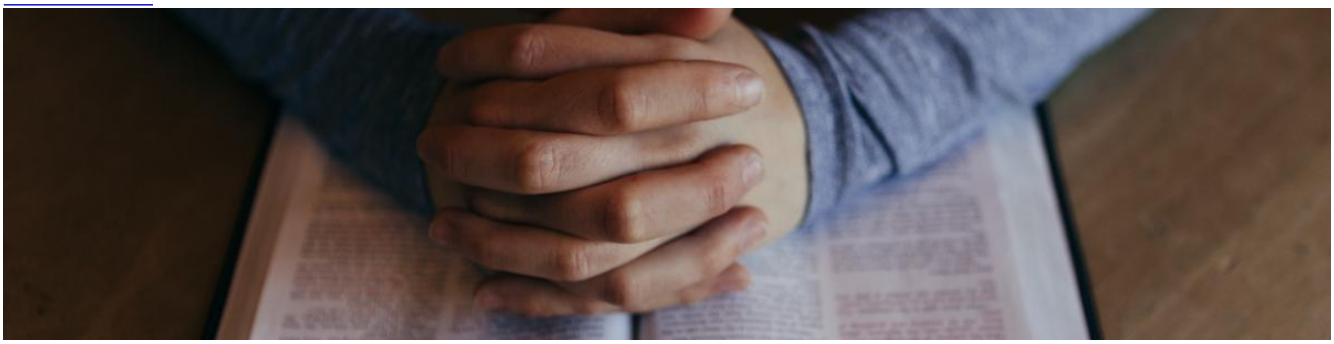
Finding Judaism My Way: One Man’s Lifetime Jewish Journey

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Rabbi Alan Yuter has a long and fascinating career, much of which is described in this article. After many years of service as rabbi to several Orthodox congregations in the United States, he and his wife made aliya and now live in Jerusalem. This article appears in issue 25 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

I was born into a first-generation American family of very ethnic but non-observant Jews in the then Jewishly dense West Philadelphia neighborhood of Wynnefield. My parents assumed that I would attend Hebrew School after public school, hate it, and, like their peer’s children, suffer with Jewish learning for five arduous years, endure the bar mitzvah ordeal, then quit Hebrew school. They expected that as a young adult I would marry an ethnic but not inconveniently religious Jewish woman. My parents’ social circle was entirely Jewish—totally secular—yet socially Jewish. Some families did have Orthodox parents, but their Jewish knowledge was limited to expected protocol. To everyone’s amazement, I actually liked the Hebrew School of the Conservative Har Zion Temple. The teachers taught a mysterious foreign language, spoke of a long and glorious history, and explained that we are able to relive the past by ritualizing our present. I went to the synagogue on Saturday mornings to be enchanted, dazzled, informed, and to become more “Jewish,” whatever that meant.

After my bar mitzvah, I announced, again to everyone’s amazement, “I want to study at the Midrasha,” Har Zion’s “advanced” Hebrew High School, where the teachers were rabbis and PhDs. Here, Judaism was taught “objectively,” from a perspective that I would later learn was called “the science of Judaism.” Unlike the few, old fashioned, Yiddish-speaking Hareidi Jews who walked Wynnefield’s streets, at Har Zion, Judaism was a part of American culture. In the early 1960s,

there were some Sabbath-observant Conservative Jews, a youth group called LTF, the Leaders Training Fellowship, whose mission it was to nurture sincere and serious non-Orthodox Jewish leaders who were learned and who were committed to a worldly, reasonable traditional Judaism. This memoir reports both the “outer” biographic details of my life’s happenings as well as those “interior” reflections that shaped and accompanied my choices.

My teen years found me in two very different worlds. In order to give their children a good secular education, my parents moved across the Philadelphia City Line to Lower Merion Township, where Jews were a minority, and the pressure to conform to polite Protestant society was not understated. In 11th grade, I took a Saturday course in Organic Chemistry. Realizing how much I missed Shabbat, after the course’s conclusion, my Jewish commitments grew in intensity. Most of Wynnefield’s Jews rarely observed kashruth. Sunday afternoons and Christmas Day were spent in “pilgrimage” to Philadelphia’s “Chinatown” for food that was relatively inexpensive, celebrationally appropriate, yet socially accepted to be “Jewish,” its halakhic impropriety notwithstanding. When I gave up Chinese food, my family realized I was serious. Their Jewish friends who did keep kosher homes were Jews in their homes and Chinese food consumers when they “ate out.” Although I did say the prayers for a month after my bar mitzvah, I stopped doing so after one month because I did not understand anything of them. After my Organic Chemistry year, I re-adopted tefillin and prayer because my Hebrew comprehension rose to that threshold where the Siddur’s words and ideas had meaning. How did this change happen?

When my maternal grandparents died, Har Zion’s Assistant Rabbi Shlomo Balter, a particularly sincere and caring person, convinced my parents to send me to Camp Ramah, Conservative Judaism’s summer camp network. At Ramah, I discovered that Jewish living was incredibly rich. One summer was spent in Israel with a Har Zion youth pilgrimage, and, because my Hebrew was considered to be “passable,” I was assigned to spend a Shabbat with R. Zalman Nehemiah Goldberg, then of K’far Pines. Unable to appreciate his greatness, his Orthodoxy at that moment seemed to me to be foreign, exotic, and somewhat obscurantist, neither convincingly “scientific” nor within the culture horizon I inhabited.

Already in my mid-teen years, my search for Jewish meaning was fixed and focused on the Conservative flagship Jewish Theological Seminary (henceforth JTS) in New York, which we were always told was the best Jewish studies institution in the Western World. In order to acquire a liberal education and in order to prepare for JTS I majored in Philosophy at Temple University, which

introduced me to the shape and content of Western thought, and Hebrew language and literature under Esra Shereshevsky, a classical linguist, Hebraist, and Orthodox Jew, who failed—although he tried valiantly—to convince me to reconsider my professional—and ideological—plans.

At this biographical moment, Orthodoxy was simply not a spiritual option. Its rules seemed to me to be so strange. One zealous Orthodox layman once told me, “I ought to wear black clothing and wear a black hat because I should want to identify with Torah’s heroes, who dressed that way.” A Ner Israel–educated rabbi scolded me, “If you believe in two Isaiah’s, you should not pray.” I consulted my Orthodox Hebrew grammar teacher at Gratz College, Prof. Margaliyot, later of Bar Ilan University, who told me to “tell him to go to Hell.” As I matured, I came to appreciate his pointed advice when dealing with theological bullies of both Right and Left. Religious bullies want to own God’s turf; unless one concedes that they possess the salvation, way, and life of Torah, these bullies would rather one give up on God’s Torah than to challenge their claim that no one can read God’s mind but them.

There were, however, two Orthodox rabbis who, in my collegiate years, did impact my thinking. Rabbi Mayer Cohen of the rather small Bes Medrosh ha-Gadol, a local Orthodox shul, not only welcomed me in spite of all of my heretical ideas, he switched his weekly Talmud class from Yiddish to English so that I would attend—not an easy task for the elderly gentleman. He introduced me to an informed lay Orthodox approach to life and text study, and quietly confided to me that he preferred the Arukh haShulhan to the Mishnah Berurah, whose rulings and reasoning, as I later came to appreciate, reflected authentic communal practice and did not add latter-day stringencies and strictures.

At a Yavneh Convention in the 1960s, at the Lower Merion Orthodox Synagogue, I witnessed a debate between the Modern Orthodox R. Yitz Greenberg, then affiliated with Yeshiva University, and the Hareidi R. Moses Eisenmann, spiritual supervisor at the stridently Hareidi Philadelphia Yeshiva, subsequently affiliated with Baltimore’s Ner Israel. While R. Yitz did not object to separate-gender, concentric circle dancing, R. Eisenmann was scandalized because to his mind separate, concentric circle dancing was sexually immoral. R. Yitz provided me an Orthodoxy that was sane, without hang-ups.

This debate foreshadows the position that I would come to adopt; I do not advocate dancing (or clapping) on Shabbat or Yom Tov, based upon bBetsa 30a. While aware of the Tosafist dispensation (ad. loc.), I remain unaware of a legal principle that empowers Tosafot, or for that matter, anyone, to overrule the Talmud, or that forbids me from thinking critically. In rabbinic practice, I did permit and do not object to separate-gender dancing where all are able to see the

dancing. The talmudic meta-halakha, “better one sin in error than with spite,” teaches rabbis to know when not to make issues. R. Yitz and his wife have remained not only mentors, but models, friends, and colleagues.

Long before people considered gap year post-high school Jewish studies, my junior undergraduate year was spent at Machon Greenberg, an Israeli Hebrew teacher’s college for Diaspora educators, JTS Israel, renamed Machon Schechter, and at the Hebrew University. I was privileged to study with Prof. Ezekiel Kutcher, Israel Ta Shma, Gavriel Cohen, Yirmiyahu Yovel, Nehama Leibowitz, Ahron Appelfeld, Menashe Harel, and Ora Segal. Each of these scholars fashioned her/his own unique Jewish identity. It was during that academic year (1966–1967) that I committed myself to full halakhic observance, albeit with what I thought was a “Conservative” ideology. But I now had an alternative Orthodox model, one that was sincere, pious, and academic, yet modern, cultural, and integrated. This perspective was intellectually honest, like my Conservative Judaism, but it was also consistently and sincerely “religious,” like the American Orthodox Jews with whom I interacted.

In his Machon Greenberg Bible class, Prof. Gavriel Cohen once commented that in biblical religion, the sacrificial cult really is a religious obligation. Programmed to be a dutifully and effectively brainwashed, card-carrying, lock-stepping member of the Conservative party/movement, I blurted a stupid, snarky remark for which I am not proud, deriding Dr. Cohen’s claim regarding the restoration of the Temple cult. He wisely did not waste precious class time to argue the point, but instead he invited me to his home to discuss the matter. Taking him up on his offer and after several heated hours of conversation, he challenged me, “but it [the sacrificial order] is commanded in the Torah!” That challenge changed my life. I had either to accept Torah as it stands, or locate myself outside of Torah’s authority. Being seriously Jewish is not only an accident of identity, ethnicity, or preference, it is an ultimate concern, a commanding commitment, and an existential decision.

When my junior year in Jerusalem was coming to a close, I posed the question to Dr. Nehama Leibowitz, “I was raised on Yehezkel Kaufmann’s Religion of Israel, (which I had studied with R. Balter, when he was teaching at Gratz College) before I was systematically introduced to Rashi; you have not convinced me that the Torah was the product of Moses’ hand. What then should I do as a Jew?” She said “learn Torah, observe the mitzvot, and pray.” Hers was a learned, probing Orthodoxy that she shared with others, quite different from the Ner Israel rabbi who identifies dissent from his position to be a denial of the divine. I later came to

learn that her older brother, the cantankerous Isaiah Leibowitz, was ironically much more open to academic biblical studies.

At this stage of my journey, it seemed that if God is the Author of the Oral law, I must follow the view within the tradition that makes sense to me. One learns Torah to understand what God requires, which is not necessarily what a particular historical community arbitrarily and apodictically imposes on its members. I subsequently discovered Maimonides' view, that one should adopt the most reasonable position that one is able to find. Most Orthodox leaders spoke apodictically, as if they were God's unmediated mouthpiece, and stressed obedience, deference, and submission to their reading of God's canon, no questions, doubts, or free thinking allowed. But the Orthodox Jews to whom I was drawn used academic tools to decode God's canon, in order to discover what the Torah really requires, restricts, and when silent, permits and empowers.

If Orthodox Jews are not supposed to believe that the Torah was originally formulated in J, E, D, and P documentary sources, the Torah was not given in Ashkenazic, Sephardic, or Yemenite "traditions," or versions, either. At this point in my life, halakhic Conservative Judaism still resonated to me to be more authentic than the popular Orthodoxy that invoked a blind, atextual, socially constructed "tradition" narrative that claimed to carry the sanction of Sinai, but was ultimately no more—or less—than the actual practice and social narrative on the Orthodox street. But most Conservative Jews—including its rabbinic virtuosi class—did not seem, at least to me, to be passionately sincere in their Judaism, while the Orthodoxy I was confronting in everyday life affirmed a halakha that was applied sincerely, if not consistently, in practice. It seemed that Orthodoxy drew its authority from a book that was unreadable, a book that a) was from Heaven but b) readable and applicable only by a self-appointed elite.
Ironically, JTS became and remained a major influence in my gradual, and inevitable, alienation from Conservative Judaism. The Academic Orthodox JTS faculty took a liking to me. I came to JTS with some Talmud exposure, an academic Hebrew background, halakhic commitment, a decent Humanities background, but without the baggage of religious alienation of formerly Orthodox rebels from the Yeshiva world. The faculty graciously permitted me to pursue PhD studies in Modern Hebrew literature while still attending Rabbinical School, first completing an MA at Hunter College and then the PhD at NYU. These advanced Hebrew studies not only honed my Hebrew language and analytic literary skills, they enabled me to prepare for JTS's classes more rapidly and thoroughly.

The Orthodox JTS faculty consistently applied the “scientific” method in order to decode what the Torah really meant, in order to understand what God says through those texts. The school was, after all, named the “Jewish Theological Seminary.” These professors were thinking, probing scholars, they were also punctiliously and thoughtfully observant; but unlike the popular culture Conservative Judaism that seemed to be more a taste culture than an “evolving religious civilization,” these scholars appeared to me to be sincere. In Conservative Judaism, a rabbi is a paid, professional functionary; for Orthodoxy, a rabbi is a learned, pious person whose virtuoso competence and status has been duly vetted.

My senior year at JTS (1972–1973) presented me with an odd conundrum. Prof. Dan Miron of Hebrew University was teaching advanced seminars on Y. H. Brenner and Saul Tchernichovsky, arguably the two most unorthodox members of the modern, secular Israeli literary fraternity. Although Prof. Miron was ideologically secular, he was also a profoundly ethical person. At JTS, the Modern Hebrew literary masters were being taught by a modern scholarly master; but these seminars were scheduled in the same time slot as R. Lieberman’s senior Talmud shi’ur. Even though literary scholarship was valued to R. Lieberman, he was not pleased with my scheduling conflict or with the choice I was about to make. To my exceptionally good fortune, I was assigned to R. Shamma Friedman’s shi’ur, when he was researching bYevamot, Ha-Isha Rabba. He taught me how academic Talmud scholarship works; after completing his final exam, he even invited me to become his doctoral student. I said, “after five years of graduate school, two masters’ degrees (Hunter’s MA and JTS’s MHL), and with “just” a dissertation left to write, I don’t think my wife will let me sit for yet another two years of coursework. But I will always learn with your method when studying rabbinic texts.”

That same year I wrote a seminar paper at NYU’s Graduate English department comparing Dorothy Wordsworth’s diary with her brother William Wordsworth’s poems, applying R. Friedman’s synoptic reading parallel sugyot, a method that would be helpful in my later encounter with Christian Scriptures. Professors Avraham Holtz and Menachem Schmeltzer also guided my development in modern and medieval Hebrew literature. They were both meticulously observant Jews who were meticulously careful teachers and scholars.

My major academic “rebbes” in Hebrew literature were the pious, close reader, and American New Critic, JTS’s R. Samuel Leiter, and the liberal polymath, Assyriologist, and Bible scholar, Prof. Baruch A. Levine at NYU. Together, they

taught me how to read, decode, and unpack all sorts of literary texts. These two Renaissance men were both passionate Jews, critical readers, exceptionally gifted teachers, and outstanding mentors and perfect gentlemen, men who are models for a lifetime. In my final semester of PhD coursework, Prof. Levine required that I study with NYU's great master of poetic theory, Prof. M. L. Rosenthal. While certain that I was unprepared for that awesome experience, it turned out that Prof. Leiter's training in close reading had happy results for me.

The JTS over which Rabbis Louis Finkelstein and Lieberman presided really did affirm Jewish law. Although its Talmud faculty rarely discussed religious issues openly, its orientation was, at least for me, both obvious and electric. My first JTS year, 1968–1969, was spent in R. Israel Francus' shi'ur. This shy but powerful man taught Talmud skills flawlessly. Without ever preaching religious observance explicitly, he taught religious commitment by his actions, speech, devotion, and accessibility. He was an exemplary human being, a gifted teacher, and an individual of unassuming natural piety. During this academic year, my dorm roommate was Gershon Bacon, a shy, pious genius whose talmudic skills, learning stamina, mental acuity, and passion for truth were and remain inspiring. He spent his career at Bar Ilan University teaching and researching the History of Polish Jewry.

In 1969–1970, R. Dov Zlotnik taught me Tractate Niddah. He espoused the doctrine that God cares that the Torah be observed and that critical textual tools are necessary in order to accurately parse rabbinic texts. After all, "You can't get Torah right if your textual readings are wrong." This fervent commitment to the "scientific" reading of religious texts implies that God really talks to Israel through the Torah textual canon. I came to realize that R. Zlotnik was presenting the view of his own teacher, R. Saul Lieberman, in contrast to the Hazon Ish's view, for whom the practice of the pious is divinely ordained and we do not change "Tradition," here popular usage, based on book or manuscript evidence of what the Torah really says. This difference of opinion reflects the two streams within Orthodoxy that were battling each other in my brain. These JTS scholars reminded me of Professors Ta Shma and Kutcher; they were the real Jewish deal. My "faith," or confidence in Conservative Judaism, however, continued to dissipate. Although its logic seemed convincing, most of my classmates and for that matter, many Conservative rabbis, did not live up to their own professed commitments.

The concern for an accurate reading of Torah had little consequence, or interest, to them. I was becoming disenchanted by what seemed to me to be an integrity problem; professional Conservative Jews peddled a "religion" they did not profess.

They only partially believed in the repackaged Judaism that they themselves had invented. For popular culture Conservative Judaism, critical study was the tool by which the normative Oral Torah canon is de-authorized; for mainstream Orthodoxy, academic Torah criticism was taken to be the audaciously arrogant human criticizing of God's word. R. Ahron Soloveichik wrote that academic Torah studies undermines "the Torah's holiness."

When I invited Rav Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky to attend my wedding, he said "yes," but only after I assured him that my wife and would be observing the family purity rules. My wife, the former Linda Bender, then a JTS librarian, was an Orthodox woman of culture, dignity, and refinement. Here was a woman whose piety, propriety, and prowess was and remains unmatched (See Proverbs 31:29). Her parents, Mayer and Eva Bender, were Holocaust survivors who raised their children to be observant, ethical, religious, Zionist, devoted, and above all, sincere. R. Dimitrovsky was only partially satisfied.
Concerned that the wedding be "kosher," he was assured by his then star student, Prof. Daniel Boyarin, "It's okay, the mesadder keddushin was concerned about your kashrut." R. Dimitrovksy was not offended, he was actually put at ease.

R. Dimitrovsky's shi'ur was also the vetting crucible for the JTS "Talmud program," in which JTS created as an academic Talmud Kollel, where Judaica scholars in training would, in addition to their PhD studies, become experts in academic Rabbinics under the direction of R. Dimitrovsky and R. Lieberman. Since my doctoral interest was in Modern Hebrew literature, I never volunteered to recite in R. Dimitrovsky's class because I was not vying for an invitation to that program. R. Dimitrovsky's elegant Hebrew lectures, brilliant insights, and perceptive sense of literary nuance were also exercises in Torah study. Thinking I was coasting in class because I always sat silently, R. Dimitrovsky began my oral examination sternly. I defensively memorized the Gemara, Rashi, and Tosafot of the second and third chapters of Megillah. He asked me, "Please summarize what you have learned," so I recited what was fearfully committed to memory with some, but for sure not all, of his many textual observations. Surprised that I actually learned what he thought was a reasonable amount of material, he invited me for Shabbat lunch, a very high honor from a very great person. He said that he is a vegetarian and serves a meatless cholent. I then asked him, "What will you do when the Bet haMikdash is rebuilt?" Clearly pleased with the query, and smiling broadly, he responded, "sheEzkeh leVe'aya zo," "would I only merit to have to deal with that problem." His comment is not only the face of the old JTS that deserves to be memorialized, this is the enlightened Orthodoxy shared by

Profs. Ezekiel Kutcher, Nehama Leibowitz, Israel Ta Shma, and Gavriel Cohen. It represents Modern Orthodoxy at its elegant best; it is also the Orthodoxy that I later came to adopt.

In Fall 1970, I was assigned to R. Yosef Faur's shi'ur and, 45 years later, while we both have left Conservative Judaism, I have never left his classroom or his shadow. He became my Rav Muvhak. Like conventional Orthodoxy, he rejected Higher Biblical Criticism. But unlike most Orthodox believers, he respected the JTS Bible Critic Prof. H. L. Ginsberg, for whom he would stand when he would enter the room. Prof. Schiffman of NYU, in a personal communication, corroborated R. Faur's assessment of Prof. Ginsberg's personal piety.

In his shi'ur, R. Faur patiently showed his students how talmudic sugyot are crafted, how the Hebrew and Aramaic terms must be precisely and grammatically understood, and how Jewish law may be derived from talmudic syntax in Maimonides' legal paraphrase in the Mishneh Torah. His Jewish practice, like R. Lieberman's, was consistent, sincere, and informed by his own careful, philological reading of Judaism's sacred texts. R. Faur's Judaism was not based upon any mimetic culture consensus, folk convention, or conjectured concepts read into the canon by the post-talmudic "great rabbis" or "Masoretic sages"; it is grounded in his own passionately committed, academically informed confrontation with his own, trained, insightful eyes. For him, Israel's Torah is neither a mere evolving ethnic civilization nor the intuitive, oracular insight of uber rabbis; it is the legal contract between God and Israel that is recorded in a library that is readable, accessible, and empowering because the learner is able and encouraged to read, allowed to think, and authorized to reach her/his own reasonable and defensible conclusion. And the Torah's public wisdom empowers lay plebes to evaluate rabbinic patricians by comparing individual rabbinic statements to Torah's unchanging words.

From R. Faur, I learned that according to Orthodox Judaism, the right to issue apodictic decrees after R. Ashi has lapsed (bBaba Metsi'a 86a). There is no legal organ called "the posekim." To legislate for all Israel, one must be authorized to legislate by all Israel. Daas Torah, or authentic Torah opinion, may only be determined by reading the sacred canon carefully and not by deferring to post-talmudic enfranchised elites reverentially.

R. Faur is a legal positivist. "Tradition," i.e., the legal authorization to issue hora'ah, apodictic Oral Law legislation, really did end with Rav Ashi (Maimonides, Introduction to the Yad). However, in folk-tradition Orthodoxy and in the yeshiva ideology that this folk Orthodoxy lionizes, the Orthodox Jew is "trained,"

conditioned, and socially required to surrender one's will to God, as understood by a self-designated rabbinical elite. To their view, only the great rabbis possess the tradition, intuition, and insight to render a normative opinion.

For R. Faur's and academically informed Modern Orthodoxy, the Torah "Book" may also be used by the people to assess its rulers and their rulings. Jewish law applies an identifiable legal hermeneutic to the descriptive study of Torah's prescriptive rules. Authentic Jewish laws are formal acts of legislation issued by Torah authorized legal organs; these laws are not mere intuitions, conventions, culture habits, or rabbinical proclamations. If a great rabbi issues a ruling that contradicts the plain sense of the Talmud's text and law, that great rabbi's opinion is subject to review. The Torah is given to "us," all of us (Deut. 33:4). There are no secret traditions, no privileged intuitions, no ontologically privileged post-R. Ashi "Masoretic sages" who are empowered to authorize new blessings (like she'asani kirtsono or 'al mishm'a megilla), to forbid acts otherwise permitted other than for their own community (women wearing tallit), where they possess jurisdictional rather than charismatic authority.

I have been told that Israeli Ashkenazic Jews may not wear tefillin on the intermediate festival day. Israeli "Orthodox" practice follows the (Tikkunei) Zohar, which rules that tefillin may not be worn at this on the intermediate festival day, against the views of Maimonides, Asheri, and R. Isserles, the latter two rabbis ironically reflecting the Ashkenazic "Tradition." But I am on academic grounds convinced that both the Zohar and Tikkunei Zohar are forgeries that lack Torah authenticity, canonicity, or normativity. A not vetted mystical commentary may not be allowed override vetted Oral Torah law. After all, the reason we must be required to wear tefillin on the intermediate festival day is that it is permitted to write tefillin at this time. However, plebian Orthodox rabbis are pressured to conform, defer, and submit to the great rabbis, even in the face of inconsistency, and may not express their own independent, informed Torah opinion.

I once asked a YU/RIETS Rosh Yeshiva, "If Conservative Judaism is wrong when it institutes post-talmudic berakhot, why is R. David Abudarham allowed to authorize she'asani kirtsono?" He growled, "hmmmph" and angrily walked away. R. Moses Isserles says that women who wear tallit are "arrogant" (they exhibit yohora). I am constantly reminded that "Ashkenazic Jews are supposed follow R. Isserles' opinion." But we are required to follow one rabbi's position only if we are unable to decide the issue for ourselves. A trained rabbi, by dint of his ordination, is ordained to make one's own learned assessment and judgment. The difficulty with R. Isserles' view is that the Talmud actually permits women to lean on their

sacrifice, like men, to order to allow them to feel good (bHagiga 16b). Women are not obliged to observe men's commandments, but they are not forbidden to observe them, either. Jewish Law only requires "truth in packaging." Maimonides permits women to observe both the tallit and lulav rites, but disallows the commandment blessing for either ritual (Tsitsit 3:9).

As noted above, Tosafot rules that one may clap and dance on Shabbat because the reason for forbidding the dancing and clapping no longer applies in his time because we do not know how to fix musical instruments (see bBetsa 30a). Since now we know how to fix musical instruments, are we now to outlaw Simhat Torah clapping and dancing? Similarly, since we have indoor plumbing, and human hygiene has improved since the High Middle Ages, the professed Tosafist concern with medieval women's hygiene should not any longer apply and women ought to be permitted to don tefillin, should they wish to do so. The actual reason underlying Orthodox folk culture's restrictions regarding women is "Masorah," rhetorically alluding to the Tradition of Sinai that ended with Rav Ashi but is in fact the reification of regnant Orthodox culture into covenant. This sense of "Masorah" is invoked in order to stifle legally permitted behavior and may not be subject to review by any local rabbi. While my JTS Orthodoxy took Torah law seriously, it limited my effectiveness in most but not all mainstream Orthodox settings. Orthodox laypeople wanted to be validated, not challenged; the inherited Orthodox culture "had" to be the Torah of Sinai, without questions asked—or allowed.

R. Mordecai M. Kaplan once argued very correctly that Conservative Judaism (of his day) is in fact a coalition of Modern Orthodox moderates and nostalgic reformers. This center could not hold because, like the Church of England that Solomon Schechter admired, in the Conservative Judaism of bygone days one "acts frum and thinks krum," i.e., one conforms to culture expectations without the supporting faith commitments. But without belief, behavior cannot long be maintained and belonging will not be sustained. If there is no Commander, there are no commandments. In cookie-cutter Orthodoxy, the gap between the ideal and the real is suppressed so as not to scandalize the plebian masses; the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly celebrates this gap in order to de-authorize the Torah.

While I viewed myself as an academic, Providence had other plans. My first and second full-time positions were at the Baltimore Hebrew College, which I left after two years when my PhD was completed, and at SUNY Albany. I taught Hebrew literature, Rabbinics, and Bible at both schools. After failing to earn tenure at

SUNY Albany, when my Judaic Studies' Department's unanimous positive decision was overturned, I assumed my first full-time rabbinic position, the then denominationally hybrid First Hebrew Congregation of Peekskill, New York. This Congregation had both uptown Conservative and downtown Orthodox branches. On Shabbat, I served the uptown Traditional Conservative branch, including reading the Torah, and during weekdays, I attended shaharit prayers and said a morning shi'ur for the elderly retirees, in the style of R. Lieberman's morning devar Torah, providing for them a morning activity. Since there was no seriously younger observant community available for my family, we left after two years for Spring Valley, N.Y.

My second and last full-time Conservative position was the now defunct Jewish Community Center of Spring Valley, then a stalwart of what was Conservative Judaism's halakhic wing, now the independent Union for Traditional Judaism, the American UTJ. At this flagship synagogue, the Conservative version of "Tradition" was respected but not revered; Judaism was honored in public but ignored in private. Upon arrival to Spring Valley, I found the community torn between "liberals," who wanted to reframe Torah in the image of the now egalitarian ethic emanating from JTS, and "traditionalists," themselves mostly but not fully committed to Jewish law, but adamant that the woman sitting in the next pew should be seen in her seat but not heard in public. The JTS gave lip service to the local rabbi's rabbinic authority and autonomy, but pushed its egalitarian agenda as "the" authentic Conservative Judaism, undermining the legitimacy of its own rabbinical alumni who dared to dissent from its aggressive egalitarian theological narrative. "Pluralism" is invoked only by people out of power.

Rabbis with a classical halakhic conscience could either accept and adopt the new egalitarian dogma or leave their positions, livelihoods, and calling, to rabbis more flexible and loyal to the new JTS narrative. This egalitarian agenda was not invoked to advance women in Judaism, but was used to jettison halakha as it has historically been understood. Chancellor Ismar Schorsch, a profoundly polite, decent, and generous gentleman, trying desperately to staunch the ideological bleeding borne of rancorous debate, declared that women may be invested as Conservative cantors because of what he declared, with apodictic certainty, authority, and finality, to be an "ethnical imperative." For Schorsch, conversation and debate are unnecessary and divisive. At the new JTS, the Torah is no longer an ultimate concern, it is only a social accessory.

The "Orthodox" Conservative rabbis represented that one bloc that is able and willing to question the JTS's legitimacy, and had to be destroyed. By viewing

Jewish law as a legal order with rules, the “Orthodox” Conservative rabbis possessed the autonomous benchmark by which JTS may be judged. Ironically, the institutional center of critical Jewish studies was not happy when its judgments were subject to legal judgment.
Non-Orthodox laypeople came to the Conservative synagogues to in order to experience “religion,” but were only offered taste culture. This population became increasingly unsatisfied with the social product being offered by the Movement. So attendance, membership, vitality, and the financial viability of Conservative Judaism and the JTS all went into decline.

The ordination of women as Conservative rabbis was the immediate cause of a) the breakaway Traditional Conservative movement and b) the rapid decline in the Conservative Movement’s professional product, communal reputation, religious identity, and financial solvency. The Rabbinical Assembly membership was asked to vote on women rabbis by framing the question, “Is the act of ordaining women a violation of Jewish law?” I saw then, and see now, no Oral Law violation regarding awarding worthy women the rabbinic diploma. But after this vote passed, Chancellor Gerson D. Cohen then announced to the Rabbinical Assembly, as if by dint of the power invested in his JTS Chancellor’s office, to his view the Patriarchal leader of Diaspora Jewry sitting on the “seat of Moses,” that the Conservative Movement now must break with Jewish law in order to ordain “real” women rabbis.

At that moment I could no longer make excuses, justify, or explain away duplicity. The Rabbinical Assembly vote was not presented to its membership as a poll to abrogate Jewish law, yet this plebiscite was applied to do exactly that. Mordecai Kaplan’s center did not, would not, and in retrospect, could not hold.

It was also during my Spring Valley Rabbinical stint (1983–1987) that I read and reviewed Prof. Jacob Neusner’s breathtaking Judaism: the Evidence of the Mishnah, where the religion of Oral Torah Judaism was conceptualized based upon a taxonomy of the structure, themes, and style of the Mishnah. After publishing a laudatory review of the book, which explicates the Judaism encoded in the Mishnah based on documentary evidence rather than on political or religious ideology, and which teaches the reader how to study “religion” as an academic discipline, Prof. Neusner not only wrote me a most gracious note, he generously adopted me as a student, teaching me how to how to explicate halakha. Halakha had now replaced Modern Hebrew literature as my academic interest, for evidence for decoding Judaism as a religious system. Prof. Neusner was ordained Conservative to the Conservative rabbinate, but he found his spiritual home in the

Reform Judaism of his youth. However, his method for studying religion revealed to me that Conservative Judaism was not really religiously heretical, but actually spiritually empty, a movement without a message or product. I am not denying the sincerity of all Conservative Jews; it is improper to judge others in spiritual spaces other than my own. It was Prof. Neusner's academic method that empowered me to evaluate my life's events, to evaluate by own subjectivity as an object to be examined.

Betrayed by the new antinomianism of JTS, I turned to Orthodox colleagues, particularly at Yeshiva University (henceforth, YU), for help, and got it. After some clandestine meetings at YU, with the approval Rabbis Norman Lamm, Abner Weiss, and Louis Bernstein, arrangements were made for me to study and be tested on Yoreh Deah vol. 1, be re-ordained Orthodox, and like Rabbi Bernard Drachman (1861–1945) three professional generations earlier, switch affiliation and find a position that ultimately required a 45 percent cut in pay.

Surprisingly, the semikhah exams were thorough, but not otherwise daunting. The JTS Talmud faculty prepared me well to learn, study, and research. I was tested by and received ordination from Rabbis Oscar Fasman of Chicago's Beis Midrash le-Torah, Moshe D. Tendler of Yeshiva University, and Mordecai Eliyahu, at that time the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel. R. Fasman was a learned, generous, pious, and proudly American Modern Orthodox Jew. Like R. Lieberman, he observed Thanksgiving, a) making a point of informing me of that factoid and b) still testing me, asked me for my reaction to his celebrating Thanksgiving. I replied that I recall no explicit prohibition regarding eating a festive meal on November's last Thursday and R. Moshe Feinstein wrote that America is a land of kindness (Igrot Moshe Hoshen Mishpat 2:29, s.v. zeh haDavar), that should be acknowledged with gratitude. His broad smile and his very adamant insistence that he feed me dinner before I returned from Skokie to Spring Valley indicated that my response pleased him; it was at that moment that I became an Orthodox rabbi. Noting my exuberant mood upon my return to the office, the synagogue office manager exclaimed, "you look like you swallowed a canary," a most ironic comment for one just tested on the Jewish kosher laws the previous day. I then realized I was no longer a right winger within Conservative Judaism, but a left winger within Orthodoxy. Thinking like a liberal would prove to be challenging.

My second semikhah examiner was R. Moshe Tendler. Quickly and astutely noting my defensive, panic penchant for committing factoids to memory, he warned me that "floppy discs can remember but a Rov has to think." His examinations were exercises and tutorials in how to render a halakhic decision according to

Ashkenazic tradition. R. Tendler breathed R. Moshe Feinstein in everything that he taught. And since R. Tendler is a son-in-law of R. Moshe, in addition to learning the standard Yoreh Deah page, I thought it prudent to review anything and everything that R. Feinstein wrote in his Responsa regarding the test material. Roughly 40 percent of R. Tendler's questions actually dealt with issues discussed in Igrot Moshe. This preparation strategy made me appear much more competent than I really was. However, at the very first exam, the laws of kosher slaughter, R. Tendler opened, "What is an epiglottis?" The correct answer of course is "turvats haVeshet." But since this scientific term did not appear in Yoreh Deah, I did not know the answer. Thereupon R. Tendler reminded me, nurtured on Wissenschaft des Judentums, the so-called "science of Judaism," that "here (at Yeshiva University) we do Torah uMadda, 'Torah in the context of (real) science.'" At YU, a Rosh Yeshiva can also be a biology professor. But God, Whose sense of humor is infinite, "condemned" R. Tendler to have to contend with my son, R. Josh, who enrolled in his shi'ur for two years.

The very first question of R. Tendler's second examination, the Laws of Salting (meat), was "what does sodium chloride do to a colloid?" I said something about the lower the atomic valence, the greater the physical pull, and with NaCl, the two atoms having valences of +1 and –1, respectively, this is the most effective salt for extracting blood from meat. Unlike solutions, which are singular substance, a colloid is a mixture in which different substances are suspended in each other and retain their physical and chemical identities. Like R. Fasman, R. Tendler smiled broadly, the ice was broken, and real warmth radiated from the gentleman.

Only when I was about to leave Spring Valley would I take possession of R.Tendler's ordination certificate, which was co-signed by R. Norman Lamm. Once the professional mover loaded my furniture and effects on the truck, to my first fully Orthodox position, did R. Tendler place his ordination document in my hand saying, "With your power and strength of your hands you accomplished this feat," an ironic twist upon Deuteronomy 8:17. He then added that since I was at that moment trained and authorized to render halakhic rulings, I may no longer ask him questions unless I do my homework and reach an impasse. This relationship is called shimmush, fieldwork in situ. To this day, I call Rabbis Faur, Tendler, and Prof. Levine before Jewish holidays as formally required by Jewish law. (bRosh haShanah 16b and bSukkah 27b), because they are the mentors who shaped my mind.

My first Orthodox rabbinical position was Congregation Israel of Springfield, NJ, a Modern Orthodox synagogue, at that time (1987–2002) populated by traditionally minded non-observant, nostalgically informed older families and some very liberal Orthodox young people, with a smattering of people with Hareidi inclinations, if not commitments. The elderly, retired rabbi, then emeritus, R. Israel Turner, was a worldly, well-read, staunchly sincere custodian of Tradition. The community believed that it required a young face who could mediate the growing tension between its own Right and Left, being Orthodox while remaining current. It was here that I shared the "lifestyle" of the community, realizing how much a child of my parents I remained. My mother, Miriam, became moderately observant later in life, in response to me and my sister, Linda, who married a YU rabbi, R. Stuart Grant. My mother was a fanatic about "always doing the right thing." Exacting ethics, proper grammar, accurate spelling, and correct manners were "the right thing to do." She almost completed her BA at Gratz College, a feat accomplished by Robin and Karen, my other sisters, as well. While not Orthodox, these sisters remained informed and active thinking Jews. While my father, Samuel, had no Jewish education at all, in his later years he became comfortable in the synagogue. From him I learned that to be a good salesman, one has to be scrupulously honest and serve the customer loyally and faithfully. Trust must be earned; a reputation is a tradesman's most important possession. From my father I learned that a rabbi is a salesman, the Torah's apostle to God's people with a mission to serve, advise, listen, laugh, cry, and befriend, in addition to teaching Torah. R. Grant helped me negotiate the social web and unwritten but accepted rules of the Modern Orthodox rabbinate, how to be an effective rabbinic counselor, and forced me to think and rethink my positions, policies, and plans critically. He showed me that people who will never change their minds often do not have minds to change.

During my Springfield years, I taught at B'ruriah High School for Girls, Stern College for Women, and finally, at Touro College. B'ruriah positioned itself on the Modern/Hareidi border, requiring serious academic standards as well as total Torah commitment. R. Elazar M. Teitz and then Principal Chaya Neuman ran a class-act school! Although Touro College fostered a more right -wing Jewish position than my own, it was nevertheless the most professionally rewarding academic position of my teaching career. And Touro College did not pay well! The faculty was caring and friendly, the administration concerned and helpful, and the students appreciated a school that was invested in their individual success.

At one faculty assembly, R. Bernard Lander gave a superb lecture on teaching critical thinking to students. My personal scholarship was valued, my teaching

assignments included both Jewish and general courses, and each semester presented me with an opportunity to grow. In a night class in Judges, I taught that the name of Samson's Philistine "girlfriend," Delilah, means "guide" in Arabic. She led her blinded Samson, who was guided by God's providential hand. An undergraduate named Francine screamed, "Only God could write such a narrative." This was the most rewarding moment of my academic career, which sought to synthesize Torah learning and the academic search for truth.

Before submitting a paper to a journal, I asked my supervisor, R. Chaim Strickman, for approval, because I did not want to publish a paper that might embarrass the College. He told me that Dean Stanley Boylan, a worldly Hareidi scholar, said, "We believe in academic freedom. Yuter should publish what he thinks." R. Strickman spent his own scholarly efforts explicating R. Avraham ibn 'Azra, who is ever so cleverly depicted by R. Strickman as a medieval exemplar of a modern, worldly Orthodox Jew. He remains a valued friend to this day.

In my two Orthodox rabbinic positions, I found the professional tasks tiring but thrilling. Almost everything I did seemed to be important. My initial Congregation Israel contract stipulated that my rulings be rendered "according to the Shulhan Arukh." I happily and with a broad grin signed the contract. When asked what I found amusing, I replied "I'm not sure that you realize what you are asking me to sign." In the lay Orthodox mind, "Shulhan Arukh" is a virtual synonym for social Orthodoxy, the real-life religion of the Orthodox street. But when confronted by what is actually recorded in Shulhan Arukh, those whose Orthodox template was Yeshiva culture slowly came to realize that the alternative Orthodoxy I taught, while rational, was not the Orthodoxy with which they were familiar. One kindly, perceptive past synagogue president suggested to me that "I re-invent myself, grow a beard, look more frum, and 'rise' to the expectations of the synagogue's 'more frum' members, who are the synagogue's future and who would like me to lead them where they want to go." After all, "The high school children are going to hear one view of Tradition, and it is not yours. You are too intellectual, sincere, and hopelessly naïve. Since you were not raised Orthodox, you do not know what are our 'acceptable sins.'"

I was asked by this group within the community to raise the mehitsa, outlaw social dancing at all Congregational events, and present a more "right-wing" image of Orthodox life. These Jews were not necessarily stricter than others in their private lives; they wanted the right affiliation, a validating identity, and the "yeshiva image" of authenticity was their Orthodox culture anchor. "Right" in this context is a place on the ideological Orthodox continuum, not a statement of

theological correctness or ritual precision. Piety is a matter of marketing. Orthodox Jews do what is accepted and expected in their community, with a social premium being placed on conformity of conscience; Orthodox authenticity is conditioned by convention and celebrated by being more “religiously,” or ritually, strict. Internal sincerity is both manifest and measured by the accepted and expected external gestures of parochial “otherness.” “Spirituality” is based on community identity and sacred belonging, not by probing, thoughtful reading, or precise application of the sacred canon. Only the great rabbis, i.e., the “Masoretic sages,” are authorized to read, understand, or prescribe according to this culture’s version of Tradition. Only they are authorized to read the Torah library with infallible accuracy; other rabbis, including me, have no right to alternative perspectives, however reasonable those readings might be. While some found my alternative orientation refreshing, others found it jarring. “Tradition” for these others is not memorialized in the Talmud of Ravina and Rav Ashi, it is the un-coded, ongoing revelation intuited by and transmitted to Orthodoxy’s great sages.

One congregant was surprised that my rabbinic family accepted invitations to congregants’ Shabbat table. Grateful for the Shabbat talk topic, I explained that observant Jews must be trusted in matters of ritual, unless there is specific information that would indicate otherwise, (bGittin 2b), and those who suspect others without adequate cause are themselves worthy of lashes (bShabbat 97a and bYoma 19b). But this policy clashed with the practice of other Orthodox rabbis, who would not be so lenient in personal practice. For popular religion Orthodoxy, being “more strict” means being “more religious” and therefore more authentically Orthodox, and is not measured by an academic reading of the Oral Torah library.

When asked why I did not take more time to recite the amida prayer, I referenced bBerakhot 31a, which describes R. Akiva’s extended prayer when praying privately, a discipline—and inconvenience—that he would not impose upon the larger community. My incredulous interlocutor questioned, “Don’t other Orthodox rabbis know that?” I was asked what I mistook to be a question regarding Jewish law for a complaint regarding socially conditioned accepted expectations. While I was immersed in studying Torah, I was at the time oblivious to the folk religion lived on the street and in the homes of people whose real religious template was learned from communal life experiences and not from probing or applying holy texts.

A semi-observant member with a Hareidi Jewish template once asked me to check and attach mezuzot to his new home's doorways. Following Maimonides (Tefillin, Mezuza, and Torah 6:1), I exempted doorways without doors, hinges, and open-arch walkways. He was told by Hareidi rabbis that my policy is wrong; he was told that Orthodox Jews take pains to observe mitzvoth. When informed of this person's displeasure by my insightful past president, I suggested that mezuzot are not amulets (Tefillin, Mezuza, and Torah 5:4). This member came to his question with a folk-religion template, and I unwisely answered the question from a book-religion perspective.

These two conflicting Orthodoxies were the focus of a conflict that simmered between me and Yeshiva Tiferes Baruch, founded by Rosh Yeshiva R. Elya the son of R. Baruch Sorotzkin of Telz. R. Sorotzkin was looking for an "out of town" site for his small, Hareidi yeshiva, the goal of which was to nurture talented young men for Hareidi Torah greatness. Since I was still a naïve believer in pluralism and did not grasp the Hareidi worldview, I both welcomed the Yeshiva and supported its fundraising efforts. After all, my own rabbinic work product was not going to satisfy everyone. My local RCA colleagues warned me against welcoming the "Springfield Yeshiva"; they feared that its presence would undermine my rabbinic office. To my mind, my RCA colleagues were unable to defend their Modern Orthodox ideologies upon challenge. What I did not realize was that academic halakhic correctness is irrelevant, but political/theological correctness is essential, and for R. Sorotzkin, Modern Orthodoxy is Torah Lite. When one Purim there was excessive drinking at the Yeshiva and a drunken young man was seriously injured with broken glass, I taught Maimonides, Laws of Sales 29:18, which explains the halakhic status of toxic stupor inebriation and why entering this state is improper. While the talk resonated with most congregants, the remarks reached the Yeshiva, the response of which was, "Who am I to challenge 'Tradition'?"

When the Yeshiva purchased a Church building for its campus site, I innocently asked, "How is it permitted to enter its functioning sanctuary?" I was told that a) since the denomination (Church of the Nazarene) does not use idols, the sanctuary is not idolatrous, and b) R. Sh'lomo Zalman Auerbach, a great Hareidi said so, and the ruling is thus a legitimate opinion. Still unaware that Hareidi and my formalist Orthodoxies are different Judaisms, I foolishly followed up by asking, "If offering a sacrifice to the spirit of the archangel Michael is idolatry, why would praying to God's 'son,' even without statuary, be different?" (see bHullin 40a). The Rosh Yeshiva was not pleased with my misplaced curiosity; after all, R. Auerbach had spoken and could not be questioned. After learning about R. Auerbach and his integrity, I suspect that R. Auerbach would have responded to

the query quite differently.

The third clash with the Rosh Yeshiva came in the wake of my support for R. Lamm's advocacy of the Ne'eman Proposal, which provided for technically Orthodox pluralist conversions in Israel. Hareidi Orthodoxy rejected the proposal out of hand, and R. Lamm, whom I hold in high regard, was called an "enemy of God" by R. Elya Svei. Because I endorsed R. Lamm's proposal, I was denounced by the Rosh Yeshiva. One of my members who heard the denunciation ran to my office to denounce me. At first, the very sincere and religiously passionate person could not believe that R. Lamm would or could have taken this position. Upon discovering that R. Lamm indeed ruled in favor of liberalized conversion standards, he apologized to me.

I came to realize that the Yeshiva/Hareidi worldview is encoded in a religious narrative that supersedes Jewish law. By law, the convert must accept the commandments as binding, and assessment of this acceptance is the prerogative of the local rabbi. The Hareidi narrative reconstructs the law to require lifetime complete observance to maintain "Orthodox" Jewish bona fides. (Isaac Schmelkes, Beis Yitchok, Yoreh De'ah 100). The inner Orthodox debate is not about the right reading of holy documents or about discovering a verifiable "truth." At Laws of Forbidden Intercourse 13:17, Maimonides merely memorializes bYevamot 47a–b, which reflects the Orthodoxy of the Oral Torah. Subsequent non-compliance to the commandments cannot be grounds for revoking a convert's Jewish identity.

The Modern Orthodox rabbi's narrative is informed by the Oral Torah canon; the Hareidi narrative is informed by its elite's policy. By applying Jewish law based on the plain sense of the Orthodox canon, Modern Orthodoxy takes God at His word, which is not in Heaven (Deut. 30:12), and is therefore readable. Alternatively, Hareidi Orthodoxy sanctifies the great rabbinic person, the normative Torah incarnate. Therefore, R. Lamm is an enemy of God according to the Hareidi narrative, and I am worthy of denunciation because I did not defer to the Hareidi narrative and its own inspired narrators. Orthodox laypeople hear the Hareidi narrative and believe that it is congruent with Oral Torah canon. Since I am convinced that Hareidi Orthodoxy sincerely believes its Narrative and Tradition reflect God's will, I believe that respectful dissent will plant seeds, but cannot bring about a change of heart in the near term.

After 15 years, Congregation Israel's young leadership, having internalized the Hareidi narrative, at least in part, correctly realized that I could not and would not re-invent and transform myself into the rabbinic image advanced by the yeshivot

that their children and the potential new members they sought to attract would find appealing. While my orientation was respectable, it was not marketable. The synagogue needed to grow, and the purist book Orthodoxy I advocated did not resonate with the Orthodox culture that was the only Orthodoxy they knew. Congregation Israel wanted more “spirituality,” emotion, ritual, and rigor, in concert with the Orthodox “move to the right” in search of a validating religious identity.

I was honored with emeritus status and turned to full-time teaching at Hillel Yeshiva and at the Union for Traditional Judaism (2002–2005). While I also considered aliya at this time, and was offered teaching positions at Sha’anan College in Haifa and at what is now Ariel University, family considerations made this move impossible. But at both Israeli schools I found Orthodox Jews like me, academically trained, professionally aware, and passionate about Torah observance and learning. When interviewed by R. Sh’lomo Riskin, he advised me to earn a Yadin Yadin semikhah so that I could serve on his envisioned Bet Din for conversion. R. David Halivni, who also left the JTS and the Conservative Movement, then the Resh Metivta of the UTJ (as well as Professor of Religion at Columbia University), became my boss as well as my Yadin Yadin mentor. The initial RCA response to my UTJ appointment was negative, immediate, and instructive; the UTJ, whose faculty orientation was JTS Orthodox, with a Sephardic Hakham, and another YU ordained rabbi on staff as well, whose synagogue has a mehitsa (the JTS synagogue only had a separation), was still not seen by some within the RCA to be institutionally Orthodox. I was ordered to resign the UTJ position immediately. A leading RCA officer intervened because, after all, the UTJ could not be faulted for its roots, from which it clearly broke, and most UTJ rabbis were unprepared to earn an Orthodox ordination for the “privilege” of taking a substantial cut in pay. At stake in this conflict is whether Orthodoxy’s ultimate benchmark is the Torah covenant or its institutional franchise, between an open-book text Orthodoxy and a social, subjective, mimetic Orthodoxy for which the culture of the Orthodox street is justified by its reading of the Orthodox canon.

R. Halivni’s Yadin Yadin program lasted nine years. Two years were spent reviewing Yoreh Deah. Apparently, R. Halivni wanted to be certain I was capable of teaching this material to UTJ’s rabbinical students, so I had to be retested on this material as well. But now, R. Ovadia Yosef’s Responsa summaries in Yalkut Yosef had become available, making the preparations far less onerous. During my exam on Damages, R. Halivni asked if I had ever studied legal theory, and if so, with whose position did I identify. Upon offering “Hans Kelsen’s Pure Theory of Law” and Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah, both of which regard law as “a normative

legal order and hierarchy of value," R. Halivni then confided to me that he earned an MA in Philosophy at NYU and found Logic and Philosophy of Law to be helpful in his own Torah learning.

All but his first exam took place at Jerusalem's Hebrew University's Giv'at Ram campus. The first exam was on the laws of Judges and Testimony, and took casual place in my car as I was driving from Teaneck, NJ, to New York City, with R. Halivni sitting in the front seat next to me and three young men sitting in the back seat. R. Halivni asked me to identify the underlying principle regarding kosher witnesses (Hoshen Mishpat 34), at the time a matter bitter contention between the UTJ and JTS. UTJ rabbis uniformly refused to accept the bona fides and credentials of JTS rabbis who rejected the Oral Law.

I answered, "The issue is 'who is a good Jew.'" Having been fortunate that R. Halivni asked me questions the answers to which I knew, one of the three back seat passengers asked, after R. Halivni disembarked, "Weren't you nervous?" I said something like, "If only you knew. I just hoped he would not throw me a curve."

After each exam, R. Halivni assigned a topic and a research question to prepare and to answer. I was told to prepare to be grilled on sefek sefeka, the principle of a double doubt, and grill me he did. One exam took place at a Hebrew University library private room. While being questioned by R. Halivni, Prof. Haym Soloveitchik, the eminent historian of medieval Ashkenaz, was sitting and watching the exam spectacle with great amusement. During another exam, this time at the Hebrew University library patio, the Israeli sociologist, Prof. Menachem Freidman, came over to shmuz. I found the interruption odd, but very relieving. In this context, R. Halivni appeared to me not as the critical scholar sifting through talmudic sources and traditions, comments and glosses; in this context, he was an old-fashioned Hungarian Rov and dayyan who looked to be lenient when appropriate but knew when to be stringent when necessary.
While R. Halivni accepted me as a student, he always related to me as a colleague. At a Teaneck, NJ, UTJ conference, during the lunch break, I left the UTJ synagogue in order to eat. The very fine UTJ officer, Douglas Aronin, asked me why I needed to leave the room. I referred Mr. Aronin to bMegillah 28a (which I learned years earlier with R. Dimitrovsky), which forbids "undue casualness" (kallut rosh), a category that includes eating and drinking in a synagogue sanctuary. Taking umbrage at what he took to be a slight to R. Halivni's honor and authority, Mr. Aronin demanded that I explain my reasoning to the Resh Metivta, R. Halivni, whom he felt I had slighted. Upon my referencing bMegilla

28a, R. Halivni cited without hesitation, flinch, or hesitation, “Diaspora synagogues are built on condition,” so leniency is here appropriate. His learned colleague, R. Dimitrovsky, also taught me well; I responded, “That this leniency only applies when the synagogue is in disrepair, and the UTJ synagogue sanctuary is currently in good repair.” Far from being insulted, R. Halivni appreciated the exchange, quipping that “Hassidim are lenient on this matter.”

Again his student, I now attend R. Halivni’s weekly Hebrew University Talmud shi’ur, where he performs his magic in explaining how the Babylonian Talmud came into being. I am now almost 70 years old, and again have found a rebbe whose ‘iyyun shi’ur opens the eyes, sharpens the mind, and gladdens the heart with its clear, straight reasoning.
When the B’nai Israel of Baltimore (henceforth, BI)) pulpit became open, I was asked to apply for the position, at that moment with two of the nine Yadin Yadin exams behind me. BI had let go its previous Ner Israel trained and ordained Hareidi rabbi, who presented himself to BI as “Modern Orthodox,” but nonetheless forbade a BI outing to New York City’s Metropolitan Opera because, to his view, such an excursion violates kol isha, the alleged generic prohibition of women’s singing in men’s presence. Upon being dismissed from his at-will contract, this rabbi proceeded to sue BI in the Hareidi Bet Din of Baltimore for wrongful termination. After all, “Jewish law forbids firing a rabbi” because “R. Moshe Feinstein said so.” At my first search committee phone interview, Mr. Frank Boches, the most Jewishly well-read Orthodox lay leader I have ever met, who knows liturgy, hazzanut, Jewish law, history, and theology, asked me, “How do you render halakhic decisions in general, and how are you holding regarding women singing?” I answered that I am a “letter of the law legal formalist,” to which Mr. Boches said, “We don’t want to hear that.” In response, I suggested that he really did want to “hear that” because Judges 5:1 finds Devorah singing with Barak and Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim 75:3 only suggests—and does not forbid (yesh leHizzaher)—that men ought not to hear women singing during the recitation of Shem’a during prayers.

BI wanted to preserve its Orthodox identity, but without obsession, parochialism, or fanaticism. It was not interested in the social traditions of Eastern European conventions. While BI understandably identified Hareidi policy with Orthodox halakha, it begged for an unashamed—and unapologetic—Modern Orthodox identity, product, and message, that Torah values are reasonable, accessible, and do not require parochial otherness. In short, going to the Right is for the BI community the wrong thing to do. My BI predecessor has every right to his Hareidi world view; it is his presentation of himself as “Modern” Orthodox that is

problematic. Modern Orthodoxy is based upon a strict constructionist reading of the official religion talmudic statute, and permits what is not forbidden by law, while Hareidi and Yeshiva Orthodoxies reflect the parochial culture for which sanctity is celebrated by cultivating “otherness” and piously proclaiming apodictic rabbinic decrees as if great rabbis are empowered to legislate new laws by intuitive decree. Hareidi halakha really is very flexible; the great rabbis may indeed change Judaism at will by ignoring or instituting laws that negatively impact its culture control by invoking Da’as Torah, the ability and authority of elite rabbis to read God’s mind with infallible—and unquestionable—accuracy.

In addition to the women singing issue, Jewish law actually requires the conscription of men and women when confronted with a defensive war (bSota 44b). Jewry is obliged to call the secular authorities and not the rabbis when dealing with sexual abuse (Hoshen Mishpat 425:1). We are not to direct women to recite the talmudically unattested blessing “that they were made according to God’s will” and not as men; these are Orthodox reforms of Jewish law (Abudarham). One neo-Hareidi YU rabbi invented a category called ziyyuf haTorah, “falsifying Torah.” This meta-halakhic innovation empowers the great rabbi to forbid any innovation he intuitively finds to be objectionable and disturbing to “Tradition.”

BI’s leadership was always very open and professional. This leadership had the courage to be both Orthodox and modern. It immediately informed me that BI is being sued for wrongful termination and asked me how to proceed. I suggested that the claim that Jewish law does not recognize the permanence of at-will rabbinic contracts is wrong. As a matter of legal fact, a) this claim, that rabbinic tenure is a lifetime appointment, is contested in halakhic literature (Israeli Chief Rabbis serve for 10-year terms by stipulation), b) the rabbi clearly accepted the at-will stipulation of employment knowing, and by his agreement, accepting what it means to have an at-will employment arrangement as well as its legal force, and c) the rabbi presented himself as “Modern Orthodox,” but advocated every Hareidi position in all of his actions and words. This is misrepresentation, which would be grounds for dismissal for cause and without severance compensation because of mekah ta’ut, the product being sold was not the product as it was represented at the moment the contract went into effect. If one maintains that a) Orthodox Judaism regards the Hareidi rabbinic elite to be its only legitimate virtuosi leadership class, and b) Modern Orthodoxy’s unwillingness to unconditionally defer to this elite is a sin of ignorance at best and heresy at worse, then c) its ideological positions, being theological and halakhic nullities having no religious valence, and d) it would be proper to mislead the uninformed

in order to trick them to mend their ways. For Hareidi Judaism, Modern Orthodoxy is Torah Lite, because Torah is not and may not defined by the plain sense of the canon, but rather by the divinely inspired intuition of the Hareidi elite. In order to bring the outsider to Torah, misrepresentation may be justified. Since BI is a self-consciously Modern Orthodox community, and not Hareidi Lite, there is no way that that BI could, would, or should submit to a Bet Din that cannot accept or validate BI's claims.

The Baltimore Bet Din placed BI under the ban (herem) until it reached a settlement with its former rabbi. The Bet Din summoned BI's officers to a Din Torah, and ordered them to sign a document conceding to the Baltimore Bet Din the authority to adjudicate the case. Having just completed R. Halivni's examinations on the Jewish Laws of Courts and Testimony, I was able to advise my hesitant BI officers not to sign any letter authorizing the Baltimore Bet Din's jurisdiction over BI. The Baltimore Bet Din assumed its authority over BI because it was approved to be "the" rabbinical court by "the" Orthodox synagogues of greater Baltimore, Maryland. This "approval" was taken to mean that it possessed halakhic authority over all Orthodox Jewish life in the region, which implies that congregations as well as congregational rabbis are bound by its unassailable and non-reviewable authority. I asked if BI's board had ever formally consented to this Bet Din's authority claim, and was told that BI was not even consulted regarding its formation, much less aware of its jurisdictional claims. Since Jewish law neither tolerates nor recognizes the imposition of an obligation without willful, conscious consent and authorization (bEruvin 81b, bYebmot 118b, bKeddushin 23a)—the Jewish concept of contract/covenant/berit being what it is, the Baltimore Bet Din's claim that it already possessed final jurisdiction on this matter seemed to an overstatement, if not unfounded altogether. I then called BI's attention to the fact that that the plaintiff's lawyer and the Bet Din's lawyer were one and the same person, which would appear to be a potential conflict of interest. And given the fact that this ruling was issued without even offering BI a hearing is unacceptable in both Jewish (see Hoshen Mishpat 17:5) and, I am told, American Law as well (see
http://dictionary.law.com/Default.aspx?selected=696 l).

The Baltimore Bet Din and other Hareidi laypeople then threatened me personally. I was prepared to be respectful, but not deferential. Neither I nor BI share its religious narrative. But this Bet Din expected unconditional compliance and demanded deference as a condition for maintaining an Orthodox identity. Its apodictic degrees cannot, may not, and will not be challenged or subject to review. It embodies Torah opinion in theory by dint of its leaning and in fact, by

dint its office. What was the Baltimore Bet Din's policy that convinced me not to accept its authority?

This Bet Din maintained a standing panel of (all Hareidi) rabbinical judges, and decided that BI, a self-consciously Modern Orthodox congregation, is nonetheless obliged to accept its uniformly Hareidi ideology, authority, jurisdiction, policy, and most critically, discipline. BI's officers were instructed to pick any judge from its pre-screened rabbinic panel, the terminated rabbi would also pick a rabbi from this panel, and the two selected rabbis would appoint a third rabbi, also from this putatively impartial panel. I asked BI's co-president, Howard Cohn, if the standard termination settlement, one month's compensation for each year of service, the standard severance settlement in the American rabbinic industry, was offered to the plaintiff, and was told that this settlement was duly offered and but rejected out of hand. The rabbi demanded that he be restored to his position, and, failing that scenario, BI must be ordered to provide both seed funding and a Torah scroll so he might open a competing synagogue in the Downtown Baltimore neighborhood, which would regard this rabbi's message to be Orthodoxy's only voice. Having earned a reputation for favoring its own Hareidi rabbis in similar cases in greater Baltimore, BI's leadership was rightly suspicious of the Baltimore Bet Din track record for fair play and even-handedness. I ruled that BI must agree to go to a Bet Din where the synagogue is entitled to appoint its own rabbinical judge for an ad hoc unaffiliated Bet Din (zabla), with a copy of that ruling sent to the RCA office in New York. By ordering BI to sign away its halakhic rights to the Hareidi Bet Din, by withholding information from laypeople regarding their real, legitimate halakhic rights, by regularly requiring exorbitant settlements far in excess of the usual and conventional practice in the rabbinic industry—which is one month's pay for each year of service—and by authorizing settlements that appear to be extortion because they far exceed the accepted practice in the rabbinic profession, I realized that for this Bet Din's "Orthodoxy," canonical Jewish laws are applied selectively, but not consistently. The Baltimore Bet Din could and perhaps should have imposed this standard compensation settlement upon both BI and its former rabbi. The terminated rabbi does not get to demand what a proper settlement should be. Integrity, however, would have required that the Bet Din not mislead uninformed laypeople who were already suspicious of the Bet Din's impartiality, probity, and ideological policies. And by refusing to accept the Baltimore Bet Din authority, BI and I remained under the Bet Din's ban, even though we agreed to a Bet Din resolution. I was told by an attending wedding observer that a Ner Israel rabbi would not say "amen" to a wedding benediction I recited. Upon being asked if I was offended by that particular slight, I said that "on the contrary, I am very flattered. In that world, an apikoros, a heretic, is

recognized to be a learned person."
BI is that Orthodox synagogue where I fit in. In addition to the urbane, learned, and aristocratic Frank Boches, Leonard Sollins, the president at the time of my initial appointment, an accomplished lawyer, the devoted angel who kept BI alive in the years between the urban flight to Baltimore's northwest uptown and the subsequent revivifying downtown gentrification, was always available for advice. He supported my request for an independent Bet Din because he reasoned that political pressure could be put on local judges to reach the "politically correct" and socially acceptable conclusion and, given the Baltimore Bet Din's reputation, letter of the law justice would not be allowed to override the greater concern for Hareidi hegemony over Orthodox Jewry. No rabbi on that Bet Din would, argued Mr. Sollins, rule against Hareidi policy, the principles of equity and Shulhan Arukh settled law notwithstanding, because his own standing in the community would be at stake.

Mr. Howard Cohn, also a lawyer and an owner of a small sock business, and third pillar of BI's leadership, understood me better than any other layperson in my career. He tapped into my mind. Like my father, Mr. Cohn was a businessman who served and serviced his clients; he understood my work ethic and mindset. Like Mr. Sollins, he also understood and appreciated my jurisprudential approach to Jewish law. Mr. Cohn supported BI generously, with purse, time, and sweat; every BI project I could justify, including Friday night dinners and synagogue sponsored communal Seders. We agreed to lower the sanctuary's mehitsa to 48" in order to make the synagogue more inviting, that no one's line of sight would be blocked, and to thereby proclaim our Modern Orthodox identity. After all, according to "official religion" Jewish law, once a wall or partition is 40 inches (approximately ten handbreadths) high, the partition extends to the highest heavens. And according to the Maimonidean religious narrative, unless my ruling can be refuted by an explicit, recorded Oral Torah norm, my ruling is valid and stands. BI identified its target market, and since Baltimore already boasts a booming Hareidi population, BI services those who prefer an alternative Orthodoxy aimed at an under serviced population, those who really accept Tradition but who wish to participate in contemporary culture as Traditional Jews.

While the BI community felt that Conservative Judaism did not ring authentic, the Orthodoxy that the BI community confronted seemed to be too extreme, strict, dogmatic, and uninviting. BI was open to reinventing itself from being a "shul" into a "home," an Orthodox synagogue where all are welcome with respect, including non-Orthodox rabbis. This model was first conceived by R. Avi Weiss of Riverdale, New York and, like the Yeshiva he founded, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah,

this vision resonated to me. A former JTS roommate, R. Zalman Stein, a “frum-from-birth former Conservative Jew,” once visited BI and realized BI is really old JTS with a mehitsa, intellectually open, scrupulously halakhic, and doors, ears, and hearts open to all, without judgment of others.

After the passing of R. Moshe D. Tendler’s brother, R. Joseph Tendler of Ner Israel, my wife and I traveled “uptown” to visit my mentor during his mourning. Upon arrival at the mourning house, one “gentleman” was at that very moment demeaning BI because, according to his narrative, BI hired a Conservative rabbi, who instituted Conservative practices. I not so innocently interjected that this “gentleman” got his facts wrong. I informed him that the Torah readings at BI follow the standard Russian Ashkenazic rite, its rabbi is a member of the RCA, BI uses the RCA ArtScroll prayer book, and it remains a long-time Orthodox Union member. Indignant that his politically correct narrative rant was deemed to be factually incorrect, this “gentleman” asked me, “And how might you know this?” I answered, “I am that rabbi.”

BI’s leadership wanted me to join the pan-denominational Baltimore Board of Rabbis, and even offered to pay my membership dues. The previous rabbi would not do so because, to his view, it is “forbidden” to sit with or to otherwise “recognize” non-Orthodox rabbis as being Jewishly legitimate. When challenged by what right I gave “recognition” to the theological Jewish Left on the Board of Rabbis, I did not say “Rabbi Soloveitchik permits the policy”; instead, I argued that “Torah law does not recognize ‘recognition’ to be a category in Jewish law, Da’as Torah is not a recognized norm in Jewish law, we are forbidden to separate ourselves from the larger community, (mAvot 2:4), and there is no need for BI to require my Board membership because joining is the right thing to do.” I was, however, not invited to join the Orthodox Rabbinic Board, as I was not compliant with its leadership’s authority claims or its theological narrative.
On the first Rosh Hashanah at BI, I passed out a New York Jewish Week advertisement that Yeshiva University had a fundraising event at the Metropolitan Opera. My women singing “leniency” is not unique to me. BI was, is, and remains an Open Orthodox synagogue because it is open to all Jews and permits what Jewish law permits. Human dignity requires good manners, and bad manners are neither good policy nor good theology.

BI extended its welcoming hand to both Evangelical and Roman Catholic communities in the downtown Baltimore neighborhood, hosting on one occasion the Archbishop of Baltimore. While aware that R. Joseph Soloveitchik did not approve of such dialogue, his cousin, R. Saul Lieberman, allowed interfaith events

to take place under his JTS roof, and he presided as JTS Rector with an iron halakhic hand. It is by Jewish Law permissible to learn Hebrew Scriptures with non-Jews who accept Scripture's sanctity. While latter-day rabbis do have a right to rule that interfaith dialogue is presently unwise or inopportune, they do not have to right to claim that the activity is improper for all Jewry for all time. (See bAvoda Zara 43b and http://www.biu.ac.il/jh/parasha/shoftim/tal.html.) It is true that Maimonides believed that Christianity is "forbidden religion," often misconstrued as "idolatry." But it is also true that Maimonides' compendium was never accepted as "official" Judaism by any Bet Din haGadol. And it is also true that Cyrus, who was by all historical accounts an idolater, nevertheless received a monotheist's approval in Scripture (Ezra 1:2). It was at this moment in my career that I taught both Hebrew and Christian Scripture at Anne Arundel Community College. Different religious communities generate alternative religious narratives; empathy empowers the thinking person of faith to appreciate the narrative of the "other" without compromising the narrative which informs and shapes one's own identity.

BI began to attract young professional adults, most of whom were "traditional," not usually fully Orthodox, who found most Conservative synagogues to be unsatisfying and most Orthodox synagogues off-putting. When a professional woman raised in and to this day still committed to Conservative Judaism, asked if women may read Megillah at BI, I permitted the practice. While well aware that Tosafot intuits that woman must hear, but may not read the Megillah, I also recall that the Talmud, which trumps, overrules earlier (in this case, a Toseftan) rabbinic opinion, concludes that women must read the Megillah. In order to strengthen his restrictive ruling, Tosafot requires that women recite a radically innovative, canonically unattested "upon hearing the Megillah" benediction. In order to forbid the permitted, those who would restrict Oral Torah's legally authorized women's right to perform permitted rites are prepared to invent new blessings, against the talmudic principle that benediction formulae may not be changed and need to be promulgated by an authorized legal organ (bBerakhot 40b). The Oral Torah Tradition does permit women to read the Megillah; this license is not a concession to feminism, it is a matter of legal Torah fact. Orthodox culture "tradition" thus forbade what Oral Torah Tradition actually permits (bMegillah 4a). Contemporary Orthodox rabbis indeed do have the right to forbid the permitted for their own communities, but they are not empowered or authorized to do so for communities not within their jurisdiction. One BI woman asked me if she could recite a chapter of Lamentations on the Ninth of Av. I responded, "Why not?" The most critical difference the Orthodox religion of the Jews, which is called Torah, is that God's will is written in a Book, it is not merely the patriarchal hierarchy of the past

enshrined in Jewry's collective memory. The fact that an act was not practiced does not mean that the act is not permitted by law. The Torah does not reify past practice to be inherently holy. The commandments alone afford and accord holiness (Numbers 15: 38–40). My BI young people trusted me when I ruled restrictively because I always permitted that which was not forbidden. Modern Orthodox rabbis realize that Torah law and rabbinic taste are not always congruent.

When asked if a woman may recite Kiddush for a BI Friday night synagogue dinner, I also ruled affirmatively. A woman shares the same obligation as men to recite Kiddush, which fulfills the Torah obligation to mention/remember the Sabbath. (Exodus 20:8, bPesashim 106a, Maimonides, Shabbat 19:1), by saying Kiddush. The Hebrew root zkr also means "say" in Ugaritic and is attested in Hebrew at Psalms 145:7. Furthermore, if a man says the Shabbat evening prayers and the woman does not, the woman's Kiddush obligation may be greater than the man's. Orthodox folk usage has often overruled Oral Law statutes.

BI became a learning, liberal, and lively Orthodox synagogue. We studied Bible, Jewish law, thought, and history together. No question, which at its root was a spiritual quest, was out of bounds. Some very intellectual Jews attended regularly, including a card-carrying Reconstructionist woman and a secular, politically Progressive intellectual, who knows both Hebrew and Arabic very well, whose challenges I cherish, and with whom I correspond to this day. My Reconstructionist attendee got me involved with Baltimore's annual Science Fiction conference, where I would present papers on literary Biblical topics. Another congregant introduced me to her Comparative Religion class at AACC (Anne Arundel Community College) where, as noted above, I was asked to teach both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. At University of Maryland–Baltimore County, I taught "Judaism in the Time of Jesus." BI and I had an understanding. If BI allowed me to be a collegiate adjunct, I would not ask for a raise in salary. I benefited greatly, while BI suffered no financial loss (bBaba Kamma 20b). Contract renewal negotiations were quick, pleasant, and always ended with a warm and happy handshake.

After a few years of chronic fatigue, BI's work load—and steep steps—took their toll. While I found every day to be exciting, the preparations challenging, and the people absolutely wonderful, my then undiagnosed fatigue remained persistent. I had contracted Parkinson's Disease, and because I could not do the job, I felt obliged to resign. My successor, R. Eitan Mintz, a Yeshiva University graduate trained by R. Avi Weiss, possessed both the yearning and the learning to evolve

BI into a home, a bayit. His spiritual openness included hosting the Society of Biblical Literature, a gesture that showed great courage. In his job search interview, R. Mintz displayed the courage to disagree with me. A rabbi needs courage as well as learning. Rabbis who are afraid of their shadow will have a difficult time shedding and spreading the light of Torah. At his trial Shabbat, R. Mintz by reflex also helped a synagogue newcomer find his place in the siddur, revealing a heart wide to serve other Jews. At my retirement party, I was privileged to pass the Torah torch to this very talented, charismatic, and informed Modern Orthodox rabbi, who also thinks outside the box, whose heart and mind are always in concert and are in the right place, and whose executive skills and emotional intelligence far exceed my own.

My active retirement finds me residing two miles south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, giving classes for Torat Reeva, a Modern Orthodox adult learning program, and lecturing for CJCUC, Rabbi Riskin's compelling, courageous, and creative outreach to Bible-believing Christians. Psalm 117 reminds Jewry that God's kingdom must be proclaimed to the nations of the world. While I do not always believe in latter day saintly narratives, I do believe what the Bible prescribes.

My life has been a dialectic of pushes and pulls, thinking and doing, searching and finding. I never was able to determine if I should have been a rabbi or an academic; the Author of history arranged my life that I never had to come to a decision, as I was privileged to learn Torah with truth-finding tools and to apply the findings in the market place of Jewish faith, the synagogue and Bet Midrash. The Author of history also gave me Linda, my life's partner, whose culture, dignity, and refinement kept me from making many silly mistakes and saying things that should have better gone unsaid. Her piety, prowess, people skills, and gracious hospitality made her the angel I needed but did not deserve to have.

• My personal narrative has been a quest seeking a way to live Torah correctly. External acts and cerebral musings, body and mind, all merged in my movement to an Orthodoxy that always asks, "What is the right thing to do now?" Culture Tradition Orthodoxy, characterized by Hareidi Orthodoxy, tries to preserve Torah by erecting higher fences; it is sincere, passionate, and is for that reason worthy of respect, if not loyal opposition. But for me, God talks through those ancient books that we apply in the culture horizon we inhabit in the present. Those books are not in Heaven; they are in hearts and minds of today's Jewry to apply them in our lives. Reverence for the Almighty precludes the piety of obsequious deference to human elites. The current debate within Orthodoxy, taken for the sake of Heaven, will empower Judaism and Jewry to endure (mAvot 4:11). I am

particularly grateful that I accomplished most of my goals, but not one goal was ever accomplished in the way I intended or imagined it would. My understanding of Torah empowers individuals to be moral agents for appropriate change on one hand, and a commitment to the human collective on the other. Jews are ruled by egalitarian rules, not self-serving rulers. Those pulls informed my mental and behavioral choices; I hope this memoir will not encourage clones, but serve as a model for others Jews and non-Jews alike to search for God on the highway and the by-way, not my way, but in their own way. God made humankind both equal and different; equality actually requires that individuality be honored. And with probing Jews cultivating religious individualism, the Jewish person will be a contributing member of God’s kingdom of priests that yields a holy community.