

“As Swords Thrust Through the Body”: The Neziv’s Rejection of Separatism

Howard S. Joseph

Abstract: An analysis of the views of Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, known as the Neziv, one of the leading Orthodox rabbis of the 19th century. For communal and theological reasons, he opposed Orthodox separation from non-Orthodox Jews, advocating Jewish communal harmony and joint Torah study in the face of post-Enlightenment deviations and denominational movements.

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The modern era presents Jews with many dilemmas. In responding to these challenges Jews have taken differing approaches and developed varying degrees of attachment to the traditional Jewish life guided by *halakhah*. Before modernity, it was assumed that the system of *halakhah* shaped every Jew’s life into a series of obligations and responsibilities that programmed daily life according to time, place and circumstance. Modernity shattered that assumption.

Those Jews who attempted to cling most intensely to the traditional lifestyle of *halakhah* became known as Orthodox, initially a derogatory term used by reformist elements of the Jewish community to describe its more conservative members. Since the Enlightenment, Orthodox and non-Orthodox tensions have become a permanent feature of modern Jewish life.

Orthodoxy can be understood as a resistance movement against the forces of dissolution Jews face in modern times. Reform also saw itself as resisting the enticements of conversion to Christianity. Today’s Conservative movement also claims that it resists the powers of assimilation. Seen in this perspective, Orthodoxy is the most radical of the resistance movements to the forces of assimilation and integration, displaying the highest degree of conscious rejection of modern values. As such, Orthodoxy is often characterized by its heightened sense of siege, while the other movements appear more at ease with modernity.

As there are varieties of non-Orthodox ideologies, so too there are varieties within Orthodoxy itself in the modern era. The nineteenth century saw these types crystallize

into various distinct elements: Hasidic, Lithuanian Yeshiva, Hungarian and German Neo-Orthodoxy associated with Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. As constituents of Orthodoxy they share a common commitment to halakhic observance as a necessity of any authentic representation of Judaism. They disagree, however, on various attitudinal questions that shape their responses to the particular challenges of modern living. These are in the areas of general education, the role of women, and Zionism, to name but a few.

During the past decades intra-Orthodox tensions have escalated. Those who identify with the attitudes of Modern Orthodoxy have sometimes been overwhelmed by strident criticisms coming from the Ultra-Orthodox community. The latter have at times engaged in a campaign to delegitimize the positions of the former on a variety of subjects. Modern Orthodox have been portrayed as weak, compromising, and not truly committed to halakhic procedures and requirements.

Modern Orthodox representatives have sought models for their positions in earlier times. Many models have been found wanting, however, for they represent pre-modern views that purportedly fail to consider the new dangers that inhere in contemporary life. The question remains whether there are modern authorities who are aware of modern conditions and yet favor the positions that have come to be associated with Modern Orthodoxy.

One of the most intensely debated issues within Orthodoxy has been the question of the Orthodox relationships to non-observant Jews and to organizations

that advocate a non-Orthodox or secular form of Judaism. Should observant Jews disassociate from them or engage them in some areas of joint interest?

As one of leading Orthodox rabbis of the nineteenth century, Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (1817–1893), known by his initials as ‘the Neziv’, confronted this issue in a number of his works. I will analyze his views on Jewish communal harmony, specifically the issue of the treatment of non-Orthodox individuals in the community. His writings can be divided into (I) the integrity and unity of Israel, (II) Jewish communal harmony, (III) his conception of the total community and its leadership, and, (IV) the limits of tolerance. These texts are located in his commentary on the Pentateuch entitled *Ha-Ameq Davar*, his super-commentary to the latter, *Harhev Davar*; his commentary to Song of Songs (*Shir HaShirim*) entitled *Metiv Shir*, his *responsa* entitled *Meshiv Davar*, and his attempt at a philosophy of Jewish history (*Shear Yisrael*).¹ A brief conclusion (V) follows these sections.

I. On the Integrity and Unity of Israel

For the Neziv, maintaining the integrity of Israel is a primary covenantal obligation. He derives this responsibility from his understanding of the covenant between God and Abraham, one that includes Abraham’s descendants as well. The Neziv considers the specific obligation for Jews to keep themselves separate from other nations to be Biblical in origin:

“And He said to Abraham, your children shall be strangers in a foreign land. They will be enslaved and persecuted for four hundred years. I will then judge the nation that enslaved them and they will

depart with great wealth,” (Genesis 15:13–14).

The Neziv expounds on the fundamental significance of this imperative: “In addition to being a prophecy that this will occur, it is an instructive warning for the future: your children shall be strangers, visitors among the nations and must not wish to mix with them, becoming similar to them in life-style and manners. Therefore, it is written of Jacob, ‘He visited there [Egypt]’ (Deuteronomy 26:5), which means that he did not go there with the intention to dwell permanently.”²

He also discusses this theme in *Harhev Davar* to Genesis 15:14:

“Your children shall be strangers”—This is also a promise. That is, because of all the troubles they will not have to assimilate, God forbid, into the nations they enter to be like them in order not to suffer any longer. Furthermore, this is a revelation of God’s will (*gilui da’at Ha-Shem*) that we be only strangers and not seek to better ourselves among the nations by being like them and as citizens.... Although to human judgment it appears to be the opposite in that if we become citizens and be considered part of them they will not harm us. Thus we learn from the case of Laban that this is not so....

The Neziv establishes the separate integrity of Israel that must be maintained for the future. He leaves open question of what to do about unity when confronted with those who are casual about the integrity of the nation through their lack of observance of the traditional covenantal

¹ I have translated *Shear Yisrael* and treated The Neziv’s ideas in it in my, [Why Antisemitism](#) (Northvale: Jason Aronson), 1996. It is the Neziv’s attempt at a philosophy of Jewish history, bringing together many of his ideas.

² See [Why Antisemitism](#), Ch. 3, and his commentary to the *baggadab*, “*Imrei Shefer*.”

mitzvot. We will address this specific question as we move along, but first it is important to observe how the Neziv addresses the obligation to maintain unity among Jews.³

Rabbi Berlin discusses the concept of Jewish unity in numerous places. One of the most vivid of his points is made in regard to Deuteronomy 32:9, “Indeed, the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the rope of His allotment.” The Neziv seizes upon the image of the rope and comments:

The entire nation (*umah*) is here compared to a rope that is wound with many threads. In the *Sifre* the explanation is given: Just as the rope is composed of three strands so too Jacob is third of the Ancestors.... According to my understanding the simile is that Israel is likened to a thick rope composed of tens of thousands of strands. At the top the rope is tightly wound while at the bottom the strands are individually distinct. Similarly, the Holy Blessed One, as it were, is the Soul of Souls to whom all the souls of Israel are tightly bound above. Below each one has an individual soul. This is why Israel is called “*goy ehad*”, one nation, for they are united in their root above. (*Ha-Ameq Davar*, Deuteronomy 32:9)

In Genesis 49:24 he reiterates much the same point, but extends the image:

This is why the Sages teach (San. 84) that when an Israelite suffers the *Shekhinah* says ‘I have been disgraced.’ It is as if we moved one of the individual strands at the bottom of the rope. This would affect the top of the rope as well.... This is the great Strength of Jacob (*Avir Ya’akov*) [an expression

which the Neziv understands as a name of God.] For this reason it is forbidden to take vengeance against each other.

The Neziv also connects this idea to Leviticus 19:18 the ‘love’ commandment: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord.” On this verse he comments:

From the language of the *Yerushalmi* I learned another explanation for the juxtaposition in this verse (i.e. the connection between not taking vengeance and being loving.) The *Yerushalmi* explains (*Nedarim* 9:4) ‘You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen.’ This is like one who while cutting meat his hand slips and cuts his other hand. Will he now cut his hand [that had slipped while holding the knife to avenge its error?] [No.] It says be loving to your neighbor as yourself. Rabbi Akiva says: “This is a great principle in the Torah.”

This means that vengeance is like one who is carelessly cutting meat. Would it enter his mind to now hit or cut the first hand in vengeance? This is why the obligation to be loving follows the prohibition of vengeance. Even though one’s own life and welfare have precedence over that of others the other is like oneself. It is improper for one limb to strike another. Even if one limb already did so no vengeance would be sought for it. So too one should not seek vengeance against someone who has hurt you. This is why it says ‘as yourself,’ for all Israel is one being (*kol yisrael nefesh ahat*).

³ The Neziv’s concept of Jewish integrity may be the inspiration of the concept of *Berit Avot*, the ancestral covenant that appears in the thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, The Neziv’s great-great-grandson, as well as in the thought of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook who was a disciple of Rabbi Berlin. (See Introduction to [Why Antisemitism](#)) Rabbi Soloveitchik sometimes calls the ancestral covenant: The Covenant in Egypt. See “*Kol Dodi Dofek*”, in *Besod Ha-Yahid Veba-Yahad*, edited by Pinchas Peli, (Jerusalem: Orot, 5736), p. 331 (Hebrew). It has been translated by L. Kaplan, in [Theological and Halakhic Reflections on the Holocaust](#), edited by Bernhard H. Rosenberg, co-edited by Fred Heuman, (Hoboken and New York: Ktav Publishing House and Rabbinical Council of America) 1992. See p.80.

Israel is God's rope that descends into the world from above. Israel's essence is derived from God in Heaven, her 'Soul of Souls.' As the rope descends its threads become more distinct, reflecting each Jew's individuality. Israel is God's portion, and as such the fate of the individual threads and the rope itself reflect the status of God's name and glory in the world. If a Jew is injured by another Jew or by a gentile, God's position in the world is diminished. That is, God suffers along with injured Israel.

This function served by Israel is not a voluntary one. Willy-nilly, every Jew belongs to this metaphysical category. All are part of the mystery. Just as we are human and cannot be otherwise, so too we are Jews bound in covenant with God and cannot be otherwise. Leviticus 19:18 serves as another metaphor for Jewish unity according to the Neziv. Israel is one being with distinct limbs. The limbs must never forget that they all belong to one being, and therefore vengeance upon another Jew constitutes an attack on one's own body. As such, it is self-destructive, irrational and unjustifiable.

II. On Jewish Communal Harmony

Rabbi Berlin often treats the question of Jewish communal harmony in the face of deep division of opinion on fundamental subjects. His comments often focus on the issue of *sinat hinam*, [gratuitous hatred] which the Talmud (*Yoma* 9a) maintains led to the destruction of the Temple and exile. The Neziv believes that excessive intra-Jewish friction brought about the great tragedies in Jewish history. However instructive talmudic comments may be, they

refer to an era safely removed from modern times. Nevertheless, the Neziv applied these talmudic teachings to his contemporary reality and the intense divisions brought about by the various Jewish responses to modernity.

An article in the journal *Mahazikei Ha-Dat* occasioned the Neziv's most thorough comments on the subject.⁴ In response to this article the Neziv wrote a lengthy essay that was later printed with his *responsa*. It appears in *Meshiv Davar* as 1:44 entitled, "On Right and Left."⁵ The Neziv directly addresses the contemporary scene.

I saw an article entitled "Right and Left" in the journal *Mahazikei Ha-Dat*, Volume 3, by one of the editors in which an important question is raised. Since it is our responsibility to participate in efforts to strengthen the faith of Israel I could not desist from presenting my thoughts on this issue to the members of *Mahazikei Ha-Dat*, may *Ha-Shem* bless them. Anyone else who has anything to respond and clarify in these matters in another way let their words come and enlighten our lives. For although we are removed geographically from one another we are close to each other in our desire and willingness to arrive at the goal with the help of the knowing and guiding God.⁶

The author of the original article attempted to divide the Jewish community into three parts: the Right (the righteous or saintly), who remove themselves from all earthly matters not even benefiting to the extent of a small finger's worth;

⁴ An organization called *Mahazikei Ha-Dat* (Upholders of the Faith) was founded in Western Europe in 1879 and published a bi-monthly journal under the same name from 1879–1913. The founders were from hasidic groups and the Sofer family, the leaders of Hungarian Orthodoxy. It was the predecessor organization to Agudat Israel later founded in 1912 and including German Orthodoxy as well. A branch was established in England in 1891. *Mahazikei Ha-dat* represented what would be called today a *haredi* position on many issues. The Hebrew University library has some of the early issues of this short-lived journal. I was unable to locate the original essay which prompted The Neziv's response. [Email correspondence with Dr. Benjamin Richler.]

⁵ See the translation of this essay in the appendix to this article.

⁶ The Neziv dealt with these themes over many years. Yet one senses that he was waiting for an opportunity to publicly state his position without directly attacking some of the leading Orthodox scholars of the nineteenth century. Here he challenges an apparently lesser known advocate of the position. He is also aware that being in Lithuania he is somewhat removed geographically from the scene of greatest tensions in Central Europe. However, as we will see, he argues that the issues are important for all because they affect the destiny of the entire nation.

the Left (the wicked), who either out of ignorance or brazen willfulness throw off the yoke of Torah and religion; and the Center, who innocently follow the ways of the world without rejecting the Torah. The Neziv took exception to this division, finding it confused and unacceptable:

With all due respect, I believe that the author does not follow through on his initial question. He began with the question of whether there are three different trends in our religion and faith and concludes that the Left is equivalent to a rejection of the Torah and religion. In other words, the Left is outside of our faith.

Also confusing is the expression 'maybe' concerning the three trends. What kind of question is this? We have always had three trends: the completely righteous, the wicked and the intermediate. The question really should be whether among the followers of our faith and religion, among those who do not reject Torah, there are to be found three groups. This is the question that should be properly researched.

The Neziv moves the discussion towards the subjects of love of God and *devequt*, the intense connectedness to God. After all, these are the goals of Torah. If there are three trends in Judaism, they must be defined in terms of this over-arching objective. The Neziv's discussion of *ahavat Ha-Shem*—the love of God—also yields three trends, differently defined. The one who is on the Right is one whose mind is continually imbued with love and attachment (*devequt*) to God, and who closely approaches the *Shekhinah*. This is truly the way of piety (*hasidut*), which is impossible except for one who separates from the world. The one who stands on this exalted level finds it difficult to associate with other people even to teach them Torah and morals. Every interaction with others interrupts the intellectual connectedness that is impossible without isolation (*hitbodedut*).

Regarding the latter two categories, the Neziv writes:

There is a second God worshipper who observes all the details of Torah but who does not know the taste of love and *devequt*. This one does not separate at all to achieve this love. . . . These are called Leftists for they are removed from extreme closeness to the *Shekhinah* and the Spirit of Holiness (*Ruah Ha-Qodesh*).

There are also those who follow a middle path. During recital of *keriat shemah* and *tefillah* their minds approach love and *devequt* of God while the rest of the day they are occupied with worldly affairs. Those on this intermediate way are also called pious (*hasidim*), but in a different manner than the ones above: They are *hasidim* in deeds.

In this context he issues a warning on zealotry:

Now let us look at Levi and Phineas who both were zealous against sexual immorality and were totally devoted on this issue. Yet Phineas rose to the highest level, while Levi was rebuked by his father. There are many similar instances. The explanation is that [zealousness] requires great precision to evaluate the activity according to time and place. It is also necessary to understand many Torah principles that are not always clear. Thus it is impossible to be this type of *hasid* except through Torah study. The way of *hasidut* through love of God and *devequt*, which one imagines does not require Torah learning but only sincerity (*temimut*), isolation and intention for love of God, is not correct. Even the one who prepares for and clings to love of God requires at least being very careful not to deviate from the way of Torah. Holy desire and love 'more intense than death' should not lead away from reason.

The Neziv insists that any disrespect for the middle group is sinful. In the middle are many *hasidim*, pious followers of the way of Torah:

The result of our explanation is that not all of those who follow the middle path in the service of God are to be considered middling [in their commitment], for many of the Centrists can be considered as *hasidim*. Not in the sense of those immersed in isolation in love and *devequt*, but in the sense of *hasidim* in deeds as we explained above according to the words of our sages.... We might think that those in the center are the ones who neither reject the yoke [of Torah] but are not careful in observance. However, it is clear that in the middle category there are many gradations ranging between the two poles of righteous and wicked.

These three types are the constituents of the Torah community. There have always been these three trends in the Torah community, as they exist today. The Neziv demonstrates this point with a careful analysis of Isaiah 30:20–21.⁷

The Neziv continues his response to the author of the *Mahazikei Ha-Dat* article now focused on the question of those Jews outside the realm of commitment to one of the three trends. Should we disassociate ourselves from them? The original author is an advocate of separation, fearing that modern times threatens the middle *hasid* more than in the past.

The Neziv describes the siege attitude that has characterized much of Orthodoxy in modern times. It can be summarized as follows: Judaism is in greater danger than ever before. Since this is the worst generation in history, there is much about which to be afraid. Isolation and separation are, therefore, the strategies to adopt. These strategies have come to be defining qualities of what is now called Ultra-Orthodoxy. The Neziv strongly disagrees with this assessment of the historical reality:

We must realize that the facts are not as the writer reports, namely, that there has never been a generation

so rejecting as our own. This is not true at all. Even when we first entered our Holy Land and for many generations following thereafter the desire for idolatry was prevalent and, indeed, burned as intensely as an oven as the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 102b) says. It was obvious that no one could be certain of avoiding this idolatrous trend unless one behaved in the way of *hasidut* continually turning one's mind to the way of God.

During the first Temple period idolatry was a major issue continuously addressed by the prophets, yet they never advocated separation from the idolaters. Since the passion for idolatry among Jews has long been overcome, those terrible times have passed. Today's problems are different:

In our generation, however, there has been an increase in unbelievers with faulty ideas concerning the authority of the Talmud, for example. Our sages have said (*Avodah Zarah* 27b) that a person should not engage in business with a heretic. The *gemara* explains that heretics attract others to follow them. For this reason one who is not cautious is in danger of being drawn to them after a while.

This is an obvious reference to the Reform movement, which questioned talmudic authority and is a different phenomenon than ordinary moral or spiritual weaknesses. It therefore requires a different response and a carefully well thought-out strategy. Thus the Neziv passionately disagrees with the writer's suggestion:

Now the author presents his thoughts and proposal to be careful of this generation and to separate completely from them as Abraham did from Lot. With the pardon of the writer, this advice is as harsh as swords thrust through the body and survival of the nation! When we were sovereign in our Holy Land—as during part of the Second Temple period—

⁷ See "On Left and Right" for his interpretation of these verses

the land was lost, the Temple was destroyed and Israel exiled because of the dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees. This caused much gratuitous hatred (*sinat hinam*)⁸ leading to unjustified murder. Thus, when a Pharisee saw someone being lax in a certain matter—even though he was not a Sadducee but only sinning in this matter—because of tremendous *sinat hinam* he judged him to be a Sadducee who can be legitimately harmed. From this mistaken attitude numerous allegedly justified and holy murders multiplied.... It is not far-fetched to think that this can occur today. A member of *Mahazikei Ha-Dat* might see someone and imagine that he does not follow his way in proper worship of God. He will then judge him to be a heretic and separate from him. They will then chase (*rodef*) each other (with intent to harm) in the erroneous belief that this is justified, God forbid. The entire people of God will be destroyed, God forbid.

This consideration is critical in the Diaspora condition, for only if we stay together can we resist the dangers of assimilation:

All this would be true even if we were sovereign in our own land. How much more certain when we are downtrodden in exile scattered like sheep among the nations. In exile we are likened to the 'dust of the earth' as the Holy Blessed One told Jacob: your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth. The nations are likened to flood waters as is written in Isaiah (17:12): "Ah, the roar of many peoples that roar as roars the sea." There is no hope for a block of dust against floodwaters unless the dust becomes a solid rock. A flooding river would then only roll the stone from place to place but not altogether destroy

it. Israel among the nations has no hope unless it becomes the 'rock of Israel.' If we become united into one union no nation or culture can destroy us. So, therefore, how can anyone advise us to separate from our fellow Jews? The nations would then wash us away little by little, God forbid.

The Neziv thus offers various reasons why he rejects the separatist option. Most fundamentally, there is a *mitzvah* derived from *Berit Avot* commanding us to remain a distinct people. Peoplehood is derived from our common ancestry, not our common observance of *mitzvot*. This generates a moral and religious imperative to remain integrated with each other. Secondly, separation would weaken us in our exilic status. We would easily be washed away either by assimilation or destruction. Finally, it is abnormal for people to isolate themselves from their own kinsmen. In this case, Jews would be required isolate themselves even from family members, as Abraham did when he separated from Lot. This is too demanding for most people, and is therefore unadvisable as a national policy.

The Neziv extends his analysis of modern rebellion. Surprisingly, however, he does not cite any of the traditional categories of rabbinic discussion on the issue: those who rebel out of spite (*mumar lehakhis*) or out of uncontrollable desires (*mumar letayavon*). Nor does he see these modern rebels as children raised in a non-Torah environment (*tinogot shenishbu bein ha-aqum*). He draws instead on the story of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time, offering a new motive for these modern day rebels:

During the first Temple period there were also *mahazikei ha-dat* who refused to worship idols. But they sacrificed on the high places outside the Temple that is liable to a punishment of excision.

⁸ For a definition of the concept of *sinat hinam*, see Michael Zvi Nehorai, "Sinat Hinam", DAAT, No. 36, Winter 1996: "It is useless, purposeless contention that does not succeed in bringing the other closer to repentance." Only 'hatred' or rather, opposition, is allowed by the Torah if it is an effective tool in changing the sinner's behavior. If it fails or increases the distance between the parties it is not allowed by the Torah as part of the reproof one must offer to those who sin. Nehorai cites the Neziv's introduction to Genesis where the issue of *sinat hinam* is raised.

Nevertheless, they followed the priests of those places who were also great men who taught that this is a convenient way to achieve love and *devequt* for the Blessed Holy One without traveling all the way to Jerusalem. Because this transgression was misunderstood to be a *mitzvah*, even the righteous Judean kings such as Assa and Jehoshafat were unable to stop them, as it says, “the people were still offering at the *bamot*.” So entrenched was the view that indeed this was a good thing that when King Hezekiah abolished the *bamot* he was attacked by the Rabshakeh [the Assyrian officer] who said: And if you tell me that you are relying on the Lord your God, He is the very one whose shrines and altars Hezekiah did away with, telling Judah and Jerusalem, ‘You must worship only at this altar in Jerusalem.’ (2 Kings 18:22) We see that the Rabshakeh believed Hezekiah had grievously sinned. This is because he was a heretic who had learned in his parental home the mistaken notion that it was a sin to prevent the people from worshipping at the *bamot* with *devequt* and love of God while in reality it was a sin to do so.

The Neziv here shows his appreciation for another source of sin: convenience. In the modern context, it is argued that it is inconvenient to observe many *mitzvot*, for they conflict with a modern lifestyle in business, social activities and recreation. The appeal of some modern forms of non-traditional Judaism is in this very quality of trying to make Judaism more convenient for the masses. The Neziv suggests that those lax in observance because of convenience issues should not be considered heretics and deniers. Many *mahazikei ha-dat* were among those in ancient times who acted out of convenience.

Striking also is the Neziv’s understanding of the role of the leaders of these movements. He speaks of them as “the priests of those places who were also great men who taught that this is a convenient way to achieve love and *devequt* for the Blessed Holy One without traveling all the way to Jerusalem.” Because both the leaders and the misled are motivated by *devequt*, both are treated with forbearance.

They seem to be called *mahazikei ha-dat* as well, even though they worshipped at the ‘high places’ in contravention of Torah law.

Does The Neziv consider inconvenience to constitute a new halakhic category? Flagrant and spiteful rejection of observance falls under the category of ‘*mumar lebhakhis*.’ Violation of commandments due to desire overtaking human weakness fits into the class of ‘*mumar letayavon*.’ One raised in a totally non-Jewish environment and unaware of God’s commandments is subsumed under the rubric, ‘an infant captured among Gentiles’—‘*tinok shenishbah beyn hagoyim*.’ Here the Neziv speaks of another type: one who acts or fails to act because of inconvenience. Is there any halakhic precedent for this category?

In addition to the Biblical passage in 2 Kings, one could cite *Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah* 340 concerning the laws of rending garments for the occasion of death and mourning. In *halakhah* 4 we read:

One who is present at the time of death ... must tear, even if occasionally [the deceased] sinned due to overwhelming desire or was *one who desisted from a mitzvah because it required too much effort*.
[author’s italics]

The Neziv did not quote this text, yet it supports his position. We do not know how common this phenomenon was in Jewish history. That it was not unknown is evidenced here. Neither tradition nor classic texts excluded from the community those subsumed under this category. Evidently their weakness was understood and they received due respect in the mourning process.

Rabbi Berlin applied this category to modern heterodox Jews. They may be numerous today and organize themselves into groups, constructing a Judaism of convenience. They may even rationalize their level of observance through various arguments of a theological or pragmatic nature, yet they are not to be excluded from the community. There is a tradition of understanding this phenomenon that should not be flouted or reversed.

It is critical to probe for the proper limits for this category of convenience. Would it include changes to liturgy and practice that are made in order to increase amity with non-Jews or at least to prevent hostility and preserve a secure place for Jews in the modern integrated nations? And after generations have passed and the original obligations are no longer remembered, are the current practitioners of these variants to be considered rebels at all? After all, they now follow the custom of their families and communities.⁹

Instead of lamenting the situation and attacking these convenience-oriented Jews, the Neziv believes that promoting intensive Torah study at all levels of the community is the effective and appropriate halakhic response. Torah raises everyone's level of understanding and helps recapture the knowledge that will lead to proper behavior. Rather than increasing hatred, Torah study leads to greater love of God, Torah and fellow Jews. The Neziv concludes "On Right and Left" with an impassioned and detailed program for Torah study as the solution to our current problems.

Rabbi Berlin adds to this line of thinking in his introduction to *Shir Ha-Shirim*.¹⁰

During Hezekiah's time was this [hatred] prevented only because Hezekiah promoted Torah study. From this they understood the seriousness of this prohibition. They also learned to achieve intense love of God through Torah study...

Also remarkable is the Neziv's introduction of the comparison of modern disputes with those of the ancient Pharisees and Sadducees. Nineteenth century Orthodox thinkers often compared the reformers to Sadducees, Boethusians and Karaites.¹¹ They suggested that these categories merited hatred and opposition. When they thought of *sinat hinam* leading to destruction and exile they would have thought about it as among the Pharisees and rabbis themselves. As deniers of the Oral Torah and the authority of the Talmud, Reform Jews could fit into these ancient categories, thus justifying hatred. Among those who used these categories were two of the halakhic luminaries of the early 19th century: Rabbi Moses Sofer (1762–1839)¹² and Rabbi Solomon Kluger (1785–1869)¹³. Despite the prominence of these scholars Rabbi Berlin opposes their point of view. For him, the dispute between Pharisees and Sadducees is an example of *sinat hinam*.

Rabbi Berlin returns to this point on numerous occasions. Here are his words in his introduction to Genesis in *Ha'amek Davar*:

The book known as *Bereishit* is called 'Sefer Ha-Yashar' (upright ones) by our prophets. Rabbi Yohanan explains the reason as being that it is the book of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who were called *yesharim*... We must understand why our ancestors were called *yesharim* and not *tsadiqim* (righteous ones) or *hasidim* (pious ones). This is based on a justification of the destruction of the second Temple that took place in a 'perverse and crooked generation.' (Deut.

⁹ His position is similar to that of Maimonides in *Hilkhot Mamrim* 3:3: "However, the children of these errant ones ... just continue the ways of their errant ancestors. Therefore, it is fitting to try to help them return and to encourage them peacefully." My thanks to Eugene Korn and Michael Zvi Nehorai for reminding me of this source.

¹⁰ See *Metiv Shir*, Introduction. *Metiv Shir* is always found in a volume which the Neziv called *Rinah Shel Torah*, and includes the essay *Shear Yisrael* together with his commentary to *Shir Ha-Shirim*. A recent edition of *Rinah Shel Torah* has broken this latter unification he made and has printed *Metiv Shir* under the name of *Rinah Shel Torah*. See below, note 12.

¹¹ See the sources mentioned by Jacob Katz in "Polemics Over the Hamburg Temple and the Brunswick Assembly," in *Halakhah Be-Meitsar*, [Halakhah in Straits] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992) pp. 43–72.

¹² *Responsa Hatam Sofer* 6:89, end. My thanks to Chaim Steinmetz for reminding me of this reference.

¹³ *Ha-Elef Lekha Shelomo*, 14:257

32:3) I explained there that they were *tsadiqim* and *hasidim* and Torah scholars, but they were not upright in the ways of the world.

The Neziv sees the greatness of the ancestors in their avoidance of hatred even towards those who practiced idolatry. However, the sages at the end of the Second Temple were not *yesharim*, and did not avoid this terrible failing:

Out of *sinat hinam* in their hearts towards each other they suspected that those who disagreed with them on religious matters were Sadducees or heretics. This brought them to exaggerated levels of bloodshed and many other evils until the Temple was destroyed. This is the justification for the destruction: for God is *yashar* and God does not tolerate '*tsadiqim*' like these. God prefers people who are *yesharim* and not those who act crookedly even for the sake of Heaven, which brings about destruction of creation and desolation "of the earth.

The greatness of the ancestors was in their not only being *tsadiqim* and *hasidim* and lovers of God in the highest degree possible but they were also *yesharim*. Thus they behaved respectfully even towards the most despicable idol-worshippers. They treated them with love and cared about their well-being. This sustains the creation. We thus saw Abraham pray for Sodom even though he hated them for their wickedness as he explained to the King of Sodom. Nevertheless, he desired their well being.... Jacob, too, spoke gently with Laban even though he was justifiably angry with him for trying to destroy his entire family.... This is why Balaam prayed, "Let me die the death of *yesharim*." They are the upholders of the creation. Thus we have clearly explained why this book is called '*Sefer Ha-Yashar*,' for it is the book of creation.

There are even stronger words for the leading Torah scholars of ancient times:

The first Temple destruction was principally caused by idol worship as explained in *Parashah Nitzavim* and *Yoma*.⁹ It should be understood that the foremost promoters of sin were the leading Torah scholars (*hayu rashei ha-mabtiyyim gedolei Torah*). [The Neziv cites the talmudic view that the idolatrous kings Jeroboam, Ahab and Manasseh were great talmudic scholars.] So too in the second Temple destruction that was caused by gratuitous hatred (*sinat hinam*).... Here again the leading Torah scholars were the foremost promoters of sin. Of them the Torah lamented in the Song of *Ha'azinu*, "a foolish and unwise people," as I explain there. (*Harhev Davar*, Deut. 4:14)

He continues in his commentary on Deuteronomy 32:6, we find the following:

"O dull and witless people...." The wonder is that you are foolish for after all you received the Torah... which you study intensely and should prepare you to be an upright *tsadiq* (*tsadiq yashar*). However, you have not been wise enough to prevent improper behavior. This is I explained earlier [4:14] that the destruction of the second Temple came about through the failure of the leading torah scholars. (*Ha-Ameq Davar*, 32:6)

From these texts we see clearly that Rabbi Berlin was unalterably opposed to allowing an attitude of hatred towards other Jews, no matter how serious their deviations from tradition. He stood opposed to a policy of antagonism promoted by some of the leading scholars of his time and of which he was well aware. It is clear that for the Neziv Torah scholars are not immune from grievous errors in issues of community policy and strategy. Great Torah knowledge is no guarantor of insight into other issues. He uses the now contentious term '*daat Torah*' to mean knowledge of Torah or an opinion of the Torah on a subject, not knowledge of all human affairs. As those scholars who promoted hatred towards Sadducees were wrong, those who advocate ostracism of various

contemporary Jews and their groups similarly err. Clearly *sinat hinam* is not the answer to the problems of the age. It will indeed be *'hinam'*, not only being ineffective but even self-destructive and destroy creation. It is integrated Torah study by all Jews in all segments of Jewish society that promotes *teshuvah*.

III. The Total Community

We now turn to the question of the place of the non-Orthodox in Jewish communal affairs. Most relevant to this topic is Rabbi Berlin's commentary to *Shir Ha-Shirim*, known as *Metiv Shir*.¹⁴ He understands this book as a dialogue of love between God and Israel. Each party describes the virtues of the other. I will quote extensively from his commentary.

Shir Ha-Shirim 4:13 is God's praise of Israel: "Even your empty ones are like a grove of pomegranates with choice fruit, giving off the scent of *kofer* and *niradim*. The Neziv comments:

The Sages' comment in *Berakhot* 57a is well known: Even the empty ones among you are full of *mitzvot* like a pomegranate. The *mitzvot* referred to cannot be those that the Torah explicitly commands, for if that were the case, the people would not be referred to as being empty. Rather, the reference must be to mutual acts of kindness (*gemilut hasadim*) and charity We see that in this particular issue the 'empty ones' of Israel retain the essential quality of Israel by being compassionate and kindly....

The word *'shelahayikh'* ('empty') refers to the ones who are removed from you, who do not accept upon themselves the yoke of Torah and *mitzvot*. They are still like a grove of pomegranates in that they are full of acts of kindness and charity as a pomegranate is full of seeds.

'With choice fruit'—The *mitzvot* commanded by the Torah are like choice fruit. ... The empty members of the community do not withhold these pleasant *mitzvot* from themselves. They do perform and enjoy these choice *mitzvot*.

'The scent of *kofer* and *niradim*'—*Kofer* is a viscous substance that has an unpleasant odor. *Nard* is a plant with a strong pleasant smell. The metaphor describes the empty members of the community who usually associate themselves with the scoffers whose scent is unpleasant. However, even this combination can bring forth goodness for if they are faced with a situation that requires mercy or kindness they will assist each other. Even though they sit together and seem to bring no benefit to anyone sometimes the fact that they are together can bring them benefit as well as to the entire world.

On verse 14: "*Nard* and *kharkom*, *kaneh* and cinnamon with all types of branches of *levonah*, myrrh and aloes with all types of perfumes," The Neziv explains:

There are many different types of perfumes and scents. Some of them can be easily collected; some give off their scent only after they are processed, and some attainable only after great effort. The same is true of acts of kindness. Some are easily performed while a person is walking or talking. Others entail considerable effort and others only result from a long series of events. In this verse, the author compares these acts to various perfumes and scents, pointing out that they are all evident even in the 'empty' sectors of Israel's population.

In other words, the allegedly empty sector of the community is not at all empty. Their good deeds of kindness and charity reflect their belonging to the garden and they

¹⁴ *Metiv Shir* is part of *Rinah Shel Torah* that includes *Metiv Shir* and *Shear Yisrael*. A new translation of *Metiv Shir* has appeared, erroneously called *Rinah Shel Torah* (The Jewish Educational Workshop, Kfar Chassidim) 1993. It also has omitted the Neziv's introduction. I have used this translation, but not followed it completely.

contribute to the fragrant smells of the community. He continues with commentary on verse 15 (“The springs that nourish the gardens are a well of fresh water and flow from Lebanon.”), assuming that the garden refers to the entire community of Israel:

The various types of vegetation that the author referred to cannot grow properly unless they have a fresh source of water that will prevent the sun from making them wilt. This water can be provided in one of two ways: 1) if the garden has a well or, 2) if irrigation canals are dug to bring water from another source.

Similarly, even those who are kind need a source of reinforcement so that their acts of kindness continue to be performed in the optimal manner. This reinforcement can come about in one of two ways: 1) through Torah study that one internalizes and leading to honesty and genuine helpfulness to others, or, 2) if one does not study Torah the reinforcement can be provided by being part of the community, for within the community there are those who preach and teach about the importance of ethical behavior. I explained this in Deut. 33:28 as well.

This is the meaning of God’s praise of Israel. ‘The springs that nourish the gardens’—the reinforcement provided for the various acts of kindness that are performed even by the empty ones—‘are a well of fresh water and flow from Lebanon.’ Their source is either the Torah (a well of fresh water) or the community (the flow from the Levanon).

Indeed, here is the proper attitude of the observant community towards others. The former must nourish the latter so that they will continue to remain as a living force within the garden.

The Neziv seizes upon various comments in *Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim* Chapter 4 that describe Israel as the army of God, struggling through history to promote Torah

teachings in the world. Each sector of the nation, therefore, has a role to play—even the alleged ‘empty’ ones who are far from the disciplines of observance. They are like the advance troops sent into battle to frighten the enemy (*Qidushin* 76a). Although they serve a purpose the chief officers of the army must try to not let them influence the more disciplined segments of the army with their loose and unruly ways.

In truth, the empty ones are not empty. They exhibit the virtues of kindness and are ready to respond to the needs of others. They retain the essential compassion that characterizes Israel, working for the community and its needs. They establish and run magnificent institutions to dispense charity and welfare services. While they often associate with the scoffers who completely reject the special destiny of Israel, they also can influence them and help them in times of need. So while they are ‘empty’ and removed from full observance of *mitzvot*, they still function within *kelal yisrael*.

Those fully committed to Torah cannot abandon these other Jews. Not being students of Torah, the latter will lose their virtues of kindness and charity if they are not sustained and reinforced by those who can teach them Torah. The learned ones in the community must relate and interact with those less observant and less knowledgeable lest they be totally lost from Israel. They should be exposed as much as possible to the message of Torah, not ignored nor dismissed. As part of the *kelal*, they must be addressed and engaged in the public affairs of the nation.

As the ‘eyes’ of the community, learned Jews must also protect the committed elements from being influenced by the unruly. The Torah solution is neither total separation nor total integration. It requires a carefully guided program of interaction and guidance. Only in this way can the nation continue to function in history according to its divine destiny.

The ‘empty’ ones operate on the assumptions of convenience and choice, two very modern attitudes. While these are

far from the acceptance and obedience to the yoke of Torah and *mitzvot*, they are not removed and do not wish to be removed from *kelal yisrael*. If they can be reached through Torah study they can be influenced to maintain their attachments to Israel and be strengthened to function as a part of Israel's role in history. The learned leaders should not mislabel them as Sadducees or worse, in effect reading them out of the community. This is neither effective in maintaining their reduced level of commitments nor in influencing their return to a fuller involvement with Torah.

The Neziv believes that Torah study is the better corrective for their behavior. Torah study avoids personal attacks that inflame passions and increase tensions:

“Mass Torah study will also serve another beneficial purpose. We, the upholders of faith, will know how to behave more precisely according to the teachings of our Sages as expressed in the Talmud and *Shulhan Arukh*. The masses will not be misled to make changes according to the imagination of some [allegedly] great and holy person who thinks there are better ways to worship God. ... Those who will study Torah will understand that the lax ones are not heretics and deniers, God forbid. They will stay united with them in one group to deliberate upon how to strengthen our faith and triumph over the deniers of talmudic authority. The larger will be the group, the stronger it will be and more likely to find good counsel from each other. God will listen and pay attention to their efforts and help to preserve their children from total heresy.” (“On Left and Right”)

Engaging the ‘empty’ ones in discussion could take many forms. They too are aware of Jewish history and the decline and disappearance of the great community of

Spain. There is much to suggest that many Spanish Jews took the way of convenience long before conversionary pressure was leveled against them. When that pressure finally did come, they were ill prepared to stand against it. They had lost the commitment to stand out, be different and make the necessary sacrifices. Can the learned and observant elements convince their more unruly and lax colleagues that a serious Jewish commitment is threatened by the deleterious effects of convenience and choice as guiding principles of behavior? Studying Torah together was the preferred and more peaceful strategy suggested by Rabbi Berlin.

IV. Limits of Relations

Although hatred is not halakhically justified according to the Neziv, limits do exist regarding connections with modern day deviationists. The Neziv enthusiastically supported the pre-Zionist movements of the late nineteenth century. He encouraged Zionists and deliberated with them, despite recognizing that most of these pioneers were not observant. Nevertheless, in the ‘domain of holiness’ he believed cooperation was impossible.

There is a brief *responsum* in *Meshiv Davar* (I: 9) concerning cooperation with *Beit Yaakov*¹⁵ in which the Neziv hints about cooperation with other non-traditional groups:

Concerning associating with those who are called *Beit Yaakov* who publicly violate the sabbath, it is forbidden to join with them in any matter that concerns worship of God. This is so even though we find in *Shulhan Arukh* (55:11) that a sinner is counted in the *minyan*, [for] this is only someone who sins in one particular matter. For even though it says “The offering of the wicked is an abomination,” we still accept sacrifices offered by sinners as stated in *Hullin* [5] in order to encourage their repentance. If this be the case for sacrifices, then

¹⁵ The reference is probably to the *Biluim*, (‘BILU’ is the acronym for *Beit Yaakov Lekhu Venelekhah*) pre-Zionist pioneers of a strong secular orientation. While The Neziv cooperated with the early *Hibbat Zion* movement he still expressed dismay towards those who were secularist.

certainly in prayer circumstances which are less weighty than sacrifices we accept the sinner. However, we do not accept an offering from one who worships idols or publicly violates the sabbath, who is presumed not to have the potential for repentance. Therefore, the prayer would also be in category of an “abomination”. If this be so, then how can we join together for prayer, for in a situation in which the prayer is considered an abomination one does not fulfill the obligation to pray even *post facto* as we find in *Berakhot* 22b?

The Neziv then adds:

It is written in Proverbs (1:15) concerning those who lie in wait for people to shed their blood and loot their belongings: “My son, do not walk on the way with them, keep your feet from their path.” ‘Way’ here means a public road while ‘path’ refers to a private path. We are being taught that even though we cannot avoid going along the public roads we should not go with them hand in hand. However, on their private path we should not even walk at all. This is the way to behave with those who are trying to ambush the Israelite spirit, trying to destroy it and remove it from the way of eternal life. As far as the public road is concerned it is impossible not to interact with them in business and the like. However, we should not engage in partnerships or friendship with them as we learn in *Avot*, “Do not become friends with the wicked.” In 2 Chronicles it is written (20:37) that the prophet “Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, “As you have made a partnership with Ahaziah, the Lord will break up your work”. Jehoshaphat was fortunate in that God broke his alliance with the evil Ahaziah with whom he collaborated no further. Who is worthy of this?

All this concerns the public sphere. However, concerning their own private path, their House of Worship and the like, actually keep your feet away for their lawlessness is attractive to people. Even though we should not engage them in dispute for it says,¹⁶ “Do not argue with evildoers”, we must be very careful not to stumble into their group for they are, “a root sprouting poison weed and wormwood.” (Deut. 29:17). See my comments there in my work *Ha-ameq Davar*.

Hence we arrive at a nuanced and dialectical response. Despite his desire to keep us away from those who are a danger to Jewish tradition, there are certain situations which are unavoidable: “It is impossible not to interact with them in business and the like.” There are situations that demand interaction in the public sphere. It is obvious from his own practice that ‘and the like’ included issues that affect the public, the community of Israel. In other words, these Jews remain part of the community and must be included in any discussion on important community affairs.

V. Conclusion

We have looked at numerous comments of Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Yehudah Berlin regarding Jewish communal harmony. He was clearly aware of the various kinds of deviation from tradition and new Jewish ideologies that were developing in the nineteenth century. He reacted with an overwhelming confidence that Torah learning will properly address all these issues. His emphasis on unity is very typical of this era. It is a somewhat standard appeal to the community not to weaken itself through fragmentation.

Unique to Rabbi Berlin is his direct address to each type of deviation. Since he considers love of God and *devekut* to be the essential goals of Jewish life, he is most under-

¹⁶ This phrase is found both in Psalms 37:1 and Proverbs 24:19.

standing of those who maintain this focus. Even if they reject the halakhic system for reasons of inconvenience, they can still focus on *devequt* in their own way similar to the ancient Israelites who worshipped God on the high places. Even the leaders of such groups can be considered to be genuinely searching for *devequt* and not to be rejected. Ordinary Jews who drift away from strict observance are to be accepted and challenged through Torah study. The Neziv calls upon the observant community to interact with them and keep them within a Torah framework.

In the late nineteenth century, after the pogroms of the 1880's, many Jews began moving towards secular national ideologies. Some rabbis took a more generous view towards these Jews than they did towards Reform groups. They believed that the strong emphasis on the national spirit of the Jewish people would lead to a return to

authentic Torah commitment. Unlike many of his contemporaries, The Neziv took a harsher view towards secular national groups. They had abandoned the central ideal of love of God and replaced it with new values. Observant Jews can deal with these types only on matters of general community policy, not on matters of faith. The public welfare requires cooperation whenever possible.¹⁷

Finally, the Neziv strongly disassociated himself from any views that would lead towards hatred. Although, some of the leading Orthodox figures of the century were exponents of this hostile attitude, he directly rejects this approach. *Ahavat Yisrael*, love for Israel, includes all Jews. Principled tolerant interaction and joint Torah study are the correct Torah responses to the breakdown of consensus on Jewish identity and the pluralistic condition of the Jewish people since the Enlightenment.

¹⁷ I obviously disagree with the assessment of Ehud Luz that, "Orthodox rabbis were unequivocally negative toward Reform Jews but they were ambivalent about nonobservant Zionists." See his "The Limits of Toleration" in *Zionism and Religion*, Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira, eds. (Hanover and London, Brandeis University Press) 1998. Luz speaks about Rabbi Berlin, but incorrectly puts him together with others. The Neziv had actually reversed the position that Luz attributes to other Orthodox rabbis who were involved with *Hibbat Zion*.

Appendix

Responsa Meshiv Davar I:44 “On Right and Left”

Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Yehuda Berlin
Translated by Howard S. Joseph

With the help and in the Blessed Name of *Hashem*-God

I. Three Authentic Trends Within Judaism.¹⁸

I saw an article entitled Right and Left in the journal *Mahazikei Ha-Dat*, Volume 3, by one of the editors in which an important question is raised. Since it is our responsibility to participate in efforts to strengthen the faith of Israel I could not desist from presenting my thoughts on this issue to the members of *Mahazikei Ha-Dat*, may *Ha-Shem* bless them. Anyone else who has anything to respond and clarify in these matters in another way let their words come and enlighten our lives. For although we are removed geographically from one another we are close to each other in our desire and willingness to arrive at the goal with the help of The Knowing and Guiding God.

The author suggested inquiring into the following questions:
a) Can the faith of Israel be divided into three parts? and
b) Are left, right and center to be found in our faith? He declared that left, right and center were present in ancient times and that maybe these trends continue today:

- [On the Right], the Righteous (or, Saintly) who remove themselves from all earthly matters not even benefiting to the extent of a small finger's worth;
- opposite them [on the Left], the Wicked who either out of ignorance or brazen willfulness throw off the yoke of Torah and Religion;

- the Centrists, who innocently follow the ways of the world without rejecting the Torah.

With all due respect, I believe that the author does not follow through on his initial question. He began with the question of whether there are three different trends in our religion and faith and concludes that the Left is equivalent to a rejection of the Torah and religion. In other words, the Left is outside of our faith.

Also confusing is the expression ‘maybe’ concerning the three trends. What kind of question is this? We have always had three trends: the Completely Righteous, the Wicked and the Intermediate. The question really should be whether among the followers of our faith and religion, among those who do not reject Torah, there are to be found three groups. This is the question that should be properly researched. There are definitely three groups in Israel. According to our humble explanation they are, first of all, the ones referred to in scripture as the Rightists (*mayeminim*) and the Leftists (*masemilim*).

In the beginning, we should understand that there are two meanings to the commandment “to love the Lord your God....” which we read each day which are explained by Maimonides: One meaning of this commandment is that one should be prepared to sacrifice body, spirit and will for the will of God just as one who

¹⁸ I have broken the *responsum* into sections and given titles to each. I have also made paragraphs out of large blocks of material.

loves an only child would renounce all possessions for the life of the child; this is what any normal person would do. Similarly, it is a commandment to give oneself for the sanctification of God's name in a dangerous situation (*Piskei Ha-Rambam*).¹⁹ Maimonides also wrote (*Yesodei Ha-Torah* 5:7): How do we know that even in a dangerous situation we must not violate one of the three cardinal sins? It says (Deut. 6:5), "You shall love the Lord your God...." This meaning is, therefore, obligatory upon every Israelite.

The second meaning is that one should be connected in thought and desire to apprehend the Spirit of Holiness whenever possible or, at least, in some transcendent moment. In everyday speech [Yiddish] this love is called *die libe*. This is what Maimonides wrote (*ibid.* 2:1): "This God, honored and revered, it is our duty to love, as it is said "You shall love the Lord your God". (2:2) And what is the way that will lead to the love of Him...? [When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightaway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him and long with an exceeding longing to know His great Name...."

Similarly, we learn in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Berakhot*, Chapter *Haroeb*) that Rabbi Akivah explained this verse [of "you shall love"] using the verse "I have loved you (*rehamtikh*) with all my heart I have loved you will all my soul". The meaning of *rehamah* is from the verse (*arahamekh Ha-Shem hizki*). It is also written, "Will a mother forget to love her young ones the fruit of her womb?" This refers to a connection of the intellect in an intense love. This second meaning is obviously not for everyone as we see from Maimonides words above concerning how to achieve love of God. It is understood that not everyone reaches this level. The *Siphre* questions the link between our verse [you shall love] with the subsequent verse, "these words that I command you today should be upon your heart...." "How should one love

God? By keeping these words close to your heart; from this you will come to know the One who speech produced the world."

Thus, the one who is on the Right is one whose mind is continually imbued with love and attachment (*devequt*) to God, and who closely approaches the *Shekhinah*. This is truly the way of piety (*hasidut*), which is impossible except for one who separates from the world. The one who stands on this exalted level finds it difficult to associate with other people even to teach them Torah and morals. Every interaction with others interrupts the intellectual connectedness that is impossible without isolation (*hitbodedut*).

Only Moses our Rabbi remained on this level even while he addressed the people. Immediately following his address he again covered his face with the mask and rose in his thoughts to his proper level. No other prophets or important people—even Abraham our Father—could do this. When they taught Torah and God's ways to the people they could not sustain their elevated level of *devequt* as in their times of isolation. (Our Rabbi the Gaon Hatam Sofer, may his merit protect us, has already treated this question at length in his introduction in a very illuminating and proper fashion.) Thus the one whose soul desires continual attachment with God is referred to as a Rightist as we will further explain.

There is a second God worshipper who observes all the details of Torah but who does not know the taste of love and *devequt*. This one does not separate at all to achieve this love. This was the way of the early [Jewish] philosophers who never departed from the way of God and Torah, God forbid, and who taught others the greatness of God and Torah. However, they did not know how to love God with *devequt*. These are called Leftists for they are removed from extreme closeness to the *Shekhinah* and the Spirit of Holiness (*Ruah Ha-Kodesh*).

¹⁹ I cannot locate this source.

There are also those who follow a middle path. During recital of *Keriat Shemah* and *tefillah* their minds approach love and *devequt* of God while the rest of the day they are occupied with worldly affairs. Those on this intermediate way are also called pious (*hasidim*) but in a different manner than the ones above: they are *hasidim* in deeds.

In this category there are two types who are called *hasidim*. One benefits the community as explained in *Yoma* (87a) concerning whom it is written (Ps. 16) “You will not allow your devoted one (*hasidekhab*) to see the pit.” The second type includes those who strictly perform the commandments beyond the normal human capacity, as is known through the chapters on the pious ones (*pirkei dehasidei*) in tractate *Ta’anit*.

Thus there are three types of *hasidim* in Israel: the Rightists (*mayeminim*) who are totally connected to love of God, as well as the two types of practical *hasidut*. All three types are mentioned in one verse in the Ten Commandments, “showing hesed to the thousandth generation of those who love Me (*ohavay*) and keep my commandments (*shomrei mitsvotai*).” In the *Mekhilta* this is explained: “those who love—this refers to Abraham our Father and those like him; those who keep the commandments—are the prophets and elders.” This means that ‘lovers’ refers to those such as Abraham who were greatly immersed in *devequt* and love of God. ‘Keepers of the commandments’ refers to the prophets who benefited the community through their admonishments and the elders who strictly obeyed the commandments.

It is obvious that the one who displays *hasidut* through *mitzvah* observance should of necessity be a scholar (*talmid hakham*) and continually learn and study how to properly observe the commandments according to correct Torah opinion (*da’at Torah*), and not come to perform strange acts not in accord with Torah knowledge, God forbid. [This forms part of the standard mitnaggedic critique of *hasidism*. Neziv expresses this critique in other places, as well such as his commentary on *tzitzit* (see below) and the story of Korah. He also presents here a

variety of models for Jewish piety. Not only the Rightists are the pious, but the others as well. –*translator*]

Now let us look at Levi and Phineas who both were zealous against sexual immorality and were totally devoted on this issue. Yet Phineas rose to the highest level while Levi was rebuked by his father (Jacob). There are many similar instances. The explanation is that this (zealousness) requires great precision to evaluate the activity according to time and place. It is also necessary to understand many Torah principles that are not always clear. Thus it is impossible to be this type of *hasid* except through Torah study. The way of *hasidut* through love of God and *devequt* which one imagines does not require Torah learning but only sincerity (*temimut*), isolation and intention for love of God is not correct. Even the one who prepares for and clings to love of God requires at least being very careful not to deviate from the way of Torah. Holy desire and love ‘more intense than death’ should not lead away from reason.

The Torah warned about this through the observance of *tzitzit* that is a symbol of the six hundred and thirteen commandments. The Blessed Holy One commanded us to make threads of blue and white to represent two types of behavior in Israel. One type follows the majority way of being occupied in worldly matters; the white thread of the fringe is a reminder of all the commandments. The second type is one separated for the purpose of service to God, isolated and immersed in love of God. The blue thread is a reminder for this one for it resembles the Heavenly Throne to which this one clings. Despite this attachment one must remember to interrupt *devequt* and perform the commandments as their obligatory times appear. Two verses address these two types of Judaism (Nu. 15). “You shall see them (the fringes) and remember all the commandments of God and do them and not stray....” refers to the masses of God’s people who are Centrists or Leftists. The verse “So you may remember and do all My commandments and be holy for your God,” is addressed to the Rightists, the *hasidim* in holiness and love of God who also must be careful to observe the commandments according to Torah knowledge (*da’at*

Torah). Then they will indeed be “holy unto your God.” They will be pleasing to God who will emanate to them a holy emanation and the Spirit of Holiness. In all manners of *hasidut* the words of *Avot* (2:45) apply: “The ignorant cannot be a *hasid*.”

I will now explain Isaiah’s words: The Lord will provide for you meager bread and scant water. Your teacher will not be hidden but your eyes shall see your teacher. Whenever you deviate to the right or left you will hear a voice from behind you: “This is the road: Follow it” (30:20–21). The meaning is that the three groups existed in Isaiah’s days. Firstly, the group that behaved in holiness and *devequt* who are a chariot for the *Shekhinah*. The leaders of this group would hide in their rooms so as not to have people interrupt their spiritual devotions. These are the Rightists.

Then there was the group that followed the ways of natural wisdom (*hokhmat ha-tevah*) removed from spiritual thought whose leaders did not hide at all. Their disciples made no effort to see them face to face for they could understand their teachings through written form even more than through direct communication. This is not true of Torah learning whose treasures are expressed through disciples seeing the face of their master. This is why Moses removed his mask when addressing Torah messages to Israel: so they could see his face.

The prophet Isaiah spoke this way in his time for Torah study was necessary in the struggle against Sanneherib as we learned in the chapter *Heleq* (*Sanhedrin*) when the Sages explain the verse “the yoke will be broken because of oil”. The yoke of Sanneherib will be broken because of the oil of King Hezekiah who stuck a sword in the *bet midrash* door and declared that whoever does not study Torah will be thrust with a sword. The prophet said of this: God will provide you with little bread and water. Thus we know the way of Torah study is through “a morsel of bread and salt to eat and rationed water to drink” (*Avot* 6:4). “Your teacher will not hide” suggests that they will not be like the first group whose teachers

hide in their rooms. “Your eyes shall behold your teacher” suggests that you will be unlike the second group’s disciples who do not seek to see their masters’ faces. “You will hear a voice from behind you: “This is the road: follow it”— you will know and understand that only this way of intense Torah study will protect and save Israel in time of war. Only this way will lead to national survival. “For if you deviate to the right”, that is among the Rightists, “or to the left” among the Leftists, all will understand that only intense Torah study is the fundamental for protection of the Jews. We have now explained Right and Left in the way of our faith.

The result of our explanation is that not all of those who follow the middle path in the service of God are to be considered middling [in their commitment] for many of the Centrists can be considered as *hasidim*. Not in the sense of those immersed in isolation in love and *devequt*, but in the sense of *hasidim* in deeds as we explained above according to the words of our sages in the Talmud and the *Mekhilta* in the explanation of the Ten Commandments and further supported by what is said in Deuteronomy [of God] who “keeps the loyal covenant to the thousandth generation for those who love Him and follow His commandments.”

We might think that those in the center are the ones who neither reject the yoke [of Torah] but are not careful in observance. However, it is clear that in the middle category there are many gradations ranging between the two poles of righteous and wicked.

Despite the fact that I have been lengthy and expansive I hope that my words will not prove burdensome to the editors or to the members of *Mahazikei Ha-Dat* for my purpose is to heal. Now I will continue to the rest of the article in question. May God be with us.

II. On Heretics, Fanatics and Communal Harmony

The author writes about what he sees and claims that our generations are unlike those of earlier times. In earlier times those in the center were not in such danger from

those in the community who rejected the yoke of Torah and commandments who always existed among us. In our times, an Israelite who has no intention to deviate from Torah will be more vulnerable to the loss of his destiny and Torah inspired purpose unless he places God close to himself continuously. The author cannot deny what he sees. However, we must analyze why this has happened.

We must realize that the facts are not as the writer reports, namely, that there has never been a generation so rejecting as our own. This is not true at all. Even when we first entered our Holy Land and for many generations following thereafter the desire for idolatry was prevalent and, indeed, burned as intensely as an oven as the Talmud says (*San.* 102b). It was obvious that no one could be certain of avoiding this idolatrous trend unless one behaved in the way of *hasidut* continually turning one's mind to the way of God.

We see this from the words of Joshua to Israel [before his death] (Js. 24). Joshua presents the alternative of worship of God or worship of the Amorites' gods. He then warns them that they cannot worship both. He also warns them that they cannot worship God for He is a Holy God. They [seem to] answer properly that they will worship God.

Joshua continues saying that you are witnesses to yourselves that you have chosen to worship God and they answered, "Yes, we are witnesses." Joshua now adds that they should remove all foreign gods from their midst and turn their hearts to the God of Israel. The people respond that 'we will worship the Lord our God and obey His voice.'

It is not clear what Joshua was adding in his last statement nor in what the people responded. Joshua knew the power of the idolatrous instinct that prevailed in the Holy Land. This is expressed in the *Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim* on the verse "I have washed my feet how can I now dirty them." The sages explain that this refers to the time of Ezra when many [Babylonian Jews] refused to return to Israel. In Babylon they had 'washed their feet' and removed the desire for idolatry. How can they now return

to the land and risk dirtying them again for the land arouses idolatry? Therefore, Joshua advises them not to be rely on their willingness today to worship God unless they also are willing to immediately remove the idols from their midst in the land. That means even the idols worshipped by the Canaanite inhabitants among them should be removed so that they will not be tempted towards them. Also, turn your hearts to God. This means that they cannot rely only on removing idols and hoping that without a serious turning towards God somehow they will not slip into idolatry once again. Therefore, turn your hearts to God, placing God always before you.

This was Joshua's advice for he had prophetic knowledge of the powerful idolatrous desire in the Holy Land. But Israel did not fully understand Joshua's warning. They answered again that they would worship God, meaning: We do not really have to be afraid [of the idolatrous instinct]. Even without turning to full and continual attention to God that is the way of *hasidut* we will not worship idols but only God.

Those generations failed to follow the advice of Joshua and many stumbled until the Prophet Samuel came and began to confront them once again. (I Sam. 7) "Samuel said to the entire House of Israel, if you turn to God with all your heart then remove the foreign gods from your midst ... and straighten your hearts to God and serve Him alone." It is written there that they did remove the Baalim and Ashtarot and worshipped God alone. 'Alone' refers not to each Israelite alone, but to God alone following Samuel's advice of 'straightening your hearts.' This is a high level above ordinary human nature. It is the way of *hasidut*. For this reason many generations were well established until the sinful kings of Israel and Judah came—as well as for other reasons we shall explain—and they returned to the idolatrous instinct until they were exiled.

In our commentary to Torah called *Ha-ameq Davar* we explained that the Torah also warned us concerning idolatry through the moral teaching of Moses our Rabbi at the end of *Nitsavim* (Deut.): Behold I have placed before you

today.... This is not the place for lengthy explanations. However, all this was in a generation in which the idolatrous instinct burned in Israel and it was almost impossible to withstand this power unless one chose the way of *hasidut*. This was not the case when the members of the Great Assembly prayed concerning the idolatrous instinct as found in *Yoma* 69b. Subsequently, even though every generation had rejecters of the Torah way, nevertheless this came about only through succumbing to overwhelming desire or other weak moral qualities. Those without these weaknesses were not tempted to follow the sinners. In our generation, however, there has been an increase in unbelievers with faulty ideas concerning the authority of the Talmud, for example. [This is an obvious reference to the Reform movement. This is a different phenomenon than ordinary weaknesses. —*translator*] Our sages have said (*Avodah Zarah* 27b) that a person should not engage in business with a heretic. The *gemara* explains that heretics attract others to follow them. For this reason one who is not cautious is in danger of being drawn to them after a while.

Now the author presents his thoughts and proposal to be careful of this generation and to separate completely from them as Abraham did from Lot. With the pardon of the writer, this advice is as harsh as swords thrust through the body and survival of the nation! When we were sovereign in our Holy Land—as during part of the Second Temple period—the land was lost, the Temple was destroyed and Israel exiled because of the dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees. This caused much gratuitous hatred (*sinat hinam*) leading to unjustified murder. Thus, when a Pharisee saw someone being lax in a certain matter—even though he was not a Sadducee but only sinning in this matter—because of tremendous *sinat hinam* he judged him to be a Sadducee who can be legitimately harmed. From this mistaken attitude numerous allegedly justified and holy murders multiplied. As I explained in *Ha-ameq Davar* and *Harhev Davar* the Torah already hinted at this matter (Nu. 36:34). It is not far-fetched to think that this can occur today. A member of *Mahazikei HaDat* might see someone and imagine that he does not follow his way in proper worship of God. He will then judge

him to be a heretic and separate from him. They will then chase (*rodef*) each other (with intent to harm) in the erroneous belief that this is justified, God forbid. The entire people of God will be destroyed, God forbid.

All this would be true even if we were sovereign in our own land. How much more certain when we are down-trodden in exile scattered like sheep among the nations. In exile we are likened to the ‘dust of the earth’ as the Holy Blessed One told Jacob: your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth. The nations are likened to flood waters, as is written in Isaiah: Ah, the roar of many peoples that roar as roars the sea (17:12). There is no hope for a block of dust against floodwaters unless the dust becomes a solid rock. A flooding river would then only roll the stone from place to place but not altogether destroy it. Israel among the nations has no hope unless it becomes the ‘rock of Israel.’ If we become united into one union no nation or culture can destroy us. So, therefore, how can anyone advise us to separate from our fellow Jews? The nations would then wash us away little by little, God forbid.

Furthermore, it is even difficult to separate ourselves from the nations of the world even though God wishes us to do so, as it is said, ‘God leads them alone’ (Deut. 32:12). Balaam said, ‘There is a people that dwells apart not reckoned among the nations’ (Nu. 23:9). This means that Israel will dwell in peace when they dwell apart. But when they attempt to integrate among the nations’ they will then not be reckoned as an independent nation. ‘Israel dwells safely alone—[according to] the vision of Jacob (*ein Ya’akov*).’ This is Jacob’s passionate hope that Israel live securely among the nations by not competing with them; and separately, alone, without integrating into them. All this was of no avail to keep us separate from the idol-worshipping nations.

The Rabbis comment (*Sanhedrin* 104a) on the verse (Lamentations 1:1) “How she dwelled alone,” as follows: Rabbah in the name of Rabbi Yohanan says, “I (God) said, Israel dwelt separate and secure...” now they will

indeed be separated and alone,” for the nations distance themselves from them.

Similarly, the Talmud (*Pesahim* 118b) interprets the verse “He scattered the nations that desired war (*keravot*)” (Ps. 68:31) as “what prompted Israel to be scattered among the nations? Their desire to become close (*kereivut*) to the nations.” This means that because of this desire the nations do not permit Israel to live a long time among them.

From the beginning the Holy Blessed One commanded Abraham, “your children shall be strangers in a foreign land.” (Genesis 15:13) In addition to being a prophecy that this will occur, it is an instructive warning for the future: your children shall be strangers, visitors among the nations and must not wish to mix with them. Therefore, it is written of Jacob, “he visited there (in Egypt)” (Deuteronomy 26:5), which is explained by our Sages to mean that he did not go there with the intention to dwell permanently. Jacob, indeed, said this to Pharaoh, “we have come to visit the land” (Genesis 47:4). This does not mean that Jacob did not come to Egypt to dwell there for the rest of his life, but only visit there until the end of the famine. We cannot draw this conclusion because Jacob had already heard from God that in Egypt, “I will make you into a great nation.” So Jacob knew that they would be there for many years. This would be the fulfillment of the word of God to Abraham: “Your children shall be strangers in a foreign land.” They will be enslaved and persecuted for four hundred years. Thus, the meaning of Jacob’s not descending to Egypt to dwell there is that as far as Pharaoh was concerned, Jacob could be a citizen of the state. However, Jacob does not wish that. He would rather be a visitor following God’s word to Abraham, “your children shall be strangers” (i.e., remain as visitors) so that the word of God would be established forever. Therefore, God who turns the hearts of the nations against us to remove us and render us alone thwarts our attempts in the exile to imitate and integrate with the nations.

In the Haggadah, we recite the verse, ‘And He said to Abraham, your children shall be strangers in a foreign land. They will be enslaved and persecuted for four hundred years. I will then judge the nation that enslaved them and they will depart with great wealth.’ (Genesis 15:13–14) We then say, “It is this which has stood for our ancestors and for us. For more than once have they risen against us to destroy us. Indeed, in every generation they rise against us to destroy us. However, the Blessed Holy One saves us from their hands.”

We should not explain the expression ‘It is this’ as referring to the promise that we would leave with great wealth. This was only for the Egyptian situation and not meant to be for all circumstances. It refers, rather, to the expression ‘your children shall be strangers in a foreign land.’ This is what has stood for our ancestors and us for in every generation that they tried to destroy us because we fail to fulfill God’s word that we remain strangers and be a unique nation. We rather try to come close and integrate with them. This inevitably leads to their attempt to destroy us. However, the Blessed Holy One saves us from their hands.

Concerning this we say: “Go and learn from what Laban the Aramean attempted to do to our ancestor Jacob....” This prevents some enlightened person from claiming the opposite: that if we were completely assimilated into the nations they would cease hating us and would cease their attempts to destroy us. Our response is to learn from Laban. For we were close to him since, in effect, we are all his children. Nevertheless, he tried to destroy everything. “Everything” does not mean just Jacob for otherwise we would say that he tried to kill our Father Jacob. It means he tried to destroy Judaism. We learn this from the very precise expression—an Aramean destroying my ancestor,—which is in the present tense. [That is, continually trying to destroy what my ancestor stood for.] We see that it was not only at that moment that he tried to do so but even after it was clear that Jacob had not stolen from him he still wished to destroy him. This is clear from Laban’s

statement: I have it in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father said to me last night, “Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad”(Gen. 31:29). It is unclear, initially, to whom Laban was speaking in using the plural ‘you’ for he was speaking to Jacob alone. Is it possible that he would wish to kill his children and grandchildren? We thus see that his intention was to destroy all Jacob’s followers who had converted to Judaism. Thus, later on Jacob says, “place it here before my brethren” (v.37) for it was them he had wished to harm, to kill all of them even though they had done nothing to him. His desire was to destroy Judaism. Even though they had not segregated themselves from Laban and his family in Aram he still wished to destroy Judaism. This is because they were close and mixed in with Laban’s household and not like strangers in their city. From this we learn that as much as we try to come close to the nations they increase their distancing us from them and seek to destroy us.

We see how difficult it is to remove ourselves from the nations, for it is against the natural human instinct which is to be friendly with neighbors whether they are good or bad. So how can we now advise our children to distance ourselves from our fellow Jews in all worldly matters? Secondly, there is a *mitzvah* derived from *Berit Avot* commanding us to remain a distinct people. This peoplehood is derived from our common ancestry and not our common observance of *mitzvot*.

Finally, it is abnormal for people to isolate themselves from their neighbors. In this case, they would have to isolate themselves even from family members as Abraham did when he separated from Lot. This is too demanding for most people.

III. Torah Study Is The Solution

If we wish to strengthen our religion and prevent its deterioration among us and our children, we must look to earlier generations for understanding as is written, “from the elders I will learn.” What did Hezekiah the righteous king do when he saw that our religion had weakened

during the time of Ahaz? He stuck a sword in the door of the *Bet Midrash* and declared: Those who do not occupy themselves with Torah study will be thrust with a sword. Even though this measure would not lead to Torah study for its own sake (*lishmah*) nor for the sake of the love of God but only to avoid destruction, nevertheless, this measure strengthened our religion in the best way possible.

The pious king Josiah saw the possible destruction and exile of Israel and the loss of Torah from Israel. What did he do? “He said to the Levites, consecrated to the Lord, who taught all Israel, “Put the Holy Ark in the House that Solomon son of David, king of Israel, built; as you no longer carry it on your shoulders, see now to the service of the Lord your God and His people Israel”” (2 Ch. 35:3).

Our Sages explained that Josiah hid the Ark (*Yoma* 52b). However, it is unclear what he meant when he said: see now to the service of the Lord your God and His people Israel. Why should their service be different from now on? It is also difficult to understand why he said: as you no longer carry it on your shoulders. Had they been carrying the Ark until now? (The Sages already discussed this in the Jerusalem Talmud, tractate *Shekalim*, but this is not the place to expand on this matter.)

The matter is to be understood in that until now the High Priests were immersed in isolation for the love of God and *devequt*. This was the way of the consecrated Levites. Thus, they were unable to teach Torah among the masses and increase the number of scholars for this would interfere with their personal spiritual efforts. Their heretofore sacred service is called a Chariot of the *Shekhinah*, and is said to be “carried on the shoulders” the place in which Knowledge (*Da’at*) dwells. Josiah is now commanding them to stop their isolationist practices for the purpose of *devequt*. From now on serve both God and the nation together by teaching Torah to the masses. Following the king’s command one thousand “craftsmen and smiths’ rose up, all of them warriors” (2 Kings 24:14). Our sages understand them to be warriors for Torah (*Siphre, Ha-Azinu*). Following them there arose the

Members of the Great Assembly who advocated ‘raising many disciples.’ (*Avot* 1:1) This led to the survival of Torah Judaism in Israel.

It is our responsibility at this time to strengthen our faith (*lehahazik ha-dat*) and increase Torah study in all *batei midrashim* (*sic*), programming for all types of public study. People should not worry that some might study Torah not for its own sake (*shelo lishmah*). We learn [not to be concerned over] this from the story of Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah [who disagreed on this issue] (*Berakhot* 28a). We do not follow Rabban Gamaliel’s stated policy that “any student whose inside is unlike his outside should not enter the study hall.” We also see that Rabban Gamaliel was greatly disturbed, rethought his view and said, “Perhaps, God forbid, I have withheld Torah from Israel!” In a dream, he was shown white casks filled with ashes [to indicate that he had acted correctly]. But that was not [the case]. He was shown that just to calm his mind.”

We should not really care if one studies *shelo lishmah*. The ordinary person who studies Torah without love of God and *devequt* studies for the purpose of fulfilling the obligation to study Torah and avoid the severe punishment for ignoring Torah study. This is like all *mitzvah* obligations such as *tefillin* and the like. If they are done for love and *devequt* it is wonderful. However, not every person reaches this status. Yet the *mitzvah* is accomplished. Studying in a public setting is much better than in private. We learned in *Avot* (3): If ten study the *Shekhinah* is among them.... Even five too.... And one studying as well. Nevertheless, it is obvious the more the better. This is true even when walking in the street. In *Ta’anit* (10) we learn: If two disciples walk along the way and do not speak words of Torah they deserve to be burned.

Thus, even if one really studies to proudly show off there is no sin, God forbid; there is only no spiritual benefit or reward. Rashi (*Berakhot* 17) explains that if one studies the commandments in order to be honored then the following verse applies: “Your mercy is as great unto the

heavens.” It is as any *mitzvah* done not for its own sake, even one that requires an act [unlike study which is not considered an act.] Nevertheless, it is certainly not deserving of any punishment, God forbid. This is similar to what is taught in Tractate *Nazir* (23) concerning one who eats the Passover sacrifice gluttonously: even though it is not a preferable way the obligation has been fulfilled.

In Tractate *Yoma* (70) we are told of a Jerusalem custom that on Yom Kippur everyone would bring a Torah scroll home to read from it in order to show off its beauty to others. Rashi explains that by showing the beauty to others the owners were promoting their own glory in that it favorably reflected their endeavors to prepare a religious object in a beautiful manner.

In our situation, therefore, one who studies Torah to find glory in it does fulfill the goal of studying but not in the most elevated manner. Moreover, if we compare Torah study not for its own sake to acceptance of pious strictures for their own sake it is clear that the former is preferable. This follows from what is taught in Tractate *Arakhin* (16b): Rabbi Yehudah son of Rabbi Shimon was asked which is superior, chastising *lishmah* or humility *shelo lishmah*? He answered: we must acknowledge that humility *shelo lishmah* is superior, for Mar taught that humility is the greatest of all virtues. This shows that even *shelo lishmah* is superior for Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav: One should always occupy oneself with Torah and commandments even *shelo lishmah*.... From this it is clear that Torah study even *shelo lishmah* is superior to pious strictures *lishmah* [for nowhere is it said that one should occupy oneself with strictures].

In the Jerusalem Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah*, chapter 2) and in the opening of Lamentations *Rabbah* the Sages interpreted, “Israel rejected what is good” (Hosea 8:3) to refer to the Torah, [for it says, “I have given you a good portion, do not abandon My Torah.”] We have explained the flow of the verses as follows: Israel cries out to Me, ‘O my God, we are devoted to you.’ Israel rejects what is good; an enemy shall pursue him. “Israel cries out to Me”

—during public prayer, concerning their troubles; “O my God, Israel are devoted to you”—we have loved you, why have you not helped us. To this the prophet replies, “Israel rejects what is good”—they did not uphold Torah study and, therefore, the merit of their loving devotion will not help them. “An enemy shall pursue them”—for only the merit of intensive Torah study can protect them from any enemy.

Also in [Lamentations] *Rabbah* we find the statement of Rav Huna and Rabbi Yehudah in the name of Rehava explaining the verse “they have abandoned Me and kept My Torah.” [God is, in effect, saying] since they are occupied with the Torah it will lead them back to God. There is also the very well known statement: One should always be occupied with Torah and commandments even when not *lishmah* for *lishmah* will develop from *shelo lishmah*. Now most people explain this as referring to the same person [who will grow from one to the other.] However, this implies that if the person does not develop that way God does not accept the *shelo lishmah* acts. However, in Tractate *Sanhedrin* (105b) we learned a different explanation: Rav Judah said in the name of Rav, one should always be occupied with Torah and commandments even when not *lishmah* for *lishmah* will develop from *shelo lishmah*, for because of the forty-two offerings made by Balaam he merited to have Ruth as a descendant. This shows us that there is merit in *lo lishmah* itself which can lead to *lishmah* in a subsequent generation.

From all this we see that we, the upholders of the faith (*mahazikei ha-dat*), are obliged to engage in strong efforts to occupy ourselves with Torah study. The rabbis and communal leaders must ensure that teachers should be scholars. If we are required by the state to teach secular subjects in our schools these should be taught by pious people. This will not be possible if people are only concerned for their own children and cannot always find a proper teacher for the secular material. This will drive away the children. They will rebel against their parents and follow some perverse path in order to properly study

the secular subjects. Only if the community and its leaders accept this responsibility can it succeed. The proper teacher will make sure that they do not depart from the way of Torah and that there will be sufficient time for Torah study. Both studies will prosper. However, scholars capable of Halakhic decision-making (*horaah*) will not be produced by such a system. True Torah scholarship results only from total dedication to it. One’s total dedication to study helps merit true scholarship. One cannot be a great Torah scholar while being occupied with other matters. The great Torah scholars who are scholars in secular studies either studied secular studies before or after their Torah studies. It is not possible to do them together. Nevertheless, even though those who study both together will not reach *horaah*, Torah study for any amount of time is precious and leads to piety (*yirat Ha-Shem*).

Communal Torah study among householders (*baale batim*) will reduce communal conflict and increase the upholders of the faith. Without doubt there are many who have not rejected the authority of the Talmud, our early rabbis (*rishonim*) and that which is explained in the *Shulhan Arukh* but may still be unlearned in Torah. This leads to laxity in observance of customs and duties found in our ethical literature. However, those who will study Torah will understand that the lax ones are not heretics and deniers, God forbid. They will stay united with them in one group to deliberate upon how to strengthen our faith and triumph over the deniers of Talmudic authority. The larger will be the group the stronger it will be and more likely to find good counsel from each other. God will listen and pay attention to their efforts and help to preserve their children from total heresy.

Mass Torah study will also serve another beneficial purpose. We, the upholders of faith, will know how to behave more precisely according to the teachings of our Sages as expressed in the Talmud and *Shulhan Arukh*. The masses will not be misled to make changes according to the imagination of some [allegedly] great and holy person who thinks there are better ways to worship God.

During the first Temple period there were also *mahazikei ha-dat* who refused to worship idols. But they sacrificed on the high places outside the Temple which is liable to a punishment of excision. Nevertheless, they followed the priests of those places who were also great men who taught that this is a convenient way to achieve love and *devequt* for the Blessed Holy One without traveling all the way to Jerusalem. Because this transgression was misunderstood to be a *mitzvah* even the righteous Judean kings such as Assa and Jehoshafat were unable to stop them, as it says, “the people were still offering at the *bamot*.” So entrenched was the view that indeed this was a good thing that when King Hezekiah abolished the *bamot* he was attacked by the Rabshakeh [the Assyrian officer] who said: And if you tell me that you are relying on the Lord your God, He is the very one whose shrines and altars Hezekiah did away with, telling Judah and Jerusalem, ‘You must worship only at this altar in Jerusalem.’ (2 Kings 18:22) We see that the Rabshakeh believed Hezekiah had grievously sinned. This is because he was a heretic who had learned in his parental home the mistaken notion that it was a sin to prevent the people from worshipping at the *bamot* with *devequt* and love of God while in reality it was a sin to do so.

If we inquire as to what power Hezekiah had that made him more successful than Assa or Jehoshafat in overcoming this practice we realize that it was his promotion of Torah

study among the masses even though it was *shelo lishmah* but out of fear of the sword. Still it helped to prevent sinfulness and behavior against the Torah as well as against human reason.

In our times we have many pious *mahazikei ha-dat* who behave according to their own thoughts in order to achieve love of God even though these practices are against the views of the Talmud and *Shulhan Arukh*. They rely on a statement of our Sages: “The Merciful One desires the heart” (*Sanhedrin* 106b). This leads them to many transgressions all done for the sake of heaven in order to reach the love of God securely in their mouths. However, if they were to habituate themselves to regular Torah study in order to be able to properly obey the Torah they would be protected from faulty views. Nor would each one have his own Torah, God forbid. Everything would then follow according to the Talmud.

To sum up: If we truly and sincerely wish to strengthen our faith there is no way other than through Torah study. There is no difference whether this is *lishmah* or *shelo lishmah*. Only God knows the interior motives of the student; we should not be concerned with it at all. In this manner we will promote an increase in Torah study among all types of people. Even the men of Enlightenment will then have to admit that Talmud study is our great protection.