, Russian and American Jewry face major assimilation, and the Jews in Israel are living as if in the Warsaw ghetto albeit with some weapons.[\[xxii\]](#) His account glosses over the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Chmielnicki massacres and the extensive suffering of Jews at many points in the long exile. Furthermore, granting that the Holocaust is a tragedy of greater proportions (something the Hareidi world tends to downplay), it is unfair to blame it on secular Jewish leadership without a clear causal connection.

R. Weintraub is quite extreme in this regard. He forcefully rejected an initiative to pair yeshiva students studying with Israeli soldiers in which the yeshiva fellows would learn and pray on behalf of their brethren in combat. His objections include the fact that earlier *gedolim* (the foremost rabbinic authorities of a generation) did not create such projects, that this initiative comes from a false feeling of inferiority on the part of the yeshiva students, and that he does not want any form of partnership or relationship with the secularists.[\[xxiii\]](#) He cites Rav Velvel Soloveitchik's reaction to the 1956 Sinai Campaign.

Those who were saved were due to the merit of the *bnei Torah* because the merit of Torah causes wondrous salvation. Those who were killed, may the merciful one protect us, were because they (the Zionists) were involved in this and if they had not been involved, no one would have been killed. It emerges that only those killed are on the government's account but they have no connection to the great salvation that occurred for that goes to the account of those toiling in Torah.[\[xxiv\]](#)

Let us survey the past 75 years of Jewish history. A Hareidi community decimated by the Holocaust was able to rebuild itself and the world of *yeshivot* largely by reestablishing *yeshivot* and communities in the land of Israel due to the Israeli government allowing them to manage their own

school system with a minimum of interference, offering health care and other services, and granting them an exemption from army service while other Israelis patrolled the Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian, and Jordanian borders and fought in multiple wars. Is this citation of Rav Velvel Soloveitchik the Hareidi reaction? Actually, we saved all the lives, and you did nothing! The lack of *hakarat haTov* (thankfulness) and the desecration of God's name (observant Jews repaying generosity with animosity) are frightening. No Modern Orthodox Jew would advance such positions.

This attitude generates some revisionist history. Let us hear again from R. Miller.

The Zionists (also "religious Zionists") delight in accusing the East-European Torah-leaders as "responsible" for the destruction of the Six Million, because they were not enthusiastic over the Zionist settlement of Eretz Yisrael. But it is common knowledge that the Torah-scholars founded the Jewish community in the Holy Land, and that the Zionists refused immigration for the orthodox.[\[xxv\]](#)

We appreciate a declaration about not blaming the Torah leaders but that is no excuse for blaming the Zionists. His "common knowledge" is based on Ben Hecht's *Perfidy* about which Deborah Lipstadt has said "he makes claims in there about the Labor Party, about Ben Gurion, not caring about what was going on in Europe, which is, again, historians now show, has simply not stood the test of time."[\[xxvi\]](#)

## Providence

The previous discussion leads us to different conceptions of providence. What is the balance between human activity and divine governance in how the world runs? R. Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, *mashgiach* at Ponevezh yeshiva, states that human endeavor actually produces nothing since God truly directs the world. The natural order is an illusion which the pious can overcome and thereby function in a more miraculous fashion. One classic formulation of this mode of thought says that humans must engage in *hishtadlut* (proper human effort), but they should realize that the effort does not truly bring about the desired result.[\[xxvii\]](#) I suggest that most Modern Orthodox Jews function with a worldview rooted in Rambam[\[xxviii\]](#) and Abravanel,[\[xxix\]](#) which recognizes the reality of the natural order and the ability of humanity to impact within that order.

R. Hayim Shmulevitz, Rosh Yeshiva at the Mir Yeshiva in Yerushalayim, cites two potential *hashkafic* positions. One says that the faithful can flourish with no efforts in the natural realm at all. The other disagrees and demands effort but everyone agrees that the effort has no direct impact. *Hazal* said “Greater is the one who enjoys the work of his hands more than the God fearer” (*Berakhot* 8a). I would have thought that this statement endorses human efforts. R. Shmulevitz explains that working individuals clearly experience how efforts play no role in achieving success and that realization is a major advantage.<sup>[xxx]</sup> He does not identify a possibility found in *rishonim* affirming the natural order and the human ability to manipulate the resources within it.<sup>[xxxi]</sup>

Let us see where a R. Dessler or R. Shmulevitz style starting point can lead. R. Nosson Sherman cites R. Shimon Schwab as saying, “I am convinced that what protects our brothers and sisters in Israel is the merit of the kollel families that endure poverty and hunger for the sake of Torah.”<sup>[xxxii]</sup> Even ignoring the over-romanticizing of the kollel lifestyle, note how the soldiers receive no mention. The Hazon Ish writes that prayer accomplishes more than *hishtadlut*.<sup>[xxxiii]</sup> According to Rav Shurkin, when Rav Moshe Feinstein heard of a fellow working on a cure for cancer, he responded that “Even if he found the cure for cancer, it would not be worth the *bittul Torah* (distraction from Torah study).”<sup>[xxxiv]</sup> We end up in a place where heroic human efforts to better the lives of others lose their worth. Only such a vantage point could explain the complete lack of gratitude toward the Israel Defense Forces.

Another factor may also play a role in downplaying the helpful efforts of secular Zionists. Earlier, we encountered the idea that gentiles are incapable of authentic benevolence. Secular Jews may not fare better. R. Avigdor Miller asserts that “Atheists, and disbelievers in a Torah from Sinai, are obviously insincere in any declarations of principles of any kind; they can have no more principle than birds or insects.”<sup>[xxxv]</sup> Such a perspective makes it very difficult to give credit to secularists.

A more intensive conception of divine providence often leads to a more simplistic application of reward and punishment models. After a terrorist attack on a bus returning from the kotel in the summer of 2002, R. Weintraub explained that the mixture of women and men on the bus violated principles of *tzeniut* which is why the merit of prayer at the kotel did not save the passengers.<sup>[xxxvi]</sup> To be fair, he does not claim that the attack was a direct punishment for the lack of *tzeniut* but it still seems an extreme reaction to coed bussing.

Matters get much more extreme when we turn to R. Avigdor Miller. R. Miller thinks we can understand the Holocaust due to the unprecedented level of assimilation in Germany. He finds various “measure for measure” items bolstering his theory:



Because the German Jews had spiritually destroyed their synagogues by Reform and by imitation of Churches, the Germans wrecked and burned the synagogues in the “Crystal Night.” German Jews bore gentile names; therefore the Nazis restored their Jewish identity by issuing a decree that every Jew must add the word “Israel” to his name and every Jewess the word “Sarah.”

Because, for the first time in Jewish history, women had ceased to cover their hair, the Germans shaved them bald in the death camps. Because the virtues of chaste dress and behavior were diminished in imitation of the gentiles, they were marched naked to the gas chambers, and Jewish women were subjected to every barbarous indecency before being killed.

Because they had so revered the physicians, especially the German specialists, they were subjected to the malicious experiments and torments which the German physicians imposed upon them. [\[xxxvii\]](#)

I believe no comment is necessary.

### **Extreme Application of Values**

R. Miller was likely led astray by his intense desire to justify God. When certain positive values become pushed to an extreme, other important values get unjustifiably shunted aside. The same phenomenon may explain how one could suggest that finding a cure for cancer does not excuse interrupting Torah study. The Hareidi world prizes Talmud Torah in a very impressive fashion; however, this may also prove to be an Achilles’ heel when taken to an extreme. R. Shurkin reports that when R. Elchanan Wasserman was learning in the Radin kollel, he received a telegram that his wife had given birth to a son. When he asked the Hafetz Hayim if he should return home, the latter answered, “Are you a *mohel*?” [\[xxxviii\]](#) I fully realize that travel was harder and infrequent in that era but perhaps rejoicing with one’s family in the birth of a child justifies missing some yeshiva time.

A biography of R. Yosef Shalom Elyashiv cites the childhood recollections of his daughter Bat Sheva, wife of R. Haim Kanievsky:

When we were children, he did not know us at all. He never spoke to us from good to bad. Only once a week, Shabbat afternoon, when he could not learn from a *sefer*

because it was dark and he did not use the electricity, he would go out for a walk, and the children took turns accompanying their father. Do not think that he spoke to us; he consistently thought about learning, but it was an honor for the child to walk with father.[\[xxxix\]](#)

Inconceivable that such a story would appear in a biography of R. Lichtenstein or R. Amital. I suggest that becoming a *gadol* actually involves the crucible of child rearing.

According to R. Itamar Schwartz, a well-known story relates that R. Hayim Sanzer looked happy on the way back from his son's funeral. When questioned about this surprising mood, he answered with a parable. "A man waking in the street is struck in the back. He recoils backward to see who did it, and discovers that it was his good friend who clapped him on the back as a sign of affection."[\[xl\]](#) Here too, justifying God creates an idealization of a degree of indifference to the loss of one's child.

An equally frightening tale appears in *Shimusha Shel Torah*, a work of stories from Rav Shach collected by R. Asher Bergman. R. Yosel Slutzker, later Rav of Slutzk, was orphaned from his father and was one of the best students in the Volozhin yeshiva. A letter arrived from his mother asking him to come home because she was struggling to maintain the family business. R. Hayim Volozhin hid the letter from his student. A second letter complained that she received no response to her first letter and R. Hayim hid that one as well. The third letter said that a fire had left them destitute. The fourth letter, from a sister, related that the mother was dying. The fifth letter reported that the mother had passed away and begged the brother to return home and care for younger siblings orphaned from both parents. R. Hayim hid all the letters and only showed them to his student years later. He explained that all these distractions were the Satan trying to prevent the development of a *Gadol haDor* (the greatest rabbinic authority of a generation).[\[xli\]](#) In contrast, Modern Orthodox Jews would say that caring for your mother and siblings in times of need is a crucial part of cultivating greatness.

## Faith

It is commonly assumed in Hareidi literature that the existence of God is obvious to any fair-minded person. Therefore, skeptics and heretics function dishonestly by allowing desires to influence their judgment. Hedonistic impulses distort their analysis. Rav Wasserman, [\[xlii\]](#) R. Dessler,[\[xliii\]](#) and others adopt this position. This interpretation of *kofrim* (heretics) allows religious individuals to both assume they are clearly correct while accusing their opponents of bad faith. The only drawback is that the position is false. Some atheists may have ulterior motives but certainly not all of them. I personally



have gone through stages when it seemed difficult to affirm Rambam's 13 principles. Many students, desperately wanting to believe, have approached me with their theological questions. Some ultimately found their place within Orthodoxy while others did not. To accuse them all of simply hungering for cheeseburgers would be cruel and unjustified.

## Intellectual Understanding

Modern Orthodox Jews prize the use of the intellect even when confronting issues of Jewish theology. Some Hareidi voices prefer a simple faith which eschews analysis. R. Schwartz's *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh* says that we should only be asking "what" and never "why."

The attempt to understand God's works—the very thought of this—shows the lowliness of a created being, who thinks he has the ability to understand. One cannot understand anything!! Not why we need to wash hands and not why we need to learn Torah. We only know what we have to do, and we do it because we were commanded.[\[xliv\]](#)

R. Schwartz does not address the fact that the majority of *rishonim* endorsed the endeavor of offering rationales for *mitzvot*. Interestingly, some rabbis apply this anti-intellectual orientation even to human behavior. R. Shurkin relates how R. Mendel Zaks contrasted two biographies of the Hafetz Hayim in order to convey a preference for the one penned by R. Moshe Meir Yosher. The other volume tries to explain the Hafetz Hayim's actions, whereas R. Yosher simply records them.[\[xlv\]](#) Apparently, even human guidance should be taken on authority alone. I suggest that one could not possibly apply modeled behavior to novel situations unless one knows the rationale for the behavior.

## The Role of *Gedolim*

The Hareidi world puts much more emphasis on its rabbinic leadership than Modern Orthodoxy does. This includes granting them authority in political matters (*Daas Torah*), telling stories about their otherworldly qualities, and making them a consistent and central focus of religious discourse. Several prominent Hareidi voices explain that *yeshivot* exist to produce *gedolei Torah*, and the curriculum should reflect that even if it does not serve the needs of the bulk of students. R. Dessler famously

preferred the Lithuanian model of Jewish education over the German one because it was more likely to generate great sages even if the German method more successfully produced committed *ba'al haBatim*. He justifies such a strategy despite his understanding that it will cause some to "separate from the Torah path" and he identifies with Rambam's elitism: "Let a thousand fools die and one sage enjoy." [\[xlv\]](#) Modern Orthodox Jews will be wary of attributing that much stature to *gedolim*.

## ***Hashkafic Diversity***

R. Dessler writes that *Hazal* only argue in halakhic matters but not with regard to aggadic material since both positions convey aspects of the truth. Even when the gemara uses the word "*u-pligi* (and they disagree)" in an aggadic context, R. Dessler explains that it refers to portraying different angles on the matter rather than to actual dispute. [\[xlvi\]](#) Now, I do consider finding the truth in every side a valuable endeavor, but that does not mean that no disputes exist. For example, R. Dessler contends that Rambam and Ramban truly agree about Judaism's attitude toward medicine. Ramban states that, ideally the sick would turn to God and not to doctors but once people chose the natural order, they need to function within it and go to the doctor. According to R. Dessler, Rambam agrees and the medieval giant's robust endorsement of medicine is only for those who abandon the ideal path. [\[xlviii\]](#) The problem with his theory is that Rambam gives no hint of such a position, and it flies in the face of Rambam's consistent endorsement of the natural order.

R. Shimshon Pincus' popular *Shearim beTefila* shares the same tendency. The Vilna Gaon on *Tehillim* says that a wicked man with full *bitahon* in God will receive divine benevolence. This idea seems to clash with both *Hovot Halevavot* and *Hazon Ish*. The former says that *bitahon* only works for someone free of sin, whereas the latter says *bitahon* never meant that things will work out the way I want. Rather than just taking note of an important debate, R. Pincus asserts that they all agree; it just depends on the level of trust. The highest level of *bitahon* guarantees good results even for the wicked. [\[xlix\]](#)

The approach is not only incorrect; it is also harmful. We will not be able to adequately analyze the strengths and weaknesses of two positions when I start out by flattening them into one identical stance. Secondly, it leaves all Jews bereft of a *hashkafic* range of opinions with which to select from and identify with. We need to present our students with different views of providence so that they can connect with the position that coheres with their experiences. Hareidi minimizing of *hashkafic* variance hurts the community.

## **A Contemporary Example**

Perhaps some readers will think that all the sources I cite remain in the abstract realm of theory and do not seriously impact on current Hareidi decision-making. Investigation of Hareidi responses to the war currently going on between Israel and Hamas reveals otherwise. A small number of Hareidi men did enlist in the IDF, and a larger number of Hareidim participated in providing food and other services for those called up to the armed forces. However, public statements by the leadership strike a very different note.

R. Dov Landau, Rosh Yeshiva of Slobodka in Bnei Brak and currently considered one of the *gedolim*, said that R. Shai Graucher, a man tirelessly dedicated to *hessed* for IDF soldiers, is a *mazzik gamur* (fully destructive person) for distracting time and resources away from Talmud Torah. R. Meir Kessler, Rav of Kiryat Sefer, wrote against taking time from Talmud Torah to engage in *hessed* initiatives for the war. R. Yaakov Hillel advised not to siphon funds away from supporting yeshiva learning toward the war effort. R. Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern allowed volunteering drives to help the soldiers but only on condition that the observant Jews not identify and feel connected to the *erev rav* of secular Jewry. R. Simcha Bunim Schreiber, a Rosh Yeshiva of Nesiv Hatorah appointed by Rav Shteinman said in a *siha* (brief discourse) that we need not feel greater gratitude to IDF soldiers than to garbage men. Furthermore, he contended that almost no one serves in *Tzahal* (Israel Defense Forces) willingly. The last claim is empirically false; witness the many reservists who showed up for duty without receiving a *tzav shemoneh* (draft order). Lest one think that such sentiments only find expression in the Israeli Hareidi rabbinate, R. Aharon Feldman, Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisrael, explained why he is not in favor of special prayers for soldiers at the front. "I am afraid that if you start to be *mispallel* (pray) for soldiers, this will glorify *tzahal* and will create problems later when they start passing laws to draft yeshiva *bochurim* into the army."

How did these rabbis arrive at a position with such minimal sympathy for the major sacrifices made and personal risks taken by Israeli soldiers? The categories outlined in this essay provide the explanation. If one thinks that the Torah study of kollel fellows provides greater protection than those physically protecting our borders, then it becomes easier to downplay gratitude to *hayyalim* (Israeli soldiers). If a community adopts one value as supreme and excludes other important values, then no breaks in Talmud Torah are allowed to help those in the field. Making sure that Torah study continues becomes so important that we cannot even recite individualized prayers for soldiers in danger lest the community come to glorify soldiers more than yeshiva fellows. Finally, other Hareidi rabbanim who might disagree with these positions are not able to publicly criticize them so that it will not seem that real *hashkafic* debates exist or to avoid saying that a *gadol* made a serious error in judgment. R. Schreiber did receive some pushback, but there was no public argument made against the comments of R. Landau or R. Feldman.

## Conclusion

We could discuss other issues dividing between Hareidim and Modern Orthodoxy such as *Da'as Torah*, the relationship between *peshat* and *derash*, *Hazal*'s knowledge of science, the value of human ethical intuitions, and potential misbehavior of biblical heroes, but this will suffice for now. My list even leaves out certain additional communal flaws such as protecting abusers from the government and dishonest portrayals of Jewish history. Thus, I did not paint the blackest possible picture.

I myself benefitted from learning in Hareidi *yeshivot* yet would not send my children to such institutions and think that I have adequately explained why. Those considering such a move should mull over the many concerns raised in this essay. Perhaps one can minimize the dangers by identifying with more temperate Hareidi voices such as R. Aaron Lopiansky. Additionally, Hareidim who live in the United States can count on the reality that moderate voices have greater influence in America than in Israel. On the other hand, the three most extreme voices surveyed in this essay are R. Avigdor Miller, R. Elya Weintraub, and R. Michel Shurkin. The first spent his entire rabbinic career in America and the other two studied and taught in the United States before moving to Israel. No risk-free options exist in life, and the Hareidi lifestyle involves difficulties and dangers.

Some opponents of this essay will undoubtedly state that I have no right to write critically about *gedolim*. In a world of *hashkafic* debate, there is no substitute for evaluating different positions and seeing which ones make the most sense. This is what I have tried to do above, and it seems to me that most Modern Orthodox Jews would identify with my preferences. In fact, limiting ideological discussion to citing rabbinical authorities rather than analyzing issues is another significant weakness of the Hareidi community.

What are the potential practical ramifications of this essay? If one lives in an “out of town community,” there may not be non-Hareidi educators available. However, one may live in a city with various *hashkafic* educational options, and these factors could influence decision-making. These ideas could impact on choices of *yeshivot* and seminaries. Perhaps parents should investigate whether or not staff members send their boys to the army and their girls to *sherut leumi* (National Service) or the army. If not, these teachers are falling short in their ethical commitment to Am Yisrael, and their students are much more likely to be exposed to institutional staffs dominated by Hareidi ideology.

Although my main target audience is the Modern Orthodox readership, I would like to also address any Hareidi readers. No one likes criticism, and I imagine your instinctive reaction will be defensive. Please write a strong defense, but also consider the possibility of points worth admitting to. For example, perhaps clearly state that you utterly reject R. Miller's explanation for the Holocaust and that the portrayal of R. Haim Volozhin's hiding emotional wrought family letters from his student does not cohere with your worldview.

I have mixed feelings about publishing this essay. At the Mesivta of Long Beach, at Toras Moshe, and especially at Camp Munk, I encountered many fellows of outstanding character from a Hareidi background who would not identify with the worldview of R. Shurkin or R. Miller. I have no desire to insult them or hurt their feelings. At the same time, these ideas exist in the Hareidi world, and it seems worthy to confront them. Furthermore, even my old friends have been influenced by these currents. It may manifest in discourse about women and gentiles, in failing to acknowledge that

soldiers protect Medinat Yisrael more than kollel students, or in attributing excessive knowledge or authority to the *gedolim*. I think it important to argue for a different style *yahadut*.

Modern Orthodoxy has many shortcomings, which I have written about in several other forums, and our community needs to focus the bulk of its energies on self-improvement.<sup>[i]</sup> We must encourage more of our talented sons and daughters to consider Jewish education as a career and find ways to make that more financially feasible. If we generated communities with more powerful religious commitment, fewer would look elsewhere in search of spiritual authenticity. Even given all of that, this essay suggests that the Hareidi option is not a viable solution.

<sup>[i]</sup> See the comments of Joel B. Wolowelsky in his Letter to the Editor, *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 8 (1998–1999), pp. 329–331.

<sup>[ii]</sup> Some object to my using the term "Hareidi" for the American version. If readers prefers to substitute "yeshivish" or "black hat," it will not change the basic argument.

<sup>[iii]</sup> R. David Kastel, *Darkei David Sotah* Vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 5752) p. 313.

<sup>[iv]</sup> R. Avigdor Miller, *Awake My Glory: Aspects of Jewish Theology* (New York, 1980), pp. 339–340.

<sup>[v]</sup> R. Michel Shurkin, *Meged Givot Olam* (Jerusalem 5762) 1:60.

<sup>[vi]</sup> R. Yisrael Elyiahu Weintraub, *Iggerot Daat* (5771) p. 168.

<sup>[vii]</sup> *Iggerot Daat*, p. 200.

<sup>[viii]</sup> *Q and A: Thursday Nights with Rabbi Avigdor Miller Volume 3* (2014) p. 314.

[ix] *Meged Givot Olam* I:15–16.

[x] *Orhot Rabbenu* (Bnei Brak 5756), 1:197.

[xi] *Orhot Rabbenu* 1:197.

[xii] *Orhot Rabbenu* 1:226.

[xiii] *Darkei David* p. 314.

[xiv] *Awake My Glory*, p. 147.

[xv] R. Itamar Schwartz, *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh* Volume 1 p. 119.

[xvi] R. Dan Kestenbaum, *Olam ha-Middot* (5772), p. 174.

[xvii] *Meged Givot Olam* 1:79.

[xviii] R. Michel Shurkin, *Meged Givot Olam* Volume 2 (Jerusalem, 5775) p. 56.

[xix] *Kovetz Ma'amarim* (Jerusalem 5765) p. 202.

[xx] *Orhot Rabbenu* 3:147.



[xxi] *Meged Givot Olam* 1:60.

[xxii] Cited in *ki-she-Yahadut Pogeshet Medina* ed. Yedidya Stern et. al (Tel Aviv 2015) pp. 238–239.

[xxiii] R. Yisrael Eliyahu Weintraub, *Einei Yisrael*, (Bnei Brak 5770) pp. 433–434.

[xxiv] *Einei Yisrael*, p. 434.

[xxv] *Awake My Glory*, p. 151.

[xxvi] BBC Documentary on Rudolf Kastner "*Setting the Past Free*." Lipstadt's comments are at the 20-minute mark.

[xxvii] *Mikhtav me-Eliyahu* 1 pp. 187–206.

[xxviii] *Moreh Nevukhim* 2:29, 48.

[xxix] Commentary on *Devarim* (Jerusalem 5744) p. 92.

[xxx] R. Hayim Shmulevitz, *Sihot Mussar* (Israel 2013) *Vayikra* 69 pp. 301–303.

[xxxi] For an excellent analysis of these issues, see David Shatz, "Practical Endeavor and the Torah u-Madda Debate," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 3 (1991–1992), pp. 98–149.

[xxxii] R. Nosson Scherman, "Finding God in the Rubble," *Jewish Action* (Winter 2001) p. 20.

[xxxiii] *Kovetz Mikhtavim me'et Maran Ba'al ha-Hazon Ish* (Bnei Brak 5741) p. 5.

[xxxiv] *Meged Givot Olam* 1:23.

[xxxv] *Awake My Glory*, p. 104.

[xxxvi] *Iggerot Daat* pp. 271–272.

[xxxvii] R. Avigdor Miller, *Rejoice O Youth* (New York, 1962) pp. 349–351.

[xxxviii] *Meged Givot Olam*, 1:27.

[xxxix] *Ha-Shakdan: Pirkei Mofet Odot Yegiah, u-Peilot mi-Shkedato beTorah shel Rabbenu..R. Elyashiv* (Jerusalem 5770/5771) p. 63.

[xl] *Bilvavi Mishkan Eveneh* Volume 2 p. 179.

[xli] Asher Bergman, *Shimusha Shel Torah* (Bnei Brak 5758) pp. 24–25.

[xlii] See his *Ma'amar al Haemunah* in *Kovetz Ma'amarim* (Jerusalem 5765) pp. 1–6.

[xliii] R. Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, *Mikhtav me-Eliyahu* 1 (Israel 1990) pp. 173–174.

[xliv] *Bilvavi MIshkan Evneh* Volume 2, p. 294.

[xlv] *Meged Givot Olam* i:48–49.

[xlvi] *Mikhtav me-Eliyahu* 3 (Israel 2002) pp. 355–358.

[xlvii] *Mikhtav me-Eliyahu* 3 pp. 353–354.

[xlviii] *Mikhtav m-Eliyahu* 3 pp. 170–172.

[xlix] R. Shimshon Pincus, *Shearim be-Tefila* (Israel 5755) p. 80.

[1] See my "Contemporary Challenges for Modern Orthodoxy," *The Next Generation of Modern Orthodoxy* ed. Shmuel Hain (New York 2012) pp. 299–317 and "Modern Orthodoxy and Discriminating Judgment," *Conversations* (Fall 2023) p. 1–6.