

## Modern Orthodoxy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

### Lecture IX: What does a Modern Orthodox Community Look Like? Strengths & Weaknesses of Mo

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- Where Modern Orthodoxy Is At – And Where It Is Going?, Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin, *Jewish Life*, 1975
- Is Modern Orthodoxy an Endangered Species?, Rabbi Dr. Walter Wurzbarger, Orthodox Caucus webs site
- Modern Orthodoxy: Crisis and Solution, Rabbi Dr. Shmuel Singer (Congregation Beth Shalom, Providence, Rhode Island), *Tradition* 23(4) summer 1988

#### 1. Tradition 23:4, Summer 1988, Rabbi Dr. Shmuel Singer, Rabbi of Congregation Beth Shalom, Providence, Rhode Island.

##### MODERN ORTHODOXY: CRISIS AND SOLUTION

Despite the many instances in which Modern Orthodoxy is more faithful than its opponents to the Halakha, there remain other situations in which the opposite is true. If the Modern Orthodox are to succeed in winning serious youth to their banner they must seek to rectify these problems. One of these areas concerns *mitsvah* observance. Modern Orthodoxy posits loyalty to Halakha as one of its guiding principles; however, all too often this observance is selective rather than all-embracing. Sabbath and *kashrut* are observed to a point where, with the exception of certain *humrot*, there is little difference throughout the Orthodox community. This is unfortunately not true of other basic *mitzvot*. The laws of *niddah* and *mikveh* are neglected in part or whole by many associated with the Modern Orthodox camp. The obligations of daily *tefilla be-isibbur* and *tseniut* are often not stressed. Some of the rabbinic leaders of Modern Orthodoxy exhibit readiness to accept pulpits in synagogues which violate even the most lenient halakhic standards of Sabbath observance and behavior during prayer. Many of these same rabbis participate in joint worship with non-Orthodox Jewish clergy or Christians, things for which there is little or no sanction in halakhic sources. These people are not following lenient rulings. We must be speaking out against non-halakhic trends in our community if we wish to be taken seriously.

Another area of Modern Orthodox life that must be strengthened is Torah learning. A serious commitment to the intensive lifelong study of Torah is one of our most basic halakhic requirements, but such devotion is too often lacking among the Modern Orthodox. We must teach our community that just as a Jew who violates the Sabbath cannot be considered Orthodox, a person who does not study Torah intensively cannot be designated as fully *mitsvah*-observant. Lack of widespread Torah learning activities among "modernists" gives the right wing justified ammunition with which to attack the former. Modern Orthodox synagogues should be centers of learning and campaigns for increased study. We must be more aggressive in encouraging our students and congregants to increase their Torah study.

Adoption of this general approach would go far towards solving Modern Orthodoxy's contemporary crisis. It would give the movement pride in itself and self-confidence in meeting its opponents. A

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century ago German Neo-Orthodoxy succeeded in holding its own and in winning the right wing's respect by the enthusiastic advocacy of its lifestyle on strict halakhic grounds. This can be true of American Modern Orthodoxy if it makes the effort to put its house in order and project itself as the positive Torah force it truly is.

## 2. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Jewish Life, 1975, Where Modern Orthodoxy Is At and Where It Is Going?

### Torah Attitudes and Inverted Marranoes

There is yet another factor operating here. Torah Judaism draws its strength from *Mitzvos Ma'asiyos*, from action imperatives. But these actions must be supported by *Mitzvos She'b'lev*, Torah attitudes which give meaning to our behavior. America has spawned inverted Marranoes: Jews who act out the rituals, but have the inner responses of the secularist. Any monotheistic religion stands or falls on its ability to imbue its adherents with a deep abiding faith in a Higher Being, which endows every human activity with higher meaning and which views even tragedy as a potential for spiritual achievement. The context of religious practice must be *Kedushah*—the sanctity which endows even the most mundane experience with a sense of transcendence. If American Orthodoxy produces secular-minded Jews wearing *kippot*, Sabbath-observing intellectuals who cannot say "my soul thirsts for the Living G-d," we shall have failed.

### Emunah and Kedushah

*Emunah* and *Kedushah*, Faith and Sanctity, are not easily achieved. Their temporal absence are understandable. But the absence of a striving after *Emunah* and *Kedushah*, which is widespread within the modern Orthodox community, is symptomatic of spiritual failure, and goes to the heart of many of the practical shortcomings that are more visible to the eye. Many of our synagogue "services" are sterile and noisy, devoid of the straining for *Kavannah*, for direction, which characterize the authentic effort to achieve an awareness of the Divine Presence. The closing prices on the New York Stock Exchange have a greater impact on the worshipper at the Shabbos morning service than the cry of *Shm'a Yisrael* climaxing with the emphatic "ECHAD." The siddurim, once stained by tears, are now marked with lipstick. The man or woman who musters tears during prayer—even on the

Days of Awe—is looked upon as strange. Having lost our talent for the art of prayer, it is not surprising that many congregants arrive in the middle of the Torah reading on Shabbos morning, and begin to show signs of boredom after the *Mussaf Kedushah*. And despite all of the *kippot* at Grossingers, how many have the commitment to attend daily minyan?

A person shows his true mettle by how he spends his "spare time"—if one can properly speak of time, the very essence of our lives, as being superfluous. How many of us spend our evening hours with a *seifer*?—and how many of us spend our evening hours watching Johnny Carson? The plethora of kosher eating places in New York City offering Chinese, Italian, and French cooking may well be a legitimate sign of a more sophisticated American Orthodoxy but is a nightclub, replete with all the trappings of modern-day hedonism, a proper environment for an Orthodox Jew—even though the meat served is Glatt Kosher?

How many modern Orthodox Jews pride themselves on their children's "early admission" to an Ivy-League school, and aspire to their becoming scientists, attorneys, or physicians?—and how many look forward to a son who is a *talmid chochom*, a Torah educator, or a Rosh Yeshiva? Do we really believe that sitting in Grossinger's night club, or at the pool while wearing a *kippah* will inspire our children to be vibrant and committed Jews who will passionately accept their Jewish heritage and reject the valueless world of secularism? And is it any wonder that with all of our yeshivos American Orthodoxy has produced so few genuine Talmidei Chachemim? Producing authentic Torah scholars requires the single-minded intensity of purpose, and total devotion to G-d and his Torah, which modern Orthodoxy hardly reflects.

## Some Conclusions

Modern Orthodoxy can make a major contribution to the mainstream of

Torah life. Unfortunately, its strength is being lost because it has failed to provide an environment for the commitment to Torah study and Torah living as an absolute, without which Torah Judaism of any variety cannot survive. Living in two worlds, and hopping between two disparate value systems produces "pareve" Jews, at best, and schizophrenic Jews, at worst.

"Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto G-d that which is G-d's," is a christological concept expressed in the Gospels.

"Be a Jew in your tents and a man in the marketplace," is a slogan of the Haskalah.

Neither of these concepts are compatible with Jewish survival. They must both be rejected in whatever modern-day dress they present themselves.

"Let all that you do be for the sake of Heaven." This monotheism must displace "synthesis" as the common ideal of a united Torah Jewry. Only when we join spiritual and scientific endeavor and our professional and personal lives to the service of the Almighty only when we strive to pursue Kedushah and Emunah in our daily lives, will we produce in American Orthodoxy the fiery commitment which will enable us to endure, and ultimately to prevail.

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## MODERN ORTHODOX SYNAGOGUES

(Produced by Yeshiva University, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Dr. David Schnall)

- Observe Halakhah in all ritual laws and customs

A modern Orthodox synagogue will have a proper mehitzah. It will follow the order of the services prescribed by the Shulhan Arukh. The final arbiter of all ritual questions will be the rabbi.

- Usually allow only those who share the synagogue's commitment to Halakhic observance to serve as officers.

Officers of a congregation are its public representatives and must conform in their personal lives and conduct to the highest traditional standards of ethical and ritual behavior.

- Are centers of Torah learning, and campaigns for increased study.

A modern Orthodox synagogue will encourage its members to engage in Torah study at all levels – youth & adult – for the sake of Torah Li'shmoh, and shall provide Jewish educational opportunities at the highest level for both men and women in all aspects of Jewish law, ritual, philosophy, custom, and history.

- Seek to provide for the spiritual needs of women within the congregation, within the parameters of Halacha

Modern Orthodox synagogues recognize the importance of providing spiritual fulfillment to all its members - including, and perhaps today especially – the women within the congregation. They seek to find creative and meaningful

avenues of religious and spiritual expression while respecting and advocating total compliance to the parameters of Jewish law and custom, Halakha and Minhag.

- Participate in vital projects with the broader Jewish community

Modern Orthodox synagogues recognize the value of Jewish solidarity and actively cooperate with non-Orthodox in matters of mutual or political concern. This active cooperation can be the stepping stone for *kiruv* (outreach) programs, but need not necessarily be geared for that purpose.

- Expect their members to support their local Orthodox day schools through enrollment and philanthropy.

Modern Orthodox synagogues recognize the centrality of day school education. They encourage their congregants to enroll their children in modern orthodox day schools, take an active role in the day school philanthropy and provide public recognition of the contributions made to the community by students and teachers.

- Advocate the values of Torah U'Madda

Through sermons and adult education classes, a modern Orthodox synagogue will promote the values symbolized by the Yeshiva University motto: Torah U'Madda, in which Torah represents God's word and Madda – His world. This embodies recognition of the positive value of understanding and association with secular society by studying the arts and sciences, seeking professional fulfillment in the general workplace and engaging in social and political action.

- Recognize the Religious Significance of the State of Israel

A modern Orthodox synagogue will give positive recognition to the hand of God in Jewish history through the recitation of prayers for the State of Israel and the Israel Defense Forces. The synagogue should sponsor or participate in community-wide celebrations for Yom Ha'Atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim and commemorations for Yom Ha'Shoah and Yom Ha'Zikaron. In times of crisis for Israel, it will conduct the recitation of Psalms and participate in other forms of political action. These synagogues will also expect their members to support the State of Israel through tourism and philanthropy.