"Talmud Torah is Equivalent to All"

The Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Education System for Boys in Jerusalem

Ehud (Udi) Spiegel

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Preface

This study presents a unique phenomenon in the field of Israeli education – the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) education system for boys. The paper describes a system that has created a meaningful alternative to the regular state education in Israel, employing its own methods and teaching means. The system has inculcated the Haredi worldview to hundreds of thousands of graduates and achieved meteoric growth over recent decades.

The Haredi education system is the focus of interest for three reasons. We wish to understand the successes and challenges posed by an educational approach that differs from those with which we are familiar; we wish to learn more about the way the young Haredi is educated and shaped; and we are interested in enhancing our understanding of how this system impacts on Haredi society in particular and on Israeli society in general. Focusing on the Haredi education system in Jerusalem enables us to achieve an in-depth familiarity with the largest and most diverse collection of Haredi educational institutions for boys in Israel. This center functions as a model for the development of other Haredi population centers around Israel.

This education system is a melting pot that has absorbed hundreds of thousands of students over recent decades – the future generations of the Haredi world. It shapes the worldview and habits of the young Haredi, who grows into a man who is familiar with the Torah and observes the commandments. Numerous processes within Haredi society can be associated directly or indirectly with the activities that take place within this system, including issues that are raised on the Israeli agenda, such as the low level of employment of Haredi men or the tendency to insularity and extremism.

This study examines the unique profile of this system within its environment, drawing on data that describe its characteristics, but relating also to its profile through statistics and through the Haredi perception of the system. The description focuses on the methods used by the various components of the Haredi education system (kindergartens, Talmudei Torah, and Yeshivot Ktanot), and discusses the differences between the different streams that comprise this system. The study examines the activities of various elements within the system and in its periphery,

as well as processes that occur among its institutions, and processes that occur among the students themselves during the course of their education.

This study does not claim to present a full or complete picture of Haredi education. Neither does it necessarily seek to evaluate the quality of the education described here or its desirable future, or to present a coherent proposal for government policy toward this system. Our objective is to present an impressive education system that deserves attention.

Some will consider this study to be "too positive" regarding Haredi education and its complex impact. Others may find it difficult to accept the criticism presented here, and will question the study's reliability. As a secular researcher, I cannot purport to present the full character of the Haredi world, but I was careful to address the subject from a standpoint of respect. I apologize sincerely to those who may feel offended by my description of the subject. Any errors, distortions, or misunderstandings are my responsibility alone.

The study comprises three chapters:

Chapter A – Background: This chapter provides a brief description of the "conceptual variable" (the importance of educating boys), the "historical variable" (Haredi education for boys in Israel), and the "social variable" (Haredi society in general and its character in contemporary Israel, in particular). These three variables directly and indirectly shape the phenomenon examined in the study.

Chapter B – Findings: The findings section presents a profile of the system, with reference to the differences found within it.

The first two sections of this chapter present an overall picture of the phenomenon examined, including its unique features as well as quantitative and qualitative aspects.

The following sections discuss a number of issues in detail: The system's general structure and components; studies in the classroom and elsewhere; pedagogic activities; and the operating methods of the main players in the internal system in each institution and among the institutions.

The last section examines a different issue: From the media's standpoint, we present the "official discourse" of the Haredi world. This aspect relates directly

to the manner in which the Haredi community structures reality and addresses the education system's position within Haredi society.

Chapter C – Discussion of the findings and thoughts for the future. The discussion is informed by theoretical aspects enabling a clarification of the meaning of the findings, and by a presentation of their derivatives in terms of policy. This chapter will present aspects that can be learned from this education system, and will examine these in various contexts of multicultural thought and in terms of policy.

Introduction

A. "And the study of Torah is equal to them all"

> "These are the things the interest on which a person enjoys in this world, while the principal remains for him in the world to come: Honoring father and mother; deeds of lovingkindness; early arrival at the study-house morning and evening; hospitality to guests; visiting the sick; dowering the bride; accompanying the dead (to burial); devotion in prayer; making peace between a man and his fellow – and the study of Torah is equal to them all."
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> From the dawn blessings in the morning service[1]

The Haredi education system for boys constitutes the ideological and social heart of Haredi society, which fervently adopts the priority embodied in the above quote and seeks to act in its spirit. This system shapes the character of the boys who attend it and influences the lives of their future partners and children. Its institutions create the foundation for the existence and growth of the different Haredi communities.

However, the system's impact extends far beyond the confines of the Haredi community. The Haredi education system is one of the most significant educational enterprises that currently operate in Israel. According to a rough estimate, some 150,000 – 180,000 students are enrolled system e impact of this system extends far beyond the confines of the Haredi community. The Haredi education system is one of the most significant educational enterprises that currently operate in Israel.

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[1] The Mishna presents a slightly different version: "These are the things that are without measure: charity, first fruits, pilgrimage to the temple, righteous deeds, and studying Torah. These are things that a man can eat of their fruits in this world, but their true fulfillment is in the world to come: honoring one's parents, righteous deeds, bringing peace between a man and his friend. Studying Torah is equal to them all." *Peah*, 1 1.

According to a rough estimate, some 150,000 – 180,000 students attend this system *throughout Israel.*[2] In 2008, the proportion of students (boys and girls) in the Haredi sector was 24 percent of students in compulsory kindergarten *in the Jewish sector*, approximately 27 percent of students in elementary education, and 20 percent of students in senior high schools (from: Horev and Kopp, 2009, 115).[3] Although these proportions are not precise,[4] it may be stated the number of students in the Haredi education system has grown consistently over recent decades.[5]

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[2] This estimate is based on an analysis of the following data: The total number of students in Israel in 2009 was estimated at 1,839,000, almost 15 percent of whom attend Haredi institutions. Assuming that half the students in Haredi institutions are boys, there are at least 135,000 male students. In addition, thousands of students attend private kindergartens, unrecognized institutions, and Haredi institutions accountable to the state-religious education system (such as the Habad institutions). Thus the estimate is that the Haredi education system for boys in Israel accommodates between 150,000 and 180,000 students.

It is important to note that other figures suggest that almost 230,00o students attend Haredi educational institutions (see Wargen and Fidelman, 2009). Conversely, estimates as high as 395,000 have been proposed (see: "Education is Their Top Priority," Efrat Zemer-Bronfman, Weekend Supplement, *Ma'ariv*, 30 April 2010).

[3] According to the forecast of the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2012 the proportion of students in the Haredi sector is expected to reach 22.4 percent of *all students in elementary education*, and 30.9 percent of *all students in elementary education in the Jewish sector*. See: Central Bureau of Statistics, *Forecast of Students in the Education System, 2006-2012*, April 2007.

[4] The numbers and proportions quoted here are imprecise for various reasons. Firstly, the division of the Haredi system into different educational levels (kindergarten, elementary, and high school) differs from that of the state system. Secondly, the figures do not include precise statistics for all the constituent parts associated with Haredi education, such as the Habad institutions or unrecognized institutions.

[5] The figures of the Central Bureau of Statistics show that the relative weight of students in the Haredi sector, out of the entire population of students in the Jewish sector, doubled over the fourteen-year period from 1992 through 2006 (see the Report of the State Comptroller for 2008). Figures published in the summer of 2009 show that approximately one-third of children in pre-schools in the Jewish sector attend Haredi institutions (see: "Every Third Child is in a Haredi Education Framework," Or Kashti, *Ha'aretz*, 19 August 2009). It has also been claimed that the growth of the Haredi education system has moderated in recent years. Two phenomena may influence the figures and impair the ability to draw conclusions regarding trends in the system. The first is the unreliability of data received regarding the education system, as may be seen from changes in the updated statistics in the CBS publication from 2007 (Kopp, 2007, 133). Secondly, the Ministry of Education recognition of additional Haredi institutions, particularly in the late 1990s, may explain, at least in part, the steep rise in the figures. Whatever the reason, it is agreed that there has been a significant increase in the Haredi education system in recent decades. Most of this increase is attributed to the high natural growth rate in Haredi society.

The processes occurring in this system, the nature of the education it provides, and its achievements, challenges, and failings have an impact on many future citizens of Israel. Even now, this system is already making its mark on the character of the State of Israel.[6]

The Haredi education system for boys has received limited research attention.[7] Helmreich, 1982, and Finkelman, 2002, discussed the characteristics of studies in the *yeshivot ktanot* outside Israel, and the differences among these. Numerous studies (Kahane, 1990; Shleif, 1995; Nissan and Shleif, 2005; Halbertal and Halbertal, 1998) have examined the character of the yeshiva education system and its motivations. Other studies (Broider, 5764; Friedman, 2006; Shempfer, 2005; Tikochinsky, 2005) have focused on the historical changes in the institution of the yeshiva over the years. An important contribution to understanding the lives of men in the Haredi world was recently made by Nurit Stadler in her book (Stadler, 2009). Yochai Hakak (2003) offered an anthropological portrait of the *yeshiva ktana* from the individual perspective, examining the lives of the yeshiva students, with an emphasis on strategies of regimentation and the control of physical aspects. Varda Shiffer (1998) examined the structure, budget, and inspection of the Haredi education system as a whole, noting the difficulties that arise in the inspection of this system (see also: Ilan, 2001). Many studies have examined the institution and history of the yeshiva (for example: Broider, 2003; Shempfer, 2005; Kehat, 2005; Atkes, 2005), though these are of limited use in understanding current trends.[8] The current state of research did not en able a picture of the manner in which young Haredi men mature to become different and unique citizens of Israel.

The current structure and characteristics of this education system are undocumented relative to any other education system in Israel. This is the result of numerous factors, including the system's level of autonomy; the changes it has undergone over recent decades; the high level of diversity among its institutions

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[6] This aspect has been discussed as part of the public debate surrounding the core curriculum and the processes of separation between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, as well as in other areas, such as the recruitment of Haredim to the army and employment difficulties.

[7] On the Haredi education system for girls, see: Friedman, 5755; Weissman, 1995; Friedman, 1978).

[8] A **Master Plan for Haredi Education in Jerusalem** was recently prepared, including a general outline of the system and its deployment around the city, in addition to relatively precise empirical data (Cohen et al., 2007). Regrettably, this important plan has not been published to date.

in social, organizational, and administrative terms; and the fact that it has received little attention from academic research. It is largely invisible to external eyes, to the point that it sometimes seems that this situation may be intended to serve various interests. The impression is sometimes that we are more familiar with the character of Haredi education in Eastern Europe one or two centuries ago than with its current state in Israel.

This lack of familiarity with the Haredi education system has far-reaching ramifications in terms of policy.

First, it is difficult to establish informed policy regarding a system whose components and methods are unfamiliar to us. Second, there is a natural difficulty and reticence in assisting an unknown system, even when such assistance is desired and may meet common interests.[9] Third, it is difficult to identify problematic issues within this sphere and to help it address these issues. Issues such as the payment of salaries to teaching staff or student dropout are of concern to the Haredi public and to policy makers. Another issue is the discrimination against students of Sephardi origin in admissions to Haredi institutions.

B. The Research Approach

This study will focus on the following question: How does the contemporary Haredi education system for boys operate?

We will also examine the rationales that guide the system, and identify the similarities and differences between its various components. These questions raise numerous secondary issues, including aspects relating to the system's operating principles and the norms according to which it functions; its different components and rules of the game in their mutual relations; learning methods used by the system; and the variance between institutions.

These questions will be addressed through an examination of the "Haredi education system for boys in the city of Jerusalem" and of the educational

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[9] The difficulty in identifying these areas and the lack of familiarity with the system lead to a high level of suspicion toward it. This also reflects the high level of mutual suspicion between Haredi society and Israeli society in general.

institutions that operate within this system, within its cultural context.[10] A cultural research perspective views the structure and activity of the education system as part of the broader fabric of society, and as acting in accordance with cultural conventions and sociocultural roles (Bruner, 2000). It permits an examination of the continuity and sequence of actions of groups throughout the processes of structural change that occur in and around these groups (Swiedler, 2003). The system being examined here embodies numerous variables whose borders exist within diverse dimensions (cultural, social, educational, geographical, etc.) In our case, the task of understanding the system raises challenges, whether because of the complexities inherent in any education system (for example, see Inbar, 2005) or because this system is uniquely large and diverse and is guided by unique rationales, and because of our paucity of information regarding this system.

The methodology proposed here is based on ground theory, which largely represents a paradigmatic point of departure for different research perceptions (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This is a multi-staged research process through which research questions and categories are shaped by the process of empirical research relating to findings and to analytical and theoretical approaches.[11] It is a practical tool for use in describing and explaining a municipal education system about which there is limited knowledge in the research literature, and where numerous restrictions apply to its investigation.

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[10]   The decision to focus on "cultural research" was no coincidence. The first reason for this was the difficulty in entering the research field and the lack of accurate and reliable information and data. This is particularly problematic in the case of such a dynamic system, in which numerous educational institutions are opened and closed, while others merely change their name or address. It was apparent from the preliminary research that it is extremely difficult to enter the research field, and that the data relating to this field (including those held by the authorities) are insufficiently accurate to yield a reliable picture. This impression was only reinforced as our familiarity grew with the system's complex nature and its function as the fulcrum for diverse and significant cultural and social activities. This was naturally compounded by the cultural distance between the researcher, the research community, and most of the potential readers, on the one hand, and the subjects of the study, on the other. I also found that, in this case, the presentation of numerical data does not provide a reliable picture or necessarily reflect the educational activity. Conversely, I felt that an in-depth examination of isolated institutions (see, for example, Hakak 2003) constituted a highly restricted approach. Focusing on one or two institutions enables a profound and meaningful perspective on the system, but does not permit attention to the differences between the institutions within this system or its holistic examination. These points apply to varying degrees to any large, decentralized education system, but they are particularly relevant in the case of the system examined here.
[11]   This process permits an examination of complex human systems and their perception as entire wholes, while conceptualizing the categories and processes that emerge from the field.

This is a "soft" methodology that does not claim to describe reality precisely, but rather to reflect it and to attempt to understand the processes it undergoes.

The **research field** was limited in geographical terms to the city of Jerusalem, and in social terms to educational activities with Haredi boys. Jerusalem is an interesting test case for examining Haredi education for boys, and is particularly diverse in sociological and historical terms. The range of Haredi groups that live in the city and the size of the Haredi education system for boys facilitate an examination of the differences within the system, alongside its particularly prominent features in the Holy City. Investigation into the largest Haredi center in Israel may yield insights into trends in Haredi society in other parts of Israel, and on potential developments in their education systems.

The focus on boys was mainly due to the fact that this system is distinct and separate from the girls' system, and exhibits more unique characteristics. The focus here is on the heart of Haredi society, and also on that sphere that is most independent and furthest removed from inspection and monitoring by the official Israeli establishment.

It is accepted today that educational processes go beyond the confines of formal education. While this study focused mainly on the education system, it also relates at several points to broader aspects of educational action, such as education in the home or informal education.

We shall come to see that the boundaries of the Haredi formal education system are less clear than we might have expected. For example, some "Haredi institutions" actually serve traditional (or even secular) populations, while other institutions operate within the state education system and serve Haredi populations, among others. I have attempted in this study to relate when possible to all the categories that constitute a potential educational option for the Haredi public, and to those that consider themselves close to this public for various reasons.[12] In almost all cases, the data presented here relate to those institutions that are affiliated in administrative terms to the Haredi education system.

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[12] This includes the educational institutions of Habad, most of which are affiliated to the state-religious education system.

The **research method** included the collection of extensive ethnographic material, including interviews, observations, visits, and the collection of textual materials in order to form a picture of the parts of the system.

Four main methods were used to collect the material:

❖ Visits to and observations in Haredi educational institutions in Jerusalem: I visited over 25 Talmudei Torah, kindergartens, and *yeshivot ktanot*. In several cases I observed the functioning of the institution and classroom lessons.

❖ Interviews: I interviewed dozens of Haredi educators from different streams. The interviews were a key source of information and enabled me to cross-reference and examine the reliability of this information.

❖ Collection of ethnographic material – from the Haredi press, conversations on the street, etc.

❖ Collating existing research material – numerous studies have touched on different aspects relating directly or indirectly to Haredi education for boys. In particular, I should note the survey undertaken for the Master Plan for Educational Institutions (Cohen et al., 2007), which was prepared recently and constitutes a reliable source of data.

Names of the interviewees and institutions visited were mostly omitted at the request of the interviewees and hosts.

An exception is Chapter Thirteen, which presents a review of the Haredi press and includes a clearer and sharper methodology at the beginning of the chapter.

Research limitations – researching Haredi society is a complex challenge for all those who engage in it. Although the research area is physically close, it is remote in cultural and mental terms and inaccessible to the researcher. Profound cultural and mental differences exist between the researcher and his field. This limitation may hamper the researcher's ability to understand or identify with the thematic and symbolic world he investigates. Susan Harding, 1992, and Shlomo Fisher, 2007, drew my attention to the problems that may result from the negative attitudes of those who research into fundamentalism toward "radical"

groups.[13] In such cases, research discourse may create tension between the researchers (the scientists), who are supposed to be rational and enlightened, and the subjects of their study (Haredim, in our case), who are supposed to show rigid, outmoded, and irrational thought patterns. This is compounded by the difficulties resulting from the general suspicion among Haredim toward external elements who take an interest in their society, as well as specific suspicion toward researchers and members of the scientific community.[14] These difficulties form an integral part of most of the studies examining Haredi society (for example, see Hakak, 2005; Kaul-Seidman, 2002; Rier, Schwartzbaum & Heller, 2008), particularly in its broader contexts. The collection of diverse material from different sources is intended to facilitate in addressing these problems.

In this study, I refrained from entering into detailed discussion of precise (numerical) data presenting the system examined here, or from discussion the relevant laws and regulations. In my opinion, the problems resulting from the level of accuracy of the data, as well as the frequent changes in laws and regulations, mean that such discussions sometimes actually hamper the ability to understand the system's character and modalities. This is particularly true since there is sometimes a tendency to claim that such details present the "true" picture of reality.

It is particularly important to note research limitations when a study is used for policy purposes. The picture presented here is partial; while it illuminates many components, shadows conceal other dimensions. Each example or norm presented here may contradict norms found elsewhere. This is particularly true in the case of a dynamic and changing society such as the Haredi community, which has developed and fragmented into groups and sub-groups over the past decade.[15]

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[13] Susan Harding spoke of the existence of the "repugnant cultural other." she argues that these representations (together with stereotypes and images in the media) serve to establish the modern subject. Shlomo Fisher argued that the paradigmatic functionalist discourse that developed during the 1990s suffered from Orientalist perceptions.

[14] This issue is of concern to all those involved in research into Haredi society and is reflected in the work of female researchers in the Haredi world (for example, see: Elor, 1983; Stadler, 2009).

[15] A completely different type of difficulty results from the decentralized and isolated cultural and organizational structure of this society, which consists of diverse groups and institutions. A researcher examining one particular Haredi group may soon discover that other Haredi groups or institutions act in different ways.

A personal view – getting to know "them" – the Haredi educational institution constitutes a type of exterritorial entity. It is separated from the street, and indeed draws strength from this separation. Inside is the "realm of holiness" in which the Torah is taught and the commandments discussed in depth, while outside lies the profane world. Inside attention focuses on the higher worlds, while outside interests are vain and transient. The clearer this distinction, and the more it is realized and imbued in those who learn and attend the institution, the more Haredi, and the more prestigious, that institution may be considered.

My connection with Haredi society began over a decade ago. My work in the Jerusalem Foundation offered me a chance to enter this world and learn more about the Haredi education system. A secular Jew who enters a Talmud Torah experiences a fundamental sense of strangeness. Wherever you turn, inquisitive eyes peer at you. It took me time to learn concepts and language, to enter into such a different world of themes, and to adjust my expectations of the interviewees and their expectations of me.

The feeling of strangeness I experienced may be compared to the understanding of this concept in Schuetz, 1994, who examined the immigrant as a stranger who reads culture: The stranger engages in a cultural reading of the society and culture he encounters, interpreting the experiences and translating them into his own insights and actions. I, too, felt the same way.

The strangeness of the Haredi environment is more reminiscent, I found, to the approach of Bauman, 1990, who positions the "stranger" as a trespasser who threatens the existing order. He moves along the gray lines between different societies and categories. He is not a member of the group, and experiences feelings of confusion, anxiety, and insecurity. He is perceived as threatening order and "true" identity by bringing the external space inward, and by challenging boundaries and consensus. In my case, I was such a threatening stranger, and, indeed, this was made clear to me on several occasions (albeit politely).

The comparison between these two understandings of strangeness (see: Rapoport and Lomsky Feder, 2003) clarifies something of the encounter between myself, as a secular researcher, and the Haredi subjects, as well as the constant tension this encounter entails. Each side experienced its own sense of strangeness, and the encounter between the two is marked by curiosity, expectations, and disappointments.

C. Theoretical Understandings

Discussion of Haredi education for boys is an interesting topic in terms of a wide range of theoretical aspects, from the educational activity in the institution through to legal and political dimensions (Kafri, 2001) and gender-related aspects (Hakak, 2003). The modalities employed by this system pose complex challenges in organizational, philosophical, and ethical terms. Three theoretical contexts of this subject will accompany us in the study below: The study of school education; the multicultural approach; and the Haredi phenomenon. I shall present the first two contexts here, in brief, as well as a concise discussion of the principled issue of policy. The context of Haredi society will be described in detail in the next chapter.[16]

The first theoretical context is study of pedagogy and education in the educational institutions. Ivan Ilich gained fame by advocating the abolition of the school (Ilich, 1973). He rejected the school as an option for the proper raising of the individual human being, and saw it as a central source of social flaws and defects. Ilich argued that the function played by the school as a central tool for education in modern society is harmful to the personality, uniqueness, and curiosity of children. Ilich's criticism of the school and the modern education system may be extreme, but many others see the school as a conservative and fossilized institution. They argue that the education system in the Western world is one of the sources of the ills of modern society, and that it functions as a type of "total institution" as this term is defined by Goffman, 2006. Neil Postman, 1998, argued that schools prefer to inculcate passive thinking among their students, leaving them little room for self-expression (see also: Caspi, 1979; Kon, 2002). Hyman & Snook, 1999, claimed that schools threaten the physical and psychological wellbeing of the students, some of whom experience physical and psychological abuse while in these institutions.

The Haredi education system for boys offers an alternative that refutes many of the conventions and basic assumptions regarding Western education and its institutions. At the same time, however, it takes some of these conventions and

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[16] For obvious reasons, these issues are presented here "in a nutshell." The reader is invited to use the bibliographical references in order to gain further insight.

assumptions still further than the Western model. I shall argue below that its differences make it an interesting test case and presents an alternative form of educational activity that offers a chance to reexamine the current educational endeavor.

The second theoretical context is the place of minorities in the democratic nation-state, and perceptions of multiculturalism. In recent decades, modern nation-states have intensified their efforts to address the cultural divergence that exists within their territory. Some states define themselves as multicultural countries (Kymlicka, 1989; Parekh, 2000; Yonah, 2006). Multiculturalism is a political and cultural approach that is currently reflected in policies and action in most fields of life. It centers on attempts to ensure that cultural minority groups enjoy rights and resources. Theoretical discussion focused in part on the nature of the rights that should be enjoyed by illiberal minority groups living in Western liberal societies. This included, for example, the right of minority groups such as native Canadians, Muslims in France, and Arabs and Haredim in Israel to maintain their distinct identity and to refrain from adopting liberal cultural values. Discussions of this question have focused mainly on indigenous or national minorities, or on immigrant minorities. A particular problem emerged in coping with the complexity of this question as it applies to minorities that, as a matter of principle, reject the democratic idea in general, and the multicultural approach in particular (Tamir, 1998; Jacobson, 2005; Mautner, 2008). The problem is highlighted by their approach, which views multiculturalism as a temporary arrangement that serves their needs, and in situations in which such a minority group becomes a large and dominant group within society.

Discussion of the Haredi education system for boys raises this issue in its full force, presenting an instance in which a large cultural group insists on maintaining a separate education system financed from state funds. The system acts to ensure that its students are literate and have learned the basic foundations of general studies (such as arithmetic), but they are not equipped for work in a modern world, and their education does not relate to citizenship in a democratic state. The Haredi system seeks to separate its students from the outside world and, as far as possible, to prevent them from adopting a way of life that differs from the accepted norm in their surrounding society.

Policy **is a tool for realizing values**, transforming principles into a part of reality.

Establishing policy principles is the product of political and public processes. The same, however, is true for the modalities by which policy is implemented, which are also not free of value-based influence and cultural assumptions (Gal-Nor, 2008). This is particularly significant when substantial cultural rifts exist between the population in which policy is to be developed and the decision-makers and professionals responsible for implementing policy.

In our case, the question that arises is which values are to be promoted: the values of the "minority group" or the accepted values of the majority culture in the state? This question is highly sensitive, particularly since it has far-reaching ramifications for the lives of citizens, as well as economic, institution, and value-based ramifications for Israeli society as a whole. This sensitivity is heightened further in the context of a large sociocultural group that is growing and expanding rapidly and is no longer a small minority struggling for its existence. These value-based dilemmas are often reflected in the allocation of resources. By way of example, the question as to whether the state should finance transportation for Haredim who wish their children to attend a particular type of educational institution has a direct impact on the lives of tens of thousands of Haredi students whose parents wish to send them to an institution with a specific character that is remote from their home. The choice of such an institution is important to the family in religious and social terms, and may even dictate the student's personal progress in the future. Conversely, financing a transportation system of this type requires substantial budgetary allocations on the part of the state (as is the case, for example, in the special education system in Israel, or in certain large regional councils). The dilemma is heightened by the fact that the principle of equality might require the provision of a similar transportation system for other groups within society.

Haredi education in Israel raises numerous questions, only some of which will be discussed in this study.

The Haredi education system for boys is a fascinating subject in the context of Haredi society, education, politics, and administration. It offers a fresh perspective on educational activity and on the role of education in social and

cultural systems. This perspective should be of interest to any Israeli citizen interested in understanding where (and how) Israeli society is heading over the coming decades, and in learning about one of the systems that has the greatest impact on tomorrow's Israeli citizens.

Conclusion

A. A Look at the Concealed

> "A blessing is measured only in that which is hidden from the eye."
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> (Ta'anit 8b)

The Haredi education system for boys has been hidden from the eye and far from the mind for many years. This has prevented us from recognizing the blessing it embodies with its unique character and qualities and its educational action, which is worthy of study and examination.

This is a large system that is expected to absorb almost 200,000 students in the coming years. In this respect, it resembles Haredi society in Israel as a whole. A community that seemed to be on the verge of extinction six or seven decades ago will number a quarter of a million people in Jerusalem alone within one decade.

This marks a substantial change in the Israeli reality, amounting to nothing less than a revolution, with all this implies.

The Haredi education system is the product of historical, conceptual, and social changes that have led to the emergence of a broad, diverse, and complex organizational structure that works to inculcate strict and separatist approaches within Haredi society. Education is responsible for shaping the future Haredi generation, preparing it to withstand the temptations of the external world and the covert deception it offers (Sivan et al., 2004, 34-5).

A relatively strong organizational and pedagogic model has emerged that has proved itself in several variations. One part of this education system works to maintain traditions and strict approaches among community members and, in some cases, even helps establish communities with new strict approaches. Another part of the system seeks to expand the community, drawing in various peripheral populations and keeping students whose parents have already been exposed to various components of external culture within Haredi society. In these

cases, the system sometimes seems to be fighting a rearguard action, as Haredi education finds it difficult to cope with the development of a new Haredi leisure culture, or with the expanding use of computers and Internet (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005). Many Haredi educators argue that the very existence of these processes highlights the importance of their educational work and of the critical nature of the comprehensive component in the educational experience provided by their institutions.

In order to understand the modern Haredi phenomenon of rigidity and separatism, response and naivety, and the ways in which it is fashioned, it is important to examine this education system and its institutions.

Despite the unique nature of the Haredi education system and community in Jerusalem, conclusions may be drawn regarding the situation in other Haredi centers. Moreover, evidence suggests that the Haredi education system also diffuses its values and modalities to education systems active within the national-Haredi ("Hardal") public, whose way of life has drawn closer to the Haredi norm in recent decades.[17]

The Haredi education system is growing and flourishing, and its size is altering its character and visibility: The system's growing size changes the manner in which Haredi society is viewed by the outside world; it changes the needs of Haredi society and the ways its institutions and leaders function. Its increased size should also influence policy toward Haredi education in Israel.

Moreover, Haredi society is changing, and is finding it extremely difficult to maintain its way of life among large sections of its constituent population. This is illustrated by the following comments published in a Haredi newspaper:

"... Are we, as parents and educators, totally in agreement with the Haredi way of life, or are we ourselves – G-d forbid – torn between the demands of the Torah and the demands of modern life, so that we lack the basic ability to raise our children in the authentic Haredi way? Unfortunately, all too many parents and educators, even those who are Torah students, public figures, or hold important positions in religious life, are themselves infected by the virus of dropout. You can see it on them... in their appearance, their behavior,

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[17] In some of the settlements, Talmudei Torah operate in accordance with Haredi educational norms, including institutions that have adopted elements of the "Silberman method" as described above.

their whole lifestyle (...) Somehow they have learned to lead a double life: in their hearts they are hardly 'trembling [Haredim – trans.] *before G-d's word,' yet they promise themselves that their children will be educated in the true Haredi spirit.''*[18]

Thus we learn of the changes occurring among the Haredi public, and of changes and developments concerning Haredi education for boys.

It is convenient to regard Haredi education for boys as a success story, and there is certainly much we can learn from it. It is equally convenient to negate it in its entirety. The reality, however, is more complex. The key success of this system is not so much the growth in the number of students and institutions, which is due mainly to demographic processes, but rather to its ability to cope with modern reality and raise students who, as adults, are committed to a distinct and separate way of life. This is due to various factors examined in this study, particularly organizational flexibility, a strong educational ideal, and a cultural continuum that envelopes the student on all sides, providing security for him and his family. "Holistic education" provides students with a uniform message conveyed at home, in their social environment, by friends and teachers. The message emerges through overt and covert curricula, and is also largely reflected in newspaper supplements for children and in sections for fathers and mothers. From an early age, the student acquires fragments of information that construct a type of "mental map" that guides his thought, and according to which he defines the space in which he acts. Naturally, all human beings possess such maps (Pipkin, 1986). In the case of Haredi boys, however, the information acquired is mono-dimensional and clear, providing strong inner meaning and preventing, as far as possible, exposure to potentially challenging data. The trend in recent years for many Haredi young men to enter employment poses new tests for the "products" of this education system. They can be expected to find themselves exposed to new information that will enable them to function in strange working environments and in accordance with external norms: to function as productive workers. The "mental map" they have built up over the years will now open to new horizons, while maintaining its fundamental elements. It is reasonable to assume that these processes will be studied and examined in detail in the future.

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18 "It's Not Our Children – It's Us," Nathan Anshin, *Mishpacha*, 10 January 2008.

At least superficially, it seems that many Haredi men manage (in varying degrees) to meet the challenge presented by work, and to fill in gaps in knowledge they encounter (relative to the graduates of the state education system). Many others find this process difficult and even encounter a crisis.

Haredi society has undergone a complex process in recent decades through its constant contact with secular surroundings. Its members are highly exposed to technological and other innovations (Hakak, 2003; Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005; Kaplan, 2007). Haredi education is constantly required to address the tension between the uniform "Haredi" message and other messages present on the street that threaten to destabilize the message's unity and clarity. We see here a struggle between "naïve faith" (Brown, 2006), marked by studiousness, strict attention to the commandments, separatism, and discipline – values this education system seeks to inculcate – and modernity, with its liberal and critical approaches. The advantage of "naïve faith" is that it presents a holistic emotional and cognitive world view that establishes a distinct category for the "naïve" individual as distinct from those who sanctify knowledge for its own sake.[19] The struggle for the "naivety" of children and the "purity of education" forms the heart of Haredi educational work. This is a complex educational process that arouses admiration, but may also seem problematic and dangerous. The dangers and threats are compounded in a global and technological world, and particularly in a society undergoing processes of expansion, with weakening mechanisms of supervision (and a decline in rabbinical authority over its members).

It is difficult to maintain "pure education" on an ongoing basis in a postmodern environment. Paradoxically, we can see this from the increasingly numerous attempts to close and isolate education, as well as from attempts to enhance the separation of Haredi society from its secular surroundings. Reality is too complex, too tempting, and too threatening to be fully exposed to it, even while riding a bus, catching a ride to the yeshiva (while listen to the radio station the driver chooses), or waiting in line at the doctor's office.[20]

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[19] The strength of this approach over the faith of knowledge may also be understood in this way, though the difference is less acute.

[20] Even the Haredi press seeks to recruit parents to the struggle to protect the purity of education and to help the education system, which finds it difficult to meet the students' needs.

As already noted, the education of such a large number of young males to be Torah students places a severe burden on their society and on Israeli society as a whole. In my opinion, this burden cannot be met on a long-term basis. The State of Israel will find it difficult to maintain its stability and resilience when so many of its young citizens have large families and cut themselves off in such an extreme manner from other groups in society. These people cannot make a living (from paid employment) and cannot meet important civil obligations. Such a situation is not essential for the world of Torah, not essential for the Haredi world, and certainly not essential for the State of Israel.

B. Looking to the Future

1. The Need for Policy

A clear, long-term, and flexible policy regarding the Haredi education system for boys must be formulated, despite the difficulties this presents for policy-makers or others who have an interest in influencing or contributing to this system.

The reader may discern here a type of dilemma between the need for external intervention in this education system, in order that its graduates can become contributing citizens of the state, and the desire to enable a minority group to maintain its way of life and education. This dilemma relates to values – is it right to intervene; to principles – should we intervene; and to practice – how should we intervene.

Any attempt to intervene in their education system encounters fierce opposition on the part of the leaders of the Haredi public, as epitomized in the saying "do not touch My anointed ones" (Psalm 105). Such an attempt may also carry a heavy political price, and from the Haredi perspective, would be a highly problematic scenario. They believe that any external intervention in the education of children will cause inherent damage to their "pure" education, threatening their future and future of the Haredi world as a whole. In reality, however, an absence of intervention in this system also threatens the future of these children and of Haredi society in Israel, since it makes this society poor, dependent, and backward. Moreover, this is not an inevitable process. As we have noted, there are other alternatives, as can be seen in the case of Haredi education for girls. The same is true of many Haredi educational institutions outside Israel.

Accordingly, we see that it is possible to do things differently.

I do not intend to propose here detailed guidelines for policy regarding the Haredi education system for boys.[21] In general terms, steps already taken by the government in recent years should be implemented: Increasing the budgets provided for this education system, *in return* (and only in return) for the introduction of a high level of secular studies, and perhaps even the preparation of students for work after they leave school; at the very least, they must be provided with a foundation in important core subjects. All this should be on the basis of closer, genuine external inspection.

Another important subject that is generally ignored is the lack of education to citizenship and democracy. This aspect requires urgent attention. Studies report a particularly low level of tolerance among Haredim (see: Peres and Ben-Raphael, 2006), which may severely impair relations between different groups in Israeli society and democracy. Consideration should be given to this matter, and appropriate themes addressing these issues must be introduced.

These comments are hardly revolutionary, although they have lost some of their force in recent years following the inclusion of budgets for Haredi education in the budget base. Each new use of these "headlines" produces antagonism and fierce opposition among the Haredi public, which sees them as clear attempts to attack it, even when this suspicion is unsubstantiated. Conversely, it has been argued that if such steps are not taken, leading to a significant transformation, Haredi education may pose a real threat to economic security and democracy in the State of Israel. To be blunt: the success of Haredi education for boys has raised tens of thousands of men who lack any advanced employment background (any *parnasa*, to use the Haredi term), and who have no democratic awareness. This reality creates a burden for the State of Israel and jeopardizes its future.

The good news is that this is a much more flexible and dynamic system than its leaders like to admit. Accordingly, it is appropriate and possible to introduce changes, provided, of course, that this sector's leaders are interested in cooperating to this end.

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[21] Particularly since this has already been discussed in the literature. See: Schiffer, 1998; Lupo, 2004; Gottlieb, 2007.

A study focusing on the municipal education system should discuss its conclusions, and perhaps offer recommendations, for desirable municipal policy in Jerusalem regarding Haredi education.

As for the role of the municipality in this context: In my opinion, the findings show that the municipal system is incapable of coping effectively and meaningfully with Haredi education system. The structure, size, and character of the system, together with its social and political position, make it virtually impossible for the local authority to intervene seriously. This does not exempt the municipality from the need to take certain actions on the micro level, and to attempt to free professionals in the municipality from political pressure from various sources inside the Haredi community and elsewhere. Increasing budgets, allocating buildings for educational institutions, and enhancing the inspection of various institutions are essential. It is also important to encourage initiatives that present changes in various institutions in this system, such as reinforcing secular studies, empowering frameworks that train teachers or offer in-service training, expanding the response for students facing difficulties and dropout, and so forth. Small changes of this kind may later expand.

True impact on Haredi education for boys, however, can come only as the result of government policy.

2. Difficulties in formulating policy

The following are the main difficulties facing those who seek to cooperate with institutions in the system, as well as some principles for engaging in such work.

The first difficulty is the **cultural gap** between general Western culture and Haredi culture. The differences are apparent at every turn and have an impact in terms of time, space, language, and countless cultural aspects. These differences are fundamental and reflect divergences in the cognitive map and its manifestations (Levin-Rosalis, 2007). Naturally, the extent of the gap varies depending on the extent of the individual's exposure to the other culture and willingness to accept it – factors that are far from trivial.

The second difficulty is **the declarative conservatism of Haredi society and its guiding ideology**, which rejects almost categorically any proposal for

change or innovation. Even proposals to provide budgetary support for the education system are sometimes perceived as an attempt to interfere in the system and to impair the sanctity and purity of the Haredi camp. Paradoxically, the success seen by Haredi politicians to secure budgets for *yeshivot ktanot* (even without secular studies) led to a fierce demonstration by members of Ha-Eda Ha-Haredit, together with leading hard-line rabbis,[22] who protested against state interference in Haredi education. Any attempt to create real or apparent change in this system merely raises the walls higher, creating a sense among its leaders that they must work together against the external forces, in the spirit of "do not touch My anointed ones."

A further difficulty lies in the **highly decentralized nature of this system, which affects the information received by policy-makers and the nature of control of its institutions**. Since there is no genuine control or monitoring of institutions in the Haredi education system for boys, and no clear information on developments, it cannot be guaranteed that any attempt to influence certain institutions will have an impact on others. Moreover, an undertaking on the part of an institution to a given policy does not bind the other institutions, and anyone wishing to propose a given course of action must discuss this separately with almost every institution. This issue is becoming even more complex as the system grows and expands.

The fourth difficulty is the **high level of internal divergence** in the system, as we have seen. Naturally, there is a basic distinction between the institutions for different age groups – kindergartens, Talmudei Torah, and yeshivot. There is also a clear difference in the approach of strong, competitive institutions as opposed to weaker institutions that act to keep students within a Haredi framework. A further distinction is between Hasidic and Lithuanian institutions. At the same time, all these groups are committed to a similar cultural and educational ethos.

A fifth difficulty is the result of the **strong connections between the heads of the system (directors of institutions and networks) and political forces in the Haredi sector**. Many of the institutions have a direct or indirect association

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[22] The main opposition came from two rabbis from the Haredi sector, who encouraged hard-line elements in the community: Rabbi Shmuel Auerbach, who is an associate of Rabbi Eliashiv and a member of the editorial board of the newspaper *Yated Ne'eman*, and Rabbi Michael Yehuda Lifkowitz of Bnei Brak.

with a specific political entity that is expected to provide support, particularly in times of trouble and distress. Moreover, the system is the pride and joy of politicians and rabbis. Accordingly, many endeavors to cooperate in the Haredi sector – even in positive and consensual processes – often involve intervention by political forces that act to support their favored institutions. For example, the considerable political power enjoyed by the Gur, Belz, and Vizhnitz Hasidic sects sometimes means that their representatives will attend first to the interests of their own institutions, regardless of objective criteria.[23] The failure to involve powerful Haredi elements in planned action with various Haredi educational institutions may lead to the failure of such action. Political and personal sensitivities can be more influential here than among the general public.

The final difficulty is the **existence of internal cultural codes in the Haredi system** that sometimes follows its own internal procedures, regardless of orderly working norms. These codes make it very difficult for those from the outside to work with the sector. The system is influenced by various pressures, such as its public image and pressure from parents or rabbis, and it is not usually planned on a long-term basis. A Haredi institution can send its students out on a special activity without advance warning, and its directors may not attend a scheduled meeting.

3. Guiding Thoughts for Action

The issues I have raised here reflect the difficulties involved in orderly work with many Haredi educational institutions for boys. However, some preliminary guiding thoughts may be offered to help formulate policy for intervention in this system, or for engaging in cooperation on the macro and micro levels.

The macro level – there can be no doubt that meaningful change in this system will come only as the result of holistic intervention by the authorities, as reflected in part in the budgetary dimension.

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[23] This comment is certainly not meant to besmirch the representatives of these important Hasidic sects or their educational personnel, who engage in admirable and meaningful work within their sects, and sometimes elsewhere.

❖ The principles underlying any policy should be determined on the government level, and not the municipal level. This will at least neutralize political pressure on the municipal level. At the same time, attention must be given to the differences between the various Haredi centers and communities in which Haredi municipal authorities function.

❖ Policy can be more palatable when it is applied through a process of dialogue with representatives of the Haredi public, and through negotiations with them regarding principles for action and modalities. In this context, involving key figures who enjoy rabbinical support can help introduce changes (even if these are painful). It is important to note that Haredi society also includes other agents of change. They may be harder to identify, but they can also be more committed to leading processes of change. The process of negotiations is highly complex, exhausting, and problematic, and it may sometimes seem pointless, as will be confirmed by all those who have been involved in this field for years in the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Finance. These sources will also confirm that some processes can only be implemented through coercion, as was apparent in the case of the cuts in child benefits.

❖ Policy should be based on egalitarian and transparent criteria in order to neutralize, as far as possible, the sense of threat and vulnerability that is widespread among the Haredi public. This can reduce sensitivities between different Hasidic sectors or between Lithuanians and Sephardim, as well as between different groups within these sectors, preventing allegations about the influence of well-connected individuals.

❖ Professional changes may be more acceptable if they are made on the local level by professionals from within the community. Accordingly, it is important to locate people who are familiar with the Haredi communities in different locations and who are willing to cooperate on the professional level. It is very important to expand the capability of Haredi professionals in relevant fields so that they can work with the community on the basis of accepted principles.

❖ Several key issues must be addressed in determining such policy, even if it will only be possible to reach genuine dialogue with the leaders of the Haredi sector on some of these points:

1. The introduction of secular studies in the system on a massive scale in order to provide students with a substantial knowledge base;
2. Inculcating basic democratic education to students;
3. Enhancing the inspection of institutions and their range of organizational and administrative issues;
4. Creating consensus regarding the screening process for students admitted to the institutions.

The reader will notice that these recommendations are ambivalent. They range from the need of outside professional elements to take meaningful decisions to the desire to involve the Haredi population in their implementation.

This ambivalence is the heart of the story that connects government policy-making with the independence and autonomy of the Haredi world. A proper balance between the two is the only way to formulate meaningful policy guidelines.

The micro level – intervention on the local level are usually confined to specific institutions, or sometimes to a neighborhood, education network, or small Haredi town.

❖ The recommended approach is to work with key figures in the community, with the approval of key rabbis, or with independent agents for change. It is far from simple to locate agents for change, particularly given the differing interests and economic issues this sometimes involves.

❖ It is highly desirable that work take place with "leading institutions" that can function as models for the work of other institutions. A leading institution with strong leadership can take risks and be less concerned about "what people will say" than a weak institution afraid of making mistakes.

❖ In many cases, external agents will find themselves working with modern institutions or Torah institutions intended for the newly religious. These institutions are sometimes willing to cooperate on various issues, and may be less concerned that this will harm the Haredi character of their students. While the sensitivity of these institutions is naturally less, their influence is limited.

The expansion of Haredi education for boys in recent decades is the result of a confluence between vague government policy (backed by extensive resources and influenced by powerful political forces) and a flexible, independent education system with a clear educational approach. The growth of the system and of the Haredi public in general in recent years may provide an opportunity for meaningful and genuine change. This will probably not be a change on the most fundamental level, but vital changes are needed. To ignore these changes will create long-term problems; for now, they are still within the reach of decision makers.

We should also add the other side of the coin. The Haredi education system offers a fascinating range of educational experiences and important approaches to learning. Its educational successes deserve preservation and development. This is a different type of education – something that is unusual in the global village. Moreover, it would be wrong to ignore the multicultural values that are realized here (though not embodied therein), and the Jewish values it realizes in its own way. Assistance should be provided to help maintain this system, subject to certain conditions. It is also important to learn from it strategies for improving learning and teaching – it has much to offer.

C. A Further View from the Edge and the Border

The concept of "visibility" refers to the ways individuals or groups are seen by observers, including their concrete and symbolic manifestations (Lomsky-Feder, Rapoport, and Ginsburg, 2010, 13). The Haredi world seeks to limit its connections with its surroundings and its visibility among other cultures and, as far as possible, to avoid views and visual contact. It also seeks to create invisibility on the part of its sons and daughters. This may be termed a "shadowed situation" (ibid., 17). For its part, Israeli society has cooperated with this situation, eliminating the Haredim from public, educational, and academic discourse. This situation avoided the need to confront their presence, interpret their social position, and disrupt the familiar social order.

This reality is changing as Haredi visibility grows. We will learn to see the Haredi world and recognize the presence of its representatives within public discourse in Israel, including representatives of the Haredi education system.

Our discussion of the Haredi education system for boys may leave the reader with a sense of ambivalence. This is no coincidence. Following in the footsteps of the thinker Homi Bhabha[24] (Chever and Ophir, 1994; Bhabha, 1994), I suggest that this study be regarded as an encounter with a culture that represents the "other" – a type of "border zone" on the edge of Israeli culture that indeed creates ambivalent emotions.[25]

Observation of Haredi education for boys offers an interesting perspective on **the state of Western (rational and enlightened) modernity in modern times,** which. has changed its character in recent decades and has proved only partially successful in coping with countless contradictions and internal and external tensions. It has been suggested that we are already in the "late modern" period, if not the post-modern period (Bauman, 2007).

Alongside these processes, we see counter-reactions that offer alternatives to modernity, eroding its institutions and associated categories. In many cases, these counter-reactions represent different patterns of modernity that operate within multiple modernities, even if their self-definition often rails against modernity (Eisenstadt, 2000, 2004).[26]

Haredi society exemplifies this type of framework. The picture we have uncovered reinforces the argument of the erosion of Western patterns of modernity, and reflects the strengthening of other modern alternatives conscious of their unique existence relative to diverse other possible ways of life. Modernity cannot tolerate the existence of empty spaces and points in the social world (Bauman, 1991); in our case, it might be argued that the vacuum created in the educational space of Western culture has been filled with alternative educational activity rooted in a cultural alternative (Haredi).

The Haredi education system for boys shows that the alternative to Western culture and institutions is gaining a foothold among broad populations within

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[24] Bhabha has been a source of interest to researchers interested in post-colonialist studies in Israel, including Yehuda Shenhav, Louise Bethlehem, Adi Ophir, and others.

[25] The character of cultural border zones has been of interest to the research discipline of cultural studies, particularly in the context of exploring the nature of the relations created in such zones. Our case offers a deviation from the usual preoccupation of this discipline with the tension between East and West, which has been the particular focus of post-colonialist studies.

[26] Sigmund Bauman (2007) discusses the struggle between the expansion of patterns of human freedom in the Western global world and patterns that expand certainty and security.

society. It is becoming sustainable and meaningful within the space that is shaping the young generation and the ways in which it understands modernity. The alternative has created its own institutions and cultural frameworks which manage to disconnect themselves (at least partially) from the hegemonic culture. As with the insurgent citizenship or free spaces movements active around the world (Holston, 1998; Polletta, 1999), these activities have created a subversive arena that challenges and even threatens modern reality. It acts on the basis of a genuine or illusory rejection of the dominant practices and categories of Western culture, and its dominant representations and values. As such, it also rejects many values that may be important to its own members, such as work and livelihood, tolerance, and moderation – dominant values in Western society.

Freedom from hegemony is acquired at a high price. Freedom from the influence of modern, hegemonic Western culture is acquired in Haredi education at the price of inculcating general knowledge intended to signify and regiment the child's entire world. Is this price for freedom too high? Is the product of Western culture truly free, or does freedom actually rest with the Haredim, who seem to have managed to disconnect from this culture? In other words, who here is enlightened and who is retrograde? These are normative questions the reader must ponder for himself. We shall merely note that many agree that this is a classic instance in which freedom from hegemony has been acquired at the expense of foregoing personal liberties and individual rights (Radai, 2005; Bauman, 2007).

Yet the disconnection is not complete; there is nevertheless a flow of values from Western culture to the Haredi education system and the Haredi world in general. Accordingly, the claim to offer a new and alternative social order in place of Western culture has only partially been realized.

The "modern state" is also changing its character and its border zones, as we have seen.

It has been widely argued that the state has lost much of its central status as a key organization that defines human communality in the world through boundaries, territories, and the granting of security. Its ability to control and monitor human activities through processes of screening and through concentrating individuals in concrete arenas of activity has been reduced (see, for example, Maan, 1988). This has been described as a "hollow state" that maintains the external shell of

sovereignty, but whose internal capabilities have become weakened (Jessop. 1994).

Haredi education for boys places boundaries on state involvement. A more blunt formula might suggest that this system "borders" on the state and its institutions. We have clear evidence of the distancing of the state from the educational field of many of the children who are raised in this system – a field that is one of the most central in its existence and the most important for its continuity. The state has virtually no control or supervision over this education system, and all its attempts to regain control or impair development of the system have proved unsuccessful. Bureaucratic logic, based on the establishment and implementation of screening (Handelman, 2004) has only partially penetrated the margins of the educational activities taking place in this system. Thus the state foregoes its ability to rule and to be a true partner in developing the cultural existence, social order, and moral norms accepted by its citizens. Hence, it loses control and power, as the vacuum created in it is filled by this system's growth as it continues to receive state funds. In this way, the state becomes less able to control many of its future citizens, who answer to a different system of laws and to the discipline of authorities who have no connection with the state or its values.

On the one hand, the state's weakening may be perceived as having positive aspects that facilitate the expansion of social pluralism, reinforcement of civil society, and emergence of multiple voices.[27] Conversely, this separatist system raises several challenges for the State of Israel, which was perceived in the past as a strong governmental framework. The evidence before us casts a shadow on the future of this democratic state, the nation-state of the Jewish people. The internal vacuum created in the educational sphere reveals the boundaries and inner limitations of the state, which funds through its budgets spaces that are separate from it and even reject the sources of its authority. More importantly, this space is manifested in the state's marginal role in the consciousness of children raised in these kindergartens, Talmudei Torah, and *yeshivot ktanot*, who will grow up to be citizens less committed to the state and less loyal to its basic principles.

The encounter between the products of Western culture and Haredim and their education system is one between two distinct cultural groups in terms of the

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[27] It is also possible that as the Haredim become more involved in the state in the long term, it will again become more relevant to the members of the Haredi community and its education system.

cognitive structure that shapes their social knowledge and its guiding rationales (see Levin-Rosalis, 2007). Homi Bhabha, 1994, explained the manner in which "ambivalence" emerges in the border zones of Western culture, in which difference and divergence are exposed. We also experience this sense of ambivalence in the encounter with the Haredim and with their social and cultural systems: The subject of fantasies and dreams, the subject of obsessions and demands, the subject of knowledge and research, and the subject of hatred and fear.

A first glimpse of the Haredi world usually reveals the presence of a rigid, fossilized "other," radical and fanatical, irrational and total – an "other" whose character mirrors our own positive character (see: Harding, 1992; Fisher, 2007). Such a cursory glimpse establishes us, as observers from Western culture, as beautiful, just, and, above all, as enlightened humans walking a clear, paved route.

Further examination may lead us to different insights regarding the encounters offered by reality.

Further examination of the Haredi world shows us that the practices of authority with which we are familiar (primarily those relating to the authority of the state and of science) lose their validity. The encounter with this world blurs the categorical distinctions that guide us, possibly creating a sense of ambivalence. The Haredi domain challenges us, potentially neutralizing the rules of the game, concepts, and criteria accepted by our enlightened world. This is all the truer when "they" cast doubt on our authority to interpret reality and to explain it by means of our tools. This examination may also provoke intellectual obscurity (Bhabha, 1994, 132) as we are caught by its charms, or view it as an example of a nostalgic, living reality of the ethos of the long-gone Haredi *shtetl*.

Moreover, we are exposed to sights and directions of thought that are new to us. In this sense, the encounter with Haredi education allows us to challenge aspects of our culture we take for granted, and may even allude to the starting points for new educational discourse, once we have sorted the wheat from the chaff.

The Haredi domain also arouses concerns and fears. It presents an explicit threat to our culture's centrality, its social and normative validity, and its overall existence. Somewhere out there, on the cultural margins, an extreme, separatist

alternative is growing, skilled and determined, using modern tools for its own needs and for its struggle against the modern, Western, rational, and enlightened human being (Harding, 1992). Moreover, it sometimes seems that this alternative threatens to be built on the ruins of Western culture and the "Jewish and democratic" state.[28]

The encounter with the Haredi "other" marks an ambivalence on the very edge of our cultural borders, hinting at what lies beyond. In addition, it reflects the heterogeneous, eclectic, and contradictory nature of the human and social identity of each of us – an identity that is repeatedly reinforced by the encounter with the possibility of other identities. Such is the case in the encounter with Haredi identity and the systems that shape it and its young people.

The encounter with the Haredi world presents us with a challenge that relates to Haredi society, to the limits of our tolerance, and to our attitude toward our own identity. These are challenges that are well worth addressing.

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[28] As an aside, we should add here that this is another way to understand the saying "and the study of Torah is equal to them all" – the truth of Torah study justifies a struggle against anything that is different.