The Future of Israeli Hareidism

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No issue in Israeli public life arouses the range and intensity of emotions as does anything relating to Hareidim and Hareidism—the terms used for the "ultra-Orthodox" and their lifestyle. [1] A typical discussion on any Hareidi-related issue is laden with ideology, dogma, and opinion, but short on facts, let alone hard data.

The sad reality is that most Israelis, including most *dati-leumi* (National Religious/ Modern Orthodox) Israelis, relate to Hareidim with a mixture of fear and loathing—and even hatred generated by that potent mixture. Hareidim feel much the same way about secular Israelis and, very often, about religious ones too. The mutual antipathy stems from the concern on each side that the other will seek to impose its views and lifestyle.

Yet this stereotyping tends to break down at the individual level. Thus, although the average Israeli will express strong negative views about Hareidim in general, s/he will often feel warmly toward Hareidi individuals he knows through family, community, or work connections. This is a positive and hopeful feature in a generally bleak picture, which carries important implications for the future—assuming Hareidim become more involved in, and even integrated into, the wider society.

That assumption is a critical issue—not just for the future of Hareidi society, but for the very existence of the State of Israel. I will argue here that the future is one of greater integration, but that outcome is far from assured. If the Hareidi sector of society adheres to the ideology of separation—which has been one of its bastions and sources of strength and which has, at least in some respects, intensified in recent years—then the tensions between the wider society and the Hareidim will be exacerbated, and the suppressed conflicts will likely become steadily more overt and possibly violent.

That negative scenario is much less likely, but it is essential to understand why. The reason is that the primary source of friction between the Hareidi and non-Hareidi sectors is no longer cultural, let alone ideological. In a postmodern society such as Israel, the acceptance of numerous lifestyles is increasingly the norm (even by Hareidim, as their self-defeating struggle against gay parades in Jerusalem illustrated very clearly). Most non-Hareidim therefore have no problem with Hareidism for Hareidim, although they obviously don't like it or want it in their backyard. However, this acceptance is subject to two important conditions: that the Hareidim do not attempt to impose their values and life-styles on non-Hareidim, and that the Hareidi community and its lifestyle is not paid for by non-Hareidim.

It is the first of the issues—perceived attempts by Hareidim to impose their mores and values on others—that generates most of the heat and light popularly associated with "Hareidi/ secular" clashes. Travel on Shabbat, gender separation on buses—these are the classic issues that have led to bitter and sometimes violent confrontations. But these are trivial matters in the wider scheme of things. At the macro level, the clash between the Hareidi sector of Israeli society and the non-Hareidi majority has been over resource allocation, which, in plain language, means money—but also manpower (because labor is also a resource, and a critical one at that).

As soon as the Hareidi/ non-Hareidi "clash" is put in those terms, it becomes more amenable to resolution. After all, in every country different groups and sectors of the population vie for "shares of the pie." The competition may be between rich and poor, old and young, country versus city—each country has its own characteristics, but none is devoid of rivalry. In a democratic society it is the electoral process, which enables citizens to choose between the platforms of political parties, that provides a mechanism whereby that society decides how to divide up its proverbial pie. Each group's starting point is that it deserves more, for whatever reason—but every group must relate its demand, either implicitly or explicitly, to its contribution to the overall society.

The Hareidi "Problem"—Burden or Blessing?

The singular feature of the Hareidi sector is that it bases its request for a growing share of the national pie on a contribution that the non-Hareidi majority does not recognize. The Hareidim claim, as an article of faith, that their contribution of studying Torah full-time is equal to, if not greater than, that of the majority who serve in the army and work for a living. For reasons that will be explored below, the non-Hareidi majority have acquiesced to an arrangement whereby Hareidi young men are not conscripted into the Israeli Defense Forces, nor do they join the labor force and engage in economic activity. Instead, they remain in a framework of institutions devoted to Torah study, encompassing secondary and tertiary education and developing into open-ended "post-graduate" studies in kollels for married men.

However, this acquiescence on the part of the political leadership of non-Hareidi Israelis does not reflect acceptance by them—let alone by the general public—of the principle that adult Torah study is an equivalent contribution to work and/or army service. Consequently, the growth of Israeli Hareidism has generated a widespread feeling that "the burden"—the financial burden of paying taxes, the economic burden of making the country self-supporting, and, above all, the physical/existential burden of defending the country—is not shared, and that the Hareidim do not pull their weight but rather live a parasitic existence, paid for and defended by their non-Hareidi compatriots.

But since the highly democratic Israeli electoral system allows the Hareidim to express their beliefs and pursue their demands via political parties in the Knesset, and since the political system results in coalitions in which these parties are usually members—and since the Hareidi political parties' primary *raison d'être* is to channel budgetary allocations to its constituency—the result has been that the Israeli public has continued to pay for the maintenance and expansion of Hareidi society.

To suggest that this is going to change is considered by most Israelis today as naive, ridiculous, or proof that the suggestor is detached from Israeli reality—or all of the above. Indeed, it is now universally accepted by informed and educated Israelis that the Hareidi population poses a major problem, even a threat, to the socio-economic well-being of the State of Israel—and hence to its existence. No serious analysis of the country, its society, economy and political structure, can or

does fail to make this point. Even foreign analysts have “discovered” the Hareidi problem, which now features in analyses produced by the OECD and the IMF, as well as reports in the *Economist* magazine, *The New York Times,* and other important international news media.

The existence of so broad a consensus is a strong indication that the view it presents is very likely to be wrong. To the contrarian analyst, the only time you can be sure of anything is when there is unanimity among the experts about that subject. In particular, if the accepted wisdom is that something is a serious problem that seems intractable, then you can be fairly confident that it’s going to be all right. This general rule applies to the problem posed by Israeli Hareidism.

If I therefore move straight to the bottom line, my conclusion will be that the Hareidim are going to be integrated into the Israeli economy and, to a lesser extent, into Israeli society. This long and difficult process is already underway and is picking up speed. It is being driven by forces both from within Hareidi society and outside it, so that although the initial impetus for change may have been imposed on the Hareidim, today that is not the case. If anything the opposite is occurring: Change is being driven from within, by a new generation with a new mindset.

Last but not least, this conclusion does not mean that Hareidism is going to disappear, or that the Hareidim are going to become irreligious, or “Modern Orthodox,” or anything else. Hareidism of one sort or another is a permanent fixture within the spectrum of views and behavior that comprises Judaism, at least in the modern era. It can and will adjust, as it has done several times—despite the Hareidi mythology that they and their lifestyle are unchanging—and it is in the process of doing so again. This is tremendously good news for the Jewish people as a whole, for the State of Israel, and for the Israeli Hareidi community.

Mythology Meets Reality

Before analyzing the process of change underway, it is essential to review how we arrived at the current state of affairs. Along the way, we will discover how and why the process of change started some years ago.

The Hareidi problem, stripped of its emotional and religious over- and under-tones, boils down to one of demographics and economics and the relationship between these two areas. From an economic point of view, any society can

afford—if it so chooses—to provide special privileges to a small group within it. In many societies, ancient and medieval, this group was the priesthood or clergy. The Torah itself adopts this concept by designating the tribe of Levi as the privileged group to be supported by the wider society in return for devoting itself to religious duties, both in the Temple and throughout the nation. Mainstream Hareidi ideology uses the Levites as an example and role-model for the position Hareidim wish to assume within Israeli society.

The concept of a small group of devoted scholars, engaged in keeping the flame of traditional Jewish study alive after the annihilation of the European Torah centers during the Holocaust, was accepted by Ben-Gurion and other secular leaders in the 1950s and provided the justification for the two key privileges granted the then-tiny Hareidi sector, namely the exemption of dedicated yeshiva students (and all religious girls) from army service and, even more importantly, the creation of a separate education stream for the Hareidi sector. At the time, these seemed to be minor concessions and did not attract significant attention; the cost, in social, military, and economic terms, was negligible.

However, two dynamics combined to change the relative position of the Hareidi sector within the wider society, and, consequently, to change the attitude of the silent majority of the population with regard to Hareidi privileges from one of passive acquiescence to increasingly vocal opposition. The first of these was demographic: Over time, the birth rate in the Hareidi sector rose dramatically, as this society adopted early marriage and large families not merely as social mores but rather as key cultural values. At the same time, the birth rate in the general population, especially the Jewish population, was declining as the immigrants from Europe and the Arab world adopted Western mores. The inevitable result was a steady rise in the relative size of the Hareidi sector within the overall Israeli population, from a negligible level at the foundation of the state to a small but noticeable minority by the 1970s.

This period—roughly the first three decades of Israel’s existence—is viewed today by many older Hareidim as a “golden age.” From their weak and marginal position in society, firmly planted in political opposition to the ruling Labor-left coalitions, the Hareidim were forced to struggle for anything they needed. Their small numbers and shared goals and needs forced them to work via a single political party—Agudat Yisrael—to protect and expand the privileges they had obtained. Their religious leadership, comprising a handful of outstanding personalities who had survived the Holocaust and were now dedicated to regenerating Hareidi life, focused their efforts on education as the means to produce a new generation committed to living by the old values and verities.

Money was scarce, for the country as a whole and especially for the marginalized Hareidim but—as in the wider Israeli story—much was achieved, thanks to determination, focused efforts, and inspiring leadership.

In 1977, the second dynamic came into play. The “political upheaval” of May 1977 ended the hegemony of the Labor-left and brought to power a Likud-led center-right coalition. The new Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, invited Agudat Yisrael (AY) to join his government—and the invitation was accepted with alacrity. AY maintained that it could not accept ministerial positions because that would require accepting responsibility for government decisions and activities it could not approve of; instead, its representatives took deputy ministerial posts and other positions, notably the chairmanship of the Knesset Finance Committee, through which they became instrumental in making key policy decisions. More importantly, from the narrow sectoral perspective through which AY viewed its involvement in national politics, its entry into government and its prominent position in budgetary affairs allowed it to massively increase its access to funding for its institutions, educational and other.

The common perception is that from this point on, Hareidi power and influence rose steadily. This process was catalyzed by the deadlock between the two main political blocks that characterized Israeli politics through much of the 1980s and 1990s, and that allowed Hareidi parties to hold the balance of power and thereby to extract more concessions in return for their support. These concessions were almost always in the form of larger budgetary allocations, which gradually spread across a range of channels: the Ministry of Education provided budgets for the Hareidi school systems; the Ministry of Religion was the primary source of funding for yeshivot and kollels; the National Insurance Institute (NII), via its child allowances and other social welfare payments, became a critical source of funding for burgeoning Hareidi families; and, over time, a huge array of NGOs serving the Hareidi sector emerged, most of them reliant on government funding as their primary source of support.

To be fair, the process of tapping into the government budget to finance institutions and NGOs with a sectoral orientation was by no means a Hareidi monopoly. In the period from the late 1980s to the turn of the century, everyone got into the act, but the Hareidi parties were the acknowledged masters of this game—the biggest and the best.

Note that by this point it was necessary to speak of Hareidi parties in the plural. The old alliance of all the Hareidi groups under the AY umbrella broke down, once again under the twin forces of demographics and politics. There were now large

numbers of people in each of the main sub-groups of the Hareidi sector—the Hassidim, the Mitnagdim (“Lithuanians”) and the Sephardim. The latter group not only broke away to form its own party but, under the leadership of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and his chief lieutenant, Aryeh Der’i, launched an unprecedented campaign that reversed the secularization process underway among Sephardic Jewry. Shas grew to become a mass movement, led by Sephardi Hareidim but attractive to a much wider public. Its relationship with the other mainstream Hareidi party, Degel Hatorah, is complex and multi-faceted, but the basic fact remains that Shas views itself as a Zionist party and as a full partner in the governing of the state. [2]

The process described above, of financing the growth of Hareidi education, welfare, and other systems from the state budget, was both the cause and the effect of Hareidi demographic and political expansion in the 1990s. It reached its climax in the “Halpert Law” of 1999, named after an AY Knesset member and foisted on another weak coalition in desperate need of Hareidi support in order to cling to power. The law changed the structure of child allowance payments from the NII so that, whereas hitherto the additional allowance for children under the age of 18 rose until the fifth child and then declined, now it would continue rising: each marginal child would bring in a relatively larger stipend. The obvious beneficiaries if this law would be the Hareidim—but also the Bedouin Arabs, where polygamous family structures existed and NII stipends enabled and encouraged high birth-rates.

The Halpert Law proved to be the high-point of Hareidi political power. But it is important to note that even in the late 1990s it was already apparent, both within and outside Hareidi circles, that Lord Acton’s dictum that power corrupts applied to Hareidim no less than to others. The most obvious evidence was the number of Hareidi Knesset members sent to jail for various forms of corrupt practices. Although I would tend to accept the Shas argument that its representatives, and Aryeh Deri in particular, were victims of a political witch-hunt inspired by the Ashenazi/ left-liberal “elites,” that doesn’t make them innocent—it just means they were picked on and picked off.

However, with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the peccadilloes of specific Knesset members and ministers were only the tip of a much larger iceberg. In effect, Hareidi political power resulted in Hareidi society becoming entirely dependent on the government budget. In other words, Hareidi Judaism—despite its proclaimed ideology of separation, self-sacrifice, and asceticism and its efforts to dissociate itself from Zionist ideology—turned itself into a branch of the Israeli welfare state. Nor did this happen by accident; the process became self-supporting as more and more Hareidi leaders, their entourages and their

institutions, became increasingly dependent on funding whose ultimate source was the government budget—and hence the Israeli taxpayer. True, there was an alternative source of funding, namely foreign donations. But after the fall of the Reichman brothers' empire in the early 1990s, the illusion that one family had been designated by Providence to support the entire edifice of Israeli Hareidism was shattered. Foreign donations remained an ongoing source of support, but its role was increasingly to provide jam, while the bread and butter came from the Israeli government. The lesson of the rise and fall of the Reichmans seemed to be that no wealthy individual, however mind-bogglingly rich, could play the central role. The national budget was larger, more accessible and seemingly more dependable.

But government funding was earmarked for two main areas: education and welfare. As a result, both saw massive expansion. They became the focal points of activity for every entrepreneurially oriented Hareidi so that, sadly and ironically, they became the main "industries" within the Hareidi business sector. Furthermore, since the new generation of Hareidi entrepreneurs had neither experience nor formal education, management of the new entities was characterized by inefficiencies, superfluity, and corruption.

Educational establishments proliferated, each one of which was a business venture in an increasingly competitive market. The more successful entities, whether by design or by accident, became involved in real estate, catering and wedding halls, and other legitimate business operations. As for illegitimate activities, the reader is referred to the media and/or Google for more details.

The overall picture was one of rapid, headlong, and unplanned growth, in which the nimble and well-connected came out on top, while a wider class of political *machers*, public relations, marketing, and other consultants, along with the managers of the NGOs, emerged as an embryonic Hareidi upper-middle class. But there was nothing below them, other than a mass of yeshiva/ kollel families, dependent on meager stipends and living near or actually in relative poverty, as the cost of feeding, educating, and marrying off their numerous children consumed their small incomes.

The Secular Backlash

The Halpert Law proved to be the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. By pushing their political power too far, the Hareidim triggered a political backlash on the part of secular, middle-class Israelis, against what was commonly

called “Hareidi blackmail.” Since the two big parties were unwilling to clash with the Hareidi sector directly, the protest movement found a new outlet in the form of a new party, Shinui, which not only called itself “the secular list” but was openly and stridently anti-Hareidi. Its leaders were indeed anti-religious, but most of its supporters were probably not; they, too, were concerned with money rather than ideology, above all with who paid taxes and who received benefits—as well as with who served in the army and did reserve duty and who didn’t.

One of the most remarkable of the many political parties to shoot across the Israeli political firmament, Shinui may arguably be regarded as the most successful. In its first election effort, in 1999, it won six seats, a highly respectable performance, but not enough to change the balance of power. But by the next general election, the country was in a very different position. The hopes of peace and security prevalent in 1999 had been dashed by the second intifada and the suicide bombing campaign, while the prosperity engendered by the high-tech dot.com boom had been expunged by the “tech-wreck” and a global recession. These, coupled with the impact of the suicide bombings on the domestic economy, had plunged Israel into the longest and most severe recession in the country’s history. Tax revenues plummeted—but expenditures continued to rise, as the welfare structure created in the 1990s was impervious to the ups and downs of the economy. The result was a massive budget deficit and a financial crisis in 2002, which occurred against a background of serial suicide bombings and an Israeli counter-offensive against the Palestinian terrorist groups—Operation “Defensive Wall.”

There had been serious tensions between Hareidim and secularists in 2000 over Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s “secular agenda” and what Hareidim perceived as excessive Supreme Court activism. But the events of 2002 exposed the Hareidi sector to an unprecedented degree: they paid little tax but received a disproportionate share of the government’s expenditure and, as usual, they played no role in the military campaign. All this made Shinui’s message resonate widely so that, with the help of a vigorous and nasty election campaign, the party won 15 seats in the election of February 2003, making it the third-biggest party in the Knesset and an obvious coalition partner for the Likud—which, led by Ariel Sharon, had won a tremendous victory, garnering 40 (out of 120) Knesset seats.

The election outcome enabled Sharon to turn Israeli politics on its head and build a coalition in which all the Hareidi parties—including Shas, to its amazement and horror—were excluded. Sharon appointed Binyamin Netanyahu as Finance Minister, with the seemingly Herculean task of pulling the battered economy into shape, and these two used their parliamentary majority and the atmosphere of

dire crisis to rapidly legislate a series of sweeping reforms. In addition to rationalizing the tax system to generate higher revenues, Netanyahu homed in on the expenditure side, which was plainly out of control. Inevitably, justifiably, and predictably, he took a machete to the sprawling welfare system that had been constructed and of which the Hareidim were the prime beneficiaries.

In the course of 2003–2004, the overall amounts of government funding to the Hareidi sector fell drastically, probably by one-third, perhaps even more. The main blow was the slashing of child allowances, but the yeshiva stipends and other elements were also pruned. Not surprisingly, the Hareidim came to call this development “the Netanyahu *gezeros*” (decrees, a term usually applied to anti-Jewish laws by gentile anti-Semitic regimes). The alternative would have been to admit that they and their leadership had, through greed, short-sightedness, and sheer stupidity, set themselves up for this disaster. But whatever label is used, this was the watershed event that marked the end of the Hareidi welfare-state society that had been constructed over the previous three decades.

The sheer scale of the implosion in funding caused massive distress for many Hareidi families and forced many institutions to merge or close altogether. Objectively—and if the government’s aim was indeed to incentivize Hareidim to move from welfare into the workforce, as it claimed—then the cuts should have been phased in gradually, over a period of 5-10 years. But the immediate need was to stem the hemorrhaging in the national budget and, in this context, the swollen welfare budgets were the obvious targets. The result was traumatic—and that trauma set Hareidi society on a new path.

From Crisis of Confidence to a New Model of Hareidism

The immediate task facing the Hareidi leadership in the wake of the so-called *gezeros* was to address the crisis as best they could. In practice, beyond an emergency fund-raising campaign, the pain could only be eased gradually, as the Israeli and global economies began to recover. But the situation began to improve perhaps faster than might have been expected. The domestic scene changed: Shinui imploded in a welter of internal feuding and corruption charges, and soon disappeared entirely from the political scene—as far as its voters were concerned, its mission completed. Subsequent governments recognized that the cuts imposed by Netanyahu had been too drastic and allowed some increases in child allowances.

Meanwhile, a new development was sweeping the economies of the main developed countries where large Hareidi centers had developed. The greatest real-estate boom ever seen was minting millionaires seemingly by the minute, and a rich new vein of foreign funding opened up. For five years, from 2004 through 2008, unprecedented sums of money poured into the Israeli Hareidi sector, not just in the form of donations, but also as investments in real-estate and other businesses. The wider Israeli public was largely unaware of this, but anyone walking through the Hareidi quarters of Jerusalem and other Hareidi population centers could hardly fail to notice the surge of construction activity.

Once again, however, as with the Reichman saga 20 years earlier, the hope that foreign sources could replace the Israeli government in whole or part proved illusory. The real-estate crash in the United States and the subsequent financial and economic crisis in the West wiped out many of the new Hareidi tycoons, and, together with a series of scandals within the Hareidi Diaspora, served to eliminate key sources of funds, with the inflow drying up much faster than it had expanded.

Nor was the new money, even when it was available, a true replacement for the funds lost via the "*gezeros*." Donations went via intermediaries, who generally took a hefty cut for themselves, to institutions and organizations, wherein a new Hareidi executive class began to emerge and adopt a lifestyle to match. The government money, or what was left of it, went to individuals and families who desperately needed it—although they then had to turn to the charity organizations to supplement it. Thus the real-estate driven prosperity of 2004–2008 aggravated the existing income and wealth gaps within Hareidi society, with the majority of the Hareidi poor being left steadily further behind.

Meanwhile, even as the chimera of Diaspora real-estate money came and went, far-reaching changes were taking place in Israel, both inside and outside of the Hareidi sector:

- Beginning in 2003, the Israeli economy began what was to become its longest-ever period of economic expansion. Although the global crisis of 2008 hit the Israeli economy too, its impact was short and after two tough quarters, the economy bounced back and resumed its growth path. In hindsight, the period 2003–2010 can be seen as "seven fat years" in which Israel surged ahead and prosperity became widespread. However, massive income and wealth gaps developed, with Hareidim and Israeli Arabs standing out as the two main population groups left out of the party.
- If the economic success story is well-known, the extraordinary developments in Israeli demography since 2003 are not. Yet the data are official, regularly

updated, and clear-cut. They show that a) since the slashing of child allowances the Hareidi birth-rate has trended lower (as has that of the Bedouins); b) the birth-rate among non-Hareidi Israelis has steadily risen; c) the birth-rate among Israeli Arabs continues along its long-term declining trend.

- Within the overall economic success story, the single most important datum is not widely known. This is that the participation rate in the labor force has risen steadily and is now at a record-high level of 58 percent. This rate is still extremely low by Western standards, but the upward trend is the critical factor. One of the causes of this improvement, perhaps a central one, is the increase in the rate of participation among Hareidim, including Hareidi males.
- Within Hareidi society, major changes are underway. Three, in particular, need to be highlighted, relating to a) politics, b) sociology, and c) psychology. Space only permits presenting these in "headline" form, but each is worthy of close examination.

Hareidi politics: The evidence of a crisis of leadership in Hareidi society is most evident in the political sphere, where it can actually be measured. The most obvious evidence is the failure of the Hareidi parties to increase their representation in recent elections, despite surging growth in the Hareidi voting population. This suggests that Hareidi votes, especially younger ones, are leaking away to non-Hareidi parties—a suspicion supported by reading of the Hareidi and non-Hareidi media and by anecdotal evidence. In addition to voting patterns in general elections, the faction- and personality-based feuding within the Hareidi political scene—the municipal elections in Betar and Jerusalem in 2008 are outstanding examples—is forcing many young Hareidim to the conclusion that their interests are not being promoted by traditional Hareidi parties. More generally, the shrinking of government support has revealed that Hareidi politics has become entirely focused on obtaining government funding and providing jobs through patronage, and has shed its ideological underpinnings. Now that Hareidi parties are unable to provide sufficient funds or jobs to answer their constituencies' needs, they have lost their validity and with it, increasingly, their support.

Hareidi sociology: The "*gezeros*" left most Hareidim over the age of 35 with insufficient income to support their large families—and without education,

training, or any practical means of finding jobs in the wider economy. Overnight, they became a “wilderness generation”—and the Hareidi leadership has not been able to provide systemic solutions to the crisis. The conclusion drawn by many younger Hareidim—especially those who are, for one reason or another, uncomfortable with or unsuitable to the yeshiva/ kollel lifestyle—is that they must look out for themselves. Specifically, they must be able to earn a living. This is fuelling a steady increase in the number of young Hareidim attending colleges and even universities, as well as vocational courses, in a broad range of fields. These efforts are being funded and guided by, inter alia, the Joint Distribution Committee, numerous individual philanthropists, and institutional philanthropies from overseas, as well as various Israeli government ministries and agencies—including most branches of the IDF.

This means that the front line of Hareidi integration into Israeli society is now the labor market—but also that serving in the IDF, after yeshiva and perhaps some kollel study, is acceptable. The envelope is being pushed steadily outward, both in quantitative terms—the number of people involved—and in qualitative terms, meaning the kinds of things they do.

As this process moves forward, it is creating a genuine Hareidi bourgeoisie—people with real jobs and businesses that create income and wealth, rather than party apparatchiks and “welfare entrepreneurs” whose business arena is the Hareidi “hessed” empires that are the hallmarks of the sector’s poverty and welfare-dependence.

Hareidi psychology: This point is based more on subjective impressions than hard data, but it seems to me both correct and a logical accompaniment to and outcome of the preceding points. In Kennedy-style terms, we can speak of the torch being passed—more correctly, seized—by a new generation of Hareidim, who have come of age in the twenty-first century, tempered by terror and war, disciplined by a severe financial but also spiritual crisis, proud of its ancient heritage, and unwilling to impose on the next generation the ideals of genteel poverty on which it was brought up. Furthermore, this new generation sees and feels itself to be entirely Israeli, an integral part of the multi-cultural mosaic that is the State of Israel today. Unlike their grandparents, they feel no need to molder on the margins of society, and unlike their parents, they do not carry an inbuilt inferiority complex vis-à-vis secular or religious Israelis. Many of them are beginning to realize that they have much to give to the wider society and also much to learn from it, because—contrary to what they were told in school—they

and their leaders do not have all the answers. Above all they are convinced, on the basis of what they have seen both in Israel and among their peers in the Diaspora, that it is possible to live a Hareidi lifestyle and yet interact, where necessary, with the wider society.

These new trends are the antithesis of the old-style welfare-state Hareidism. The battle between the two is ongoing and will take time to resolve, but the global reversal of the welfare state model ensures that the old system is doomed. The future of Hareidism lies with the new generation, which is engaged in a live experiment of adapting its lifestyle to a new socio-economic reality.

The track record of Hareidim in adapting to new circumstances is a good one. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the wider Israeli society, including the government and the main institutions of the state, are strongly supportive of this effort. How exactly it will turn out cannot be known—because the future is unknown. But too much hangs on the outcome of this effort, for the Hareidim, for the strength and cohesion of the State of Israel, and for the future of the Jewish people, for it to fail.

[1] Social scientists have expended much energy in the effort to define “Hareidi” and “Hareidism.” One reason they have met with limited success is because of the growing differences between Israeli Hareidim and their Diaspora counterparts. This article is concerned solely with Israeli Hareidism and assumes the reader understands the terminology, even without formal definitions: you know it when you see it.

[2] In the 1988 general election, Shas followed up its stunning 1984 debut when it captured four seats, by winning six seats. I was then a reporter for the *Jerusalem Post* and covered Shas on election night. When I asked Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, then leader of Shas’ parliamentary faction, what portfolios it would seek, he said, “We view ourselves as potential candidates for every portfolio, including defense.” Nothing could better illustrate the gulf between the inclusionist pro-Zionist attitude of Shas and the exclusionist anti-Zionist line of AY and Degel.)