“Extremism” in Jewish Day School

Jack Bieler
June 2013

Modern Orthodoxy’s Achilles Heel?
An endemic problem that has been associated with Modern Orthodox Jews and the schools and shuls that they attend, is the apparent lack of religious enthusiasm and passion, and at times even the ignoring of rudimentary requirements of Halacha,\(^2\) that is associated with many aspects of religious practice,\(^3\) in contrast to those Jews categorized further to the right and more fundamentalist in approach, who ostensibly evidence significantly greater personal spiritual devotion.\(^4\) In 1989, Rabbi Norman Lamm\(^5\) intimated the negative consequences of such a temperate, disengaged mindset among the Modern Orthodox, young and old, when he wrote,

> The most critical problem facing Orthodoxy which preaches Tora U’Madda, moderation, tolerance and openness is: Can we be all these things without sacrificing that “bren”, that enthusiasm, that zeal and commitment and powerful love without which we are condemned to spiritual superficiality and religious mediocrity? Can our youngsters, some of whom aspire mightily to be “cool”, learn the ambition to be warm and even ablaze with the dream of achieving spiritual authenticity?

Is the Modern Orthodox community’s reputed disdain for open emotionalism, outward expressions of religious fervor, and precision with respect to Halachic observance, all categorized by some as indications of “religious extremism”,\(^6\) responsible for the relatively tepid spiritual sensibilities with which contemporary Orthodox Jews and their children have become so identified? And would an attempt to instill such “bren”\(^7\) result in behaviors and attitudes that many in the Modern Orthodox world would find objectionable?\(^8\)

Rabbi Lamm’s foreshadowing of how damaging “spiritual superficiality and religious mediocrity” can ultimately prove to be for children as well as adults, is sadly borne out by Alan Brill\(^9\) when he recently blogged, not that young Jews who had been raised in Modern Orthodox homes and educated in Modern Orthodox schools lacked “bren”, but rather that many of them were deciding to completely abandon the community and its lifestyle, in effect a type of “extremism” on the other end of the spectrum:

...There is a post-Orthodox moment...in that younger Centrist Jews are leaving the community. In terms of their public writings, they state that they are leaving
because they find in the religious community anti-intellectualism, narrow or excessively partisan political views, lack of theological depth or even any credible apologetics, almost no engagement in art, media and society, slavery to materialism and consumerism, provincialism, insensitivity toward women and homosexuals, and the moral failure of prominent leaders...

Such a critique appears to result not only from these individuals’ impressions of the values and attitudes of the overall Modern Orthodox communities in which they were raised, but also the student bodies and educational experiences at the schools in which they were educated. And, it should be pointed out, some students do not wait until they no longer attend the Jewish day school in order to express and demonstrate their disaffection. “Extreme” non-observant behavior can sometimes be encountered among students well prior to their graduation from day school, as will be discussed below. It must be emphasized that applying the term “extremism” to any religious context, including educational situations, is fraught with imprecision and very much a function of an individual’s particular frame of reference at a given time. And if this is true about individuals in general, it is that much truer about adolescents and even young adults who are experimenting with various identities in a quest to decide who they are, or at least considering what they think they might wish to become. Nevertheless, assuming that these phenomena, i.e., “extremes” at both ends of the religious spectrum, are accurate reflections of the reality of the Jewish day school population—it seems that the evidence is more anecdotal than empirical—what could account for some students gravitating towards these two opposite poles, and what might these schools do to anticipate and even counter these types of unfortunate “extreme” results?

“Religious extremism” in the day school.

Given that “extremism” is a relative term, and it could be applied to manifestations of many different facets of the educational experience in a Jewish day school, when focusing upon religious behavioral and attitudes, specific points of view that are given religious justification, as well as the manner in which certain types of ritual practices are carried out, or their deliberate omission, are the most distinct expression of what might be referred to as “extreme” spiritual beliefs or behavior. Areas of belief that are worthy of exploration with respect to the question of “extremism” include: 1) tolerance of different forms of Jewish observance, 2) the religious implications of the State of Israel, 3) the role of women in Jewish law, 4) attitudes towards non-Jews, and 5) the relationship between Tora and secular studies. Examples of areas of behavior which are susceptible to “extremism” include: 1) Kol Isha (lit. the voice of a woman; the extent to which, if at all, males allow themselves to listen to females singing), 2) Tzniyut (lit. modesty; length, style, design of clothing), 3) length and speed of one’s prayers, particularly re the recitation of Sh’ma and the Silent Devotion, 4) physical movement during prayer (the degree to which the pray-er engages in various kinesthetic motions during the course of prayer), 5) women and girls participation in Talmud study, 6) what is done during a student’s spare time, e.g., recess, lunch break, etc., i.e., spending time with friends as opposed to engaging in extra Tora study, 7) attending or avoiding extra-curricular praying and Tora
learning opportunities, 8) male dress (size of head covering, deciding or not deciding to regularly wear a white shirt, black suit, tie, “black” hat, Tzitziyot—from hanging loose to not wearing them at all, etc.) While behavioral manifestations of extremism usually can be readily observed, this is not the case in terms of beliefs, and without interviews, surveys, etc., where students stand on these matters is difficult to determine.

**Different types of Jewish Day Schools might define “religious extremism” each in its own way.**

Most non-Chareidi16 Jewish day high schools in the United States are categorized as either pluralistic17 or denominational18 institutions. Pluralistic day schools by definition should not promote a particular religious perspective,19 and therefore designating a specific view or practice as “extreme” would appear inappropriate to their respective cultures. If the entire Jewish community is supposed to be welcomed by and represented within the school, tolerance for religious differences would be expected on the part of the administration, faculty and student body. A denominational school, on the other hand, would appear to be committed to promoting a particular religious perspective and approach. Consequently significant deviance from the avowed outlook of the school as manifested in its mission statement would constitute an instance of “extremism” when contrasted with the stated vision of the school.

But even within the non-Chareidi Orthodox portion of the Jewish day school spectrum, Marvin Schick20 distinguishes between “Modern Orthodox” and “Centrist Orthodox” day schools, in contrast to Yeshivish or Chareidi institutions:

**Modern Orthodox** schools strive for what has been referred to as a synthesis between Tora education and modernity, as for example in the inclusion of girls in Talmudic study. These schools are coeducational, with a strong emphasis on the academic program, as well as Judaics, which includes subjects that are not emphasized in typical yeshivas. Hebrew is often the language of instruction in Judaic courses...Israel is a powerful factor...High school graduates tend to go to Israel for a year—and sometimes more—... The expectation is that after the return from Israel, high school graduates will attend a college...

**Centrist Orthodox** schools are not coeducational, except perhaps in the younger grades. Often there are separate boys and girls divisions in the same facility... Centrist Orthodox schools...emphasize secular studies and Israel to a greater extent than the yeshiva-world, and generally to a lesser extent than the Modern Orthodox... 21

Consequently, behavior and attitudes that might be defined as “extreme” by some in a pluralist school setting might not draw anyone’s attention in a Modern Orthodox school, and in turn that which is out of the ordinary in the Modern Orthodox context, could be viewed as “normal” and even “ideal” in a Centrist Orthodox school.22 Sometimes it is just such differences that ultimately inform school choice or serve as the basis for switching from one type of school to
another for a particular family, student within that family and/or the working environment of choice for a Judaic studies faculty member.

**Basic causes for student religious extremism within the Jewish day school.**

During the course of my interviewing veteran faculty members in Modern Orthodox day high schools regarding their observations and speculations concerning religious extremism within their schools a number of specific variables were identified as significant causes of this phenomenon: 1) parents, 2) teachers, 3) personal dynamics affecting some students, 4) curricular and pedagogic approaches, 5) the focus of guidance programs, and 6) the intrinsic nature of the Modern Orthodox experience and its effects upon adolescents. 23

1) **Parents.**

Virtually every educator with whom I spoke identified a student’s parents as a factor when an adolescent decides to adopt extreme views or behaviors. 24 In effect, rather than the young person emulating the specific example presented to him by the adults in his home, characterized by R. Lamm above as “often “spiritually superficial and religiously mediocre”, 25 some students opt to pursue an alternate path, often at considerable odds with their parental examples, which seems to the student more consistent and intellectually honest. In order to attain what they consider greater “consistency” than what they understand to be their parents’ examples, some students adopt more stringent religious practice, while others move further to the left, abandoning even those practices that are followed in the home. Some parents deliberately send their children to schools which promote religious practices that are at odds with what is done at home, in the interests of exposing their children to additional religious possibilities and choices. 26 Whether the creation of such a dialectical experience results in a middle-of-the-road synthesis, or promotes “extreme” reactions probably varies from case to case, and is a worthy object of study.

2) **Teachers and other members of the school staff.** 27

Chareidi teachers have comprised various percentages of the faculties of Modern Orthodox institutions over the years. Sometimes economic considerations on the part of the school underlay the phenomenon: Chareidi educators accept lower levels of compensation and benefits than Modern Orthodox teachers. Particularly when the day school is far from a metropolitan area in which many Jews live, resulting in the choice of teachers being limited, and in order to find staff members who represented a particular religious outlook, it would be necessary to recruit that person and his family, make it possible for him to relocate, for the spouse to find a job, for the children to attend school, etc., it is significantly cheaper to hire someone who lived locally, even if he did not fit precisely into the institution’s self-definition and religious orientation. While in some schools it is made extremely clear to these individuals that it was expected that they would never oppose school policies, even if they could not positively advocate for them, 28 in other institutions, again especially those who would not be able to easily replace a Judaic studies teacher if he were to leave, a laissez-faire policy exists. In
addition to what a teacher communicates regarding a school’s official policies, the manner in which he conducts his classes with respect to readiness to discuss theological issues and probing questions raised by students could be a function of how the teacher himself was educated and the religious intellectual milieu which he prefers. While some would argue that the school should employ teachers with a variety of religious perspectives in order to demonstrate to students a variety of legitimate possibilities for observance, others would maintain that the school should be delivering a clear message and religious approach rather than one that is confusing and often contradictory. Even if under the best of circumstances, faculty members who basically disagreed with the school’s religious views kept their objections to themselves, students are perceptive and identify the “hidden curriculum” of such teachers. Students are aware of whether or not faculty members choose to send their own children to the school in which they teach. While sometimes there are financial, educational and even social considerations that would mitigate against a teacher enrolling his children in the school where he teaches, at least some students may view this as a tacit rejection or at least a critique of their level of religious observance, lifestyle and values. Furthermore, many of these teachers will invite students to their homes for Shabbat or class celebrations, and once again the “disconnect” between the culture of the school and the faculty member will clearly stand out. And if the faculty member’s home life seems so much more positive than what the student experiences in his family, he might be powerfully attracted to emulate his teacher and the lifestyle with which he is associated.

But student “extremism” might not only be precipitated by Chareidi instructors of Judaic studies. Particularly in a Modern Orthodox institution, where general studies are placed on an equal plane with Judaic studies, teachers, however credentialed and pedagogically talented, whose own lifestyles are at variance with the school’s religious positions in the sense that they are not Jewishly observant and perhaps even harbor antipathies towards observance, let alone their not being Jewish in the first place, can also serve as anti-religious role models for certain students seeking mentors and adult exemplars.

Yet another area where adults can profoundly impact upon students in a Modern Orthodox school is the extra-curricular context. Students who are aficionados of drama, the arts, sports, journalism, various clubs, even bus drivers, etc., sometimes spend as much and certainly more intense time with those in charge of these activities than their formal teachers and even their parents. In schools in which I have worked, it was noted that these individuals are the least supervised of the entire staff. Naturally when something egregious occurs, an investigation is conducted and corrective action is undertaken. But what about on a day-to-day basis? How many students relate to these individuals as the significant adult in their lives, and to what effect, including engendering “extreme” behaviors and attitudes?

If the individual in question, i.e., the Chareidi educator, the general studies teacher antipathic towards Jewish observance, the Israeli Kollel member, the coach, the club leader, etc., happens to be charismatic, beloved, and admired, then his influence as an exemplar can be considerable, to the point where students model themselves after him and his views, in spite
of the rest of their religious educational experience in the institution. In effect, exposing students to mixed messages sent by any combination of a school’s professional staff replicates what these young people often experience when trying to resolve conflicts between school and home. Considerable cognitive dissonance is created, and it should not be surprising that some students will attempt to resolve their discomfort by gravitating to one “extreme” and deemphasizing the other. When these considerations are complicated by a particular faculty member viewing his contact with students in a Modern Orthodox school as a “Kiruv” (lit. drawing close; the term that connotes trying to influence someone to adopt a higher level of religious observance) opportunity or, conversely a chance to “enlighten” students and encourage them to lessen their observance standards, extreme reactions among the student body can be anticipated.

3) Students.

While the “flipping out” phenomenon has been observed more frequently in those who spend a gap year in Israel, during which they are literally removed from their homes, and as a result study and live in an environment populated by role models whose deportment and views differ markedly from the majority of personalities populating the communities in which they were raised, some high school students decide to adopt a more intensive religious lifestyle while they are still in school and living at home. The converse is also true, i.e., very often the move from either day school or Israel Tora environment to the secular college campus can also result in a significant drop-off in religious observance; yet there are instances when this can already be observed in adolescent day school students as well. Virtually all human beings at some point in their psychic development grapple with what Erik Erikson famously designated as an “identity crisis”. In his 1950 work Childhood and Society (W.W. Norton and Co.), Erikson suggested that between 12 and 20 individuals go through a psychosocial stage wherein they try to determine answers to questions such as: Who am I? How do I fit in? Where am I going in life? For someone living and being educated in an observant Jewish venue, the responses to such questions must include sooner or later the type of religious perspective and observance to which the individual decides to commit himself. One veteran educator intriguingly applied a Freudian perspective when he attributed the adoption by some of more rigorous religious behaviors might be attributed to discomfort with aspects of sexual awakening, and the attempt to reign in such thoughts and desires by means of applying additional structure to one’s life including articles of clothing that constitute reminders of one’s religious identity.

Just as some students might be attracted to abandon the norm and take on more extreme religious behaviors and outlooks, the opposite phenomenon can also play a role in the individual’s coming to grips with his “identity crisis”. While some “extreme” conduct that is associated with a deliberate disregard of religious lifestyle and values could be sooner categorized as “risky behavior” than “extremes” involving stricter religious observance, such behaviors can from a particular vantage point, be equated with one another, i.e., the attempt to “try on” different personae as part of the quest to discover one’s authentic self.
If one assumes that the adoption of such “extremes” on the part of an adolescent might have more to do with the passing stages of his identity development than a serious permanent decision based upon various influences in his life, the question of to what degree should others attempt to intervene and restore the young person’s former equilibrium arises. Naturally, if the behavior is physically life threatening, it becomes a medical issue, even one of “Pikuach Nefesh” (the saving of a life), and the necessity to try to save the individual from himself and his unfortunate choices, becomes clearly necessary. Furthermore, every educational institution will set rules and expectations, and conformity with such standards constitutes minimum requirements for remaining part of the school community. But what, if anything, should be done when the high school student’s choices make at least some adults uncomfortable, but there is nothing inherently physically unsafe or iconoclastic vis-à-vis the schools rules and standards about them? Can a teacher, counselor, community Rabbi, etc., assume the prerogative of defining what constitutes “Pikuach Nefesh” of another person’s soul, just because they personally have not chosen such a path for themselves? And what if this is only a “phase”, which will be replaced over time by other possibilities? Does an adult, however credentialed and experienced, have the right or assume the responsibility to oppose the young person’s journey of self-discovery? This is a subject for exploration and discussion.

**4) Pedagogic, curricular and extra-curricular factors.**

Sometimes the manner in which Judaic studies is presented to day school students could precipitate “extreme” religious reactions on their parts. Some educators point to the very traditional religious approaches that some of their colleagues utilize, where emphasis is placed upon essentially committing large sections of text to memory without engaging in searching questioning, analysis and/or the encouragement of critical thinking, as a major contributing factor to student religious extremism. Either students become disinterested in what they are learning because they conclude from their classes that the material has only breadth but no depth, or they are taught to accept all sorts of statements at face value, seldom being directed to consider the difference of opinion of various authorities, thereby resulting in an essentially fundamentalist approach to learning and religious practice. The problem is further exacerbated, particularly with respect to the potential for students to devalue their Judaic studies, when they compare the approaches to religious texts and thought that they have experienced, with the methodology that is associated with excellent teaching that usually characterizes general studies. Because of the superior pedagogic preparation that many general studies teachers are required to have in order to be hired, in contrast to their Judaic studies counterparts, students are led to view their religious studies in an inferior light.

Furthermore, the content/subject matter of religious studies classes can also play a role in how students relate to not only their studies, but the evolution of their personal religious practice as well. There are numerous passages within Jewish primary and secondary sources that if taken literally, at face value, by the student, will likely generate extreme reactions in both directions, i.e., some will be turned off; others will become convinced that these statements constitute “absolute truth”. If texts that contain extreme statements about non-Jews, women,
converts, Jewishly uneducated individuals, how Tora study should be the exclusive focus of Jews, the creation of the universe, etc. are made part of the curriculum, if they are not presented reflectively and sensitively, adverse responses are almost to be expected.\(^\text{46}\) It is important to emphasize that classes dealing with such issues critically and analytically should not be offered exclusively to the intellectual elite within the student body, but to everyone, taking into account the various levels of ability and interest of the students in question. All students should come away with the impression that the tradition can and does address such issues, whether or not such learning will enable them at this point to personally articulate the exact nature of their own responses to these basic questions. The mere fact that they will be able to recollect that their day school teachers addressed such matters should supply them with confidence in traditional Judaism so that in the future, when they find themselves actually grappling with these issues, they will hopefully turn for help to Jewish leaders and thinkers.

One wonders how much extreme reaction to religious thinking and observance is the result of a lack of preparation for the secular college experience that so many day school graduates will encounter relatively shortly after graduation.\(^\text{47}\) Whereas some schools offer classes in Halachic practicum, e.g., observing Kashrut in a dormitory room shared with non-observant fellow students, dealing with labs and exams assigned on Shabbat or Yom Tov, co-ed dormitories with mixed gender bathrooms, etc., many of the intellectual and spiritual challenges that the college experience entails are not directly dealt with. If a student has not encountered informed discussions of how a religious individual thinks about e.g., gender equality, pluralism, observance being characterized as primitive and/or obscurantist, anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, he could be shocked into responding by either withdrawing into himself and more extreme forms of observance, or an abandonment of tradition and Shmirat HaMitzvot.

Extra-curricular experiences can also potentially contribute to driving some students to extremes. With respect to outside speakers invited to address the student body or a particular class, how careful are schools to vet what will these individuals be articulating and can such outside speakers possibly know their audience as well as those who interact with them and teach them regularly?\(^\text{48}\) Introducing a program that has been developed by an outside organization, e.g., Aish HaTora’s Discovery and Tora Codes presentations; a Middot, Hashkafa or even TaNaCh curriculum developed independently of the school and purchased so that the school will not have to develop similar material itself; inviting an outside theater group to perform for the students, etc. all have the potential to create disconnects between the articulated mission of the school and its constituency on the one hand, and the agendas of these organizations on the other. Experiences working on the school newspaper and yearbook,\(^\text{49}\) particularly when students have a sense that the publications have been censored, or simply criticized by some sectors of the school, can engender hostility not only towards those critiquing the student work, but also the school in general and Judaism as a whole. The choice of a particular play by the dramas society can generate controversy and extreme feelings about Judaism and those who are associated with it.\(^\text{50}\) Where the school sends students on trips, the rules that apply during those excursions or retreats, the behavior and dress that is expected at
sporting events, all constitute opportunities for extreme reactions and conclusions on the part of members of the day school student body.

5) The very nature of Modern Orthodoxy itself.

What has been listed above are particular, individual aspects of the experience of a child educated in a Modern Orthodox school that could cause extreme reactions to what he is learning and the practices that he sees around him. However, even if no single component of his educational experience causes him such extensive consternation that leads him to adopt an extreme religious position, the overall gestalt of a Modern Orthodox school as well as the Modern Orthodox community in which he is raised, where all of these elements impact on students in various combinations over the course of a series of years and which at least some individuals might find confusing and contradictory on the one hand, or unflattering compromises to allow for living less than an Halachically-informed life on the other, could serve to produce extreme results. As stated above in fn. 31, in the absence of adult role models who embody actively and fully living on “both sides of the curriculum”, unless students engage in the strategy of “compartmentalization”, a figurative “schizophrenic” approach whereby religious and secular components of one’s experience are deliberately kept separate from one another, it is to be expected that they will be hard-pressed to successfully reconcile all of the different messages that are being presented to them. It is logical to recognize that concrete thinkers will have greater difficulty moving back and forth between the curriculums than abstract, more intellectually facile students. This type of dissonance can serve to cause “extremist” reactions in both directions, i.e., tuning out either the secular of the Jewish component, within those students who find difficulty in adapting to the different and seemingly contradictory demands and assumptions of the dual curriculum.

6) Religious guidance or the lack thereof.

Assuming the likelihood of conflicts arising as a result of living in a certain type of family, schooling, and/or community experiences, do adolescents who find themselves troubled by these warring influences have recourse to discuss their experiences, feelings and questions? In every one of the interviews I conducted with veteran educators in Modern Orthodox schools, I pointedly asked about whether the schools in which they have worked provide “religious guidance”. While some schools ask certain faculty members to serve as mentors for groups of students, and others appoint a “Mashgiach” who visits classrooms when he can and raises issues of Hashkafa with the students, there does not appear to be a formal structure for religious guidance, truly comparable to what is in place for dealing with serious emotional problems, i.e., guidance counselors and/or school psychologists, and college placement. While some students may draw attention to themselves and invite adult interventions by acting out in noticeable ways, there are “quiet” students who maintain low profiles, and yet may be experiencing religious conflict and tension who are never given the opportunity to express and explore these matters with a concerned professional.
7) Personal follow-up and contact after graduation.

In footnote 13, I point out that Modern Orthodox day schools have rarely done structure longitudinal follow-up studies to try to gauge the religious impact that their educational programming has had on students. Even when there is anecdotal evidence that former students may not be living lifestyles that reflect their day school educations, schools often fail to take action. One educator remarked to me that it had been discussed among the faculty members of a certain day school how a high percentage of male graduates, once they take up residence on a particular college campus, within a few months, no longer put on Tefillin. I responded, “So has anyone from the school visited those students on that campus to try to determine what the situation is and see if either any interventions could be undertaken for those students, or a modicum of preparedness could be designed that will assist future graduates who will study there so that they will be less likely to give up such religious practices?”

Proactively addressing the basic causes for student extremism in the day school.

If we assume that the above in fact are likely to serve as contributors to students responding in extreme ways to the education that they receive in the Jewish day school, each identified area can serve as a focal point for concerted effort on the part of the school in order to attempt to lessen this phenomenon.

1) Parents.

According to Joseph Schwab’s concept of “The Practical” or eclectic of education, the parent body must be taken into account in order for a successful educational program to be instituted by a school. Like any other values-driven educational perspective, Modern Orthodox day schools per force need to account for, and in my view, attempt to influence positively, the parent body in order that what children learn in school is supported and reinforced to whatever extent possible, by the children’s parents. If parents often are the catalyst for extreme student reactions, anything that can serve to narrow the religious divide, if it exists, between school and home would be helpful to curb student extremism. While the nature of student bodies in Jewish day schools is quite heterogeneous in terms of religious commitment and observance, a reflection of the the religious diversity of the families from which the students come, that does not mean that some initiatives cannot be taken to at least acquaint a large percentage of the parent body with not only what is being taught, but the religious philosophy that informs the educational approach of the school. Most schools already have evening presentations regarding substance abuse, sexual behavior, college selection, possibilities for study in Israel during the gap year, etc. Ideally, conveying concepts that drive a school’s religious perspective to parents will fill more than a single evening or even entire Shabbat, and if more prolonged presentations and follow-ups with printed material or a series of downloadable presentations would engage some of the parent body, so much the better. I feel that it is also ideal if the synagogues which the parents belong to and attend could be involved in this process as well. Communication and understanding can go a long way to enlist parents to become not only a school’s material
supporters, but also a means for making the religious educational messages more coherent and consistent.

2) Teachers and other members of the school staff.

If extreme student behavior and attitudes can sometimes be attributable to adults working for the school doing or saying particular things, thought has to be given as to how such “triggers” can be avoided and hopefully eliminated. Hiring philosophy, the criteria which contribute to the decision as to whether or not to rehire a particular teacher, astute and regular supervision of all school programs—curricular and extra-curricular, and ongoing professional education for the entire staff in terms of discussions and study of school philosophy and outlook, all can serve to educate as well as foster understanding, respect and support among a day school’s staff members. To expect that this collection of individuals will all personally agree with an institution’s outlook is probably unrealistic. But the specific standards of professional behavior, support of the school and its programs, the protocol for dealing with disagreements should they arise, etc. all need to be spelled out, communicated and regularly revisited in no uncertain terms for the benefit of the entire staff. Specialists, extra-curricular coaches and program leaders and anyone else coming into regular contact with members of the student body should be included in this process.

3) Students.

Just as school staff are expected to be on the lookout for evidence of child abuse, emotional trauma, learning difficulties, etc. and relay what they notice to those charged with assuring that the child is not evidencing inappropriate behavior for his age and social situation, and if necessary to consider what could be done to assist the child, the same should be true about religious perspectives and behaviors that appear aberrant and extreme. On one level, such attitudes and actions could be symptomatic of more extensive issues with which the student may be grappling, but even if it is determined that what has attracted attention is purely religious in nature, nevertheless inquiries should be made and discussions with the child conducted to investigate why this type of personal expression is happening at this time. The reasons may prove innocuous and appropriate; on the other hand, the inquiries could prove significant in heading off the further evolution of “extreme” positions.

4) Pedagogic, curricular and extra-curricular factors.

When teachers teach religious subject matter in a manner that students feel addresses their curiosity and interest, providing them with the opportunity to question (even if answers do not immediately present themselves), to think and reflect, there is a better chance that students will retain open minds and will be more personally connected in a balanced manner, as opposed to making them susceptible to adopting extreme religious positions, to what they are learning and studying. I once wrote that a possible frame-of reference for teaching adolescent day school students is by viewing them as potential converts. Just as the curriculum chosen for someone studying for conversion includes material that if properly presented, will represent the
essence of Judaism and hopefully elicit life-long commitment, similar considerations should be employed with regard to high school students. While it is true that someone expressing interest in conversion may be more motivated and mature than many of the students one encounters in a day school setting, the fact that these students constitute a relatively “captive audience” over the course of a number of years affords ample opportunity to make a deep impression, if approached thoughtfully and excellently.

In addition, I am a strong advocate of incorporating Ta’amei HaMitzvot (the reasons, rationales for Commandments) as much as possible in contemporary religious education. While Emuna Temima (whole-hearted, unquestioning faith) may have once been common among observant Jews, this no longer seems to be the case. However, in my view, Ta’amei HaMitzvot should not be relegated to what can be found in the writings of classical commentators such as Sefer HaChinuch, RaMBaM’s Moreh Nevuchim or R. Hirsch’s Horeb. A comment made by Aharon Horowitz while describing a hypothetical twenty-something year old who has become alienated from observant life, despite having had an exemplary Jewish education, supports the contention that thought should be given to how reasons for Mitzvot can be presented during the contemporary period in such a way that the teachings can translate into ongoing religious commitment:

...Why are our ritual and commitment to halakhah not compelling enough to last the odyssey? Let us explore the possibility that the halakhot and rituals of our community are not being effectively framed in the context of the values that stand strong during the Odyssey Years. To resurrect an old argument, the ta’amei ha-mitzvot (meaning of the commandments) that might explain the halakhot’s value are not apparent enough to the membership of the Orthodox Diaspora to provide a bulwark against the waning influence of earlier education...

This requires, in our curricula, shuls, and yeshivot, an insistence on halakhah and the halakhic way of life not so much for its own sake (or to serve God, history, or Torah), but as a way to support practically the fulfillment of the Jewish mission as a whole. We must explain how the obligations of halakhah further the social values that odyssey youth grew up with and continue to pursue even as they abandon ritual stricture.

I personally do not think that the manner in which Ta’amei HaMitzvot are presented has to exclusively be informed by the perspective recommended by Horowitz; however I believe that the educational approach to teaching Halacha must at least to some degree afford those students, who otherwise may tend to either be unreflective about religion and therefore fail to realize its utility and importance as a powerful social force for serving others, or who would simply abandon religious practice because they find that it does not “speak” to them and what they are searching for, an outlook that will contribute to the development of an approach in keeping with a Modern Orthodox perspective.

Thirdly, I feel that all students in a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school on whatever level they may be on, should read and study contemporary Jewish thought. In order for young people to begin to understand how various thinkers have attempted to apply Jewish tradition to
the modern condition, which in turn will hopefully lead students to reflect upon their own challenges in this regard, such study and discussion will hopefully help them better negotiate their individual identity crises with respect to where they stand Jewishly. Yemai iyun (special study days) and individuals addressing the student body can also be devoted to such issues, but structuring formal course work whereby students are challenged to understand how and why different groups and denominations approach Judaism as they do will understandably be more productive and affective.

Finally, serious class time should be devoted to anticipating the intellectual and social challenges that confront a day school graduate on the contemporary college campus. Even if all questions are not answered, the experience of grappling with these issues will hopefully encourage students to reach out to the educators whom they respect and feel could provide support when they encounter some of these issues, and in that way, not have to confront such challenges by themselves.

5) The very nature of Modern Orthodoxy itself.

A few years ago, I was present at a meeting where a leading Modern Orthodox rabbi, who also taught at Yeshiva University, remarked how his students did not understand what Modern Orthodoxy was. They never had been exposed to individuals who espoused such a position nor had they read thinkers who are considered the seminal contributors to this Jewish approach. I resolved at that moment that my students and congregants should not be able to claim that no one had presented to them the foundations of Modern Orthodoxy. In my high school Talmud classes I assigned readings by the likes of R. Soloveitchik, R. Lichtenstein, R. Jonathan Sacks and others and each day for fifteen minutes we discussed the previous evening’s assignment. In my synagogue, I gave seminars of the same readings for all those interested in attending, as well as went out of my way to cite such religious thinkers in writings and Derashot. It seems unreasonable to think that adults, let alone adolescents, will be able to develop an informed appreciation of such a religious perspective without exposure to the concepts and presentations of those who have given a great deal of thought to these issues.

6) Religious guidance or the lack thereof.

If schools are concerned that students are not developing balanced religious perspectives, then in addition to basic psychological and guidance services, each student should be approached individually and on an ongoing basis whereby what s/he is thinking and doing religiously can be explored. Leaving students to their own devices in terms of their religious development hardly promotes continuity and balanced religious perspectives.

Assuming that conflicts will inevitably arise within the context of the Modern Orthodox educational experience, I believe that the theme of balance is something that should be explored concertedly. Ideally this should be a message that informs the gestalt of the entire day school experience, within the curricular structure as well as in school-wide sessions and programs. However if it is unreasonable for the professional teaching staff who themselves do not usually pursue balance between the traditional Jewish and secular aspects of contemporary
experience, then at least within the context of these personal, religious guidance discussions, the concept of striving for balance ought to be unambiguously encouraged.

Particularly over the past few years, the tuition crisis that day school parents are experiencing certainly would mitigate against creating yet another cost center, i.e., a formal religious guidance program, and the need to teach a double curriculum within a typical school day in Modern Orthodox schools creates considerable resentment among subject matter teachers when their students are pulled out of class for yet another series of meetings. Nevertheless, assuming the ubiquitousness of the conflicts experienced as a result of the very nature of the Modern Orthodox experience and education, unless a structured serious approach to religious guidance is undertaken within the school context, it is hard to imagine a significant number of students not being pulled to one extreme or another.

7) Personal follow-up and contact after graduation.

Individuals, even once they have graduated from day school, should feel that there are adults who themselves represent healthy religious perspectives, and who are concerned about their former students and try to keep in touch with them, however that may be possible. During students’ gap year, schools often send a representative to make the rounds of the Yeshivot and seminaries to “see how graduates are doing”. However, due to the whirlwind nature of such visits, there is seldom time to really enter into substantive discussions with the students who are met. However important this may be during the year immediately after high school, it probably is that much more crucial while someone is on a college campus. In my view, it is important that high school educators make themselves available to serve as Scholars-in-Residence on campuses, and to give Shiurim in local colleges in order to offer former students the opportunity to stay in touch both in terms of learning as well as discussing the problems with which they may be dealing.

Additionally, administrators and faculty members should attempt to at least stay in touch with as many graduates as possible, thereby offering them a means to stay connected to the personalities that populated the school where they developed their formative religious identities and to whom they most likely were drawn close.

The professional staff of a school could claim that they are overworked as it is, and barely have time to carry out the daily responsibilities expected of them vis-à-vis the current student body, let alone deal with past graduates. But if it becomes common knowledge that a significant percentage of graduates of a school, at least in the short term, are not continuing to live religiously in accordance with what the school is teaching and preaching, is there no responsibility for administrators and teachers to at least try to reach out to this population in whom they have invested so much resources, time and effort? And while the students who turn to the right in terms of religious practice and outlook may not be interested in continuing their association with their Jewish day school, it seems to me that if for no other reason, trying to stay
in touch with such individuals could potentially shed valuable light on the educative process taking place in the school, and perhaps lead to constructive changes.

**Conclusion.**

A Modern Orthodox Jewish Day School should be viewed by the constituency that it serves as well as the professionals who are employed by it as a key institution in the maintenance and continuity of the religious perspective that it represents and attempts to promulgate. When products of the educational experience offered by such a school both in the short term as well as over the course of many years do not reflect in a significant, measurable fashion the influence of the school, but rather assume what could be considered extreme positions vis-à-vis the outlook that they were taught concertedly and comprehensively, it should give both the school’s staff as well as the Modern Orthodox community as a whole, serious pause. Ongoing evaluation and reflection is needed in order that what these schools offer as educational and religious programs and experiences can achieve their maximum positive affects upon as many members of their student bodies as possible.
1. As a college student, have you personally experienced tensions between religion and modern society?
   a. Frequently ________
   b. Sometimes ________
   c. Rarely ________
   d. Never ________

2. If yes, in what areas? (please describe briefly, in order of importance to you)
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

If yes, did you turn to anyone for help? (Please check as many as apply):
3. Yes, a YU rabbi ________
4. Yes, my parents ________
5. Yes, my synagogue rabbi ________
6. Yes, a YU professor ________
7. Yes, a YU peer ________
8. Yes, other (please explain) ________
9. No, I resolved them myself ________
10. No, I still experience such conflicts ________

11. In what type of neighborhood would you want to live 10 years from now?
   a. 75%-100% Jewish ________
   b. 50%-75% Jewish ________
   c. 25%-50% Jewish ________
   d. 0%-25% Jewish ________
   e. Don't care ________
For each of the following statements in questions 12-18, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree:

12. Ideally, I would like to live and work within a totally Orthodox Jewish environment.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

13. Living and working within modern society and culture has special religious meaning and value to me.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

14. One can live and work in modern society and remain an observant Jew as long as one maintains a clear distinction between his/her religious and secular lives.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

15. Modern life makes Orthodox Judaism untenable.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

16. Ideally, a Jew should study Torah only, without any secular study.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

17. Secular study is permissible only insofar as it is important for one's livelihood.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

18. It is a Jewish value to learn as much as one can, including secular study.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.
19. Some types of secular study, such as the natural sciences, are important for the observant Jew, but not such fields as literature, history, philosophy, and fine arts.
   a. Strongly agree ______.
   b. Mildly agree ______.
   c. Mildly disagree ______.
   d. Strongly disagree ______.

20. All spheres of knowledge are instrumentally important for the observant Jew because familiarity with each of them enhances the status of the observant Jew in the eyes of others.
   a. Strongly agree ______.
   b. Mildly agree ______.
   c. Mildly disagree ______.
   d. Strongly disagree ______.

21. All spheres of knowledge are intrinsically important for the observant Jew.
   a. Strongly agree ______.
   b. Mildly agree ______.
   c. Mildly disagree ______.
   d. Strongly disagree ______.

22. There is nothing wrong with having contact with non-Jews, so long as the contact is limited to that which is necessary for one's livelihood.
   a. Strongly agree ______.
   b. Mildly agree ______.
   c. Mildly disagree ______.
   d. Strongly disagree ______.

23. Ideally, one ought not have any contact with non-Jews.
   a. Strongly agree ______.
   b. Mildly agree ______.
   c. Mildly disagree ______.
   d. Strongly disagree ______.

24. Contact with non-Jews and the non-Jewish world is a Jewish value so long as one doesn't compromise his or her own religious observance.
   a. Strongly agree ______.
   b. Mildly agree ______.
   c. Mildly disagree ______.
   d. Strongly disagree ______.
26. It is preferable for Jews to have contact with non-Jews even if one makes concessions on their observances in order to foster such involvement.
   a. Strongly agree ______
   b. Mildly agree ______
   c. Mildly disagree ______
   d. Strongly disagree ______

26. The Holocaust was another in a chain of disasters which the Almighty has brought upon the Jewish people as punishment for their sins. As such, it is of no unique religious significance.
   a. Strongly agree ______
   b. Mildly agree ______
   c. Mildly disagree ______
   d. Strongly disagree ______

27. The Holocaust was a unique Jewish tragedy which has special religious significance, even if one cannot completely comprehend it.
   a. Strongly agree ______
   b. Mildly agree ______
   c. Mildly disagree ______
   d. Strongly disagree ______

28. No thinking Jew can be a religious believer after the tragedy of the Holocaust.
   a. Strongly agree ______
   b. Mildly agree ______
   c. Mildly disagree ______
   d. Strongly disagree ______

29. The State of Israel is significant for Judaism only because so many Jews live there.
   a. Strongly agree ______
   b. Mildly agree ______
   c. Mildly disagree ______
   d. Strongly disagree ______

30. The State of Israel has intrinsic religious significance.
   a. Strongly agree ______
   b. Mildly agree ______
   c. Mildly disagree ______
   d. Strongly disagree ______
31. The State of Israel is part of Messianic redemption.
   a. Strongly agree ____.
   b. Mildly agree ____.
   c. Mildly disagree ____.
   d. Strongly disagree ____.

32. Jews should become involved in American politics only insofar as it affects Jews and Jewish issues.
   a. Strongly agree ____.
   b. Mildly agree ____.
   c. Mildly disagree ____.
   d. Strongly disagree ____.

33. Jews have an obligation to become involved in the affairs of the country and the world and, therefore, should be involved in all political issues.
   a. Strongly agree ____.
   b. Mildly agree ____.
   c. Mildly disagree ____.
   d. Strongly disagree ____.

34. Observant Jews should avoid relations with non-observant Jews.
   a. Strongly agree ____.
   b. Mildly agree ____.
   c. Mildly disagree ____.
   d. Strongly disagree ____.

35. Observant Jews may have friendly relations with non-observant Jews if that involvement is aimed at bringing the non-observant one closer to observance.
   a. Strongly agree ____.
   b. Mildly agree ____.
   c. Mildly disagree ____.
   d. Strongly disagree ____.

36. Observant Jews should have friendly relations with all Jews. That friendship is a mitzva.
   a. Strongly agree ____.
   b. Mildly agree ____.
   c. Mildly disagree ____.
   d. Strongly disagree ____.

37. The modern world cannot tolerate religious isolation. Observant Jews must become socially involved with the non-observant.
   a. Strongly agree ____.
   b. Mildly agree ____.
   c. Mildly disagree ____.
   d. Strongly disagree ____.
38. Women should not study Torah.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

39. Some Torah study is, pragmatically, important for women, but only insofar as it enables them to perform their religious obligations.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

40. Women may study Tanakh, but not Talmud.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

41. Women should have the same opportunity to learn as men, both qualitatively and quantitatively.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

42. Women should not seek careers outside of the home.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

43. Women may have employment outside of the home, but only in the traditionally-female occupations.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

44. Women may have careers outside the home but not in leadership positions within the Jewish community such as being directors of Jewish organizations.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.
45. Young men and women should not socialize with one another until they are ready for marriage.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

46. It is healthy for young men and women to socialize with another, provided that they do so within the constraints of Halajiah.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

47. Cheating on exams and papers is a violation of Jewish values and cannot be condoned.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

48. Cheating on exams and papers is wrong in principle, but it has become so common and so vital for good grades that it should not be judged harshly.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

49. Although it may be embarrassing to be caught, there is really nothing wrong with cheating on exams and papers.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

50. I would never cheat on exams or papers.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.
51. From the perspective of Molakah, there is nothing inherently wrong with cheating on taxes or other so-called unethical business practices, since there is no direct stealing from a specific individual involved.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

52. Since cheating is such an inherent part of American business practices, it cannot be considered a violation of Molakah.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

53. I would never engage in dishonest financial dealings.
   a. Strongly agree _____.
   b. Mildly agree _____.
   c. Mildly disagree _____.
   d. Strongly disagree _____.

54. Which undergraduate college do you attend?
   a. Stern College _____.
   b. Yeshiva College _____.

55. If you attend Yeshiva College, in which Jewish Studies division are you enrolled?
   a. MYP _____.
   b. IBC _____.
   c. JSS _____.

56. If you attend Stern College, in which Jewish Studies level are you?
   a. Advanced _____.
   b. Intermediate _____.
   c. Elementary _____.

57. Previous Jewish education (If more than one of the following, please indicate grades in each):
   a. Yeshiva High School _____.
   b. Supplementary High School _____.
   c. Sunday High School _____.
   d. Other (please explain) _____.
   e. None _____.
58. Your age? ________.

59. Your major? ________.

60. Your year
   a. Freshman ________.
   b. Sophomore ________.
   c. Junior ________.
   d. Senior ________.

61. With which "branch" of Judaism do your parents most closely identify?
   a. Orthodox ________.
   b. Conservative ________.
   c. Reconstructionist ________.
   d. Reform ________.
   e. Other or none (please explain) ________.

62. Parents' synagogue affiliation:
   a. Orthodox ________.
   b. Conservative ________.
   c. Reconstructionist ________.
   d. Reform ________.
   e. Other or none (please explain) ________.

63. With which "branch" of Judaism do you most closely identify?
   a. Orthodox ________.
   b. Conservative ________.
   c. Reconstructionist ________.
   d. Reform ________.
   e. Other or none (please explain) ________.

64. Your own synagogue affiliation:
   a. Orthodox ________.
   b. Conservative ________.
   c. Reconstructionist ________.
   d. Reform ________.
   e. Other or none (please explain) ________.
The ideological diversity which always existed within Torah-observant Judaism has been one of the factors which has fuelled our energetic revitalization in this past generation. From the disagreements within Talmudic halakha, to the deep division of opinion amongst Jewish philosophers in the period of the Rishonim, to the gap between rationalists and Kabbalists and between Haredim and Misnagdim—all of that contributed to the diversity of thought which now exists within the Orthodox community itself.

The purpose of this booklet is to encourage a more conscious process of study, thinking and appreciation of the range of opinions which are now legitimately held, vigorously pro-pounded and energetically debated within our community.

On each of nine key issues, we have compiled the three or four “attitudes”—not formal halakic positions, but ideologies based on different halakhic assumptions and approaches—which comprise the full range of the Orthodox community’s thinking. Our exploration of these positions does not represent Edah’s approval of them.

We urge you to approach this material thoughtfully, with an eye toward helping yourself to define what your own convictions are, and to staying open to the reevaluation of your position in the light of learning more about the opinions of others. Most importantly, we hope that this process of study will enable all of us to live with greater respect and love for those with whom we disagree even on these obviously vital matters.

—Rabbi Saul Berman
Director, Edah

ACTIVISM

ATTITUDE #1: In contemporary times, governments and other institutions are particularly vulnerable and responsive to mass public opinion shaped by the media. Established Jewish organizations are reluctant to use this form of political leverage because it is an extreme tool which abandons the niceties of private negotiations. It is essential for the safeguarding of Jewish people and interests that there be strong activists, individuals and groups willing to take uncompromising stands and willing to use the media and their “sound-bite” approach to shape public opinion.

ATTITUDE #2: The duty of arestat to fellow Jews throughout the world requires of us that whatever political or economic leverage we have be used in their benefit. Established Jewish communal organizations have the commitment and intelligence to balance the interests of Jewish needs against maintaining the security and safety of the American Jewish community.

ATTITUDE #3: The Jewish community thrives in America only at the tolerance of the non-Jewish populace and government. Making Jewish issues part of the public agenda, exercising Jewish economic and political power in an intentionally public fashion, create a threat of anti-Semitic backlash. All that God desires for us can be achieved in private negotiations.
RELIGIOUS MEANING OF MEDINAT YISRAEL

ATTITUDE #1: The establishment of the Medinah is a step within the messianic process. The government and its laws are binding upon its citizens by virtue of their authority as melech Yisrael, expressed in the form of a Jewish-democratic state.

ATTITUDE #2: The establishment of the Medinah was fulfillment of the mitzvah of kedusha ve'yishua. It is a pre-messianic political entity in which the secular government and its laws are halachically binding upon its citizens by virtue of contractual obligation as in any modern political state.

ATTITUDE #3: The existence of the Medinah has no religious significance. But there is religious value in living in Eretz Yisrael, in studying Torah there, and in the economic support of Jews living there. The political entity of the State and its laws are binding upon its citizens by virtue of contractual obligations as in any modern political state.

ATTITUDE #4: The establishment of an autonomous Jewish state was an act of rebellion against God’s will, and its continuation and support will be punished by God.

WOMEN IN HALACHAH

ATTITUDE #1: The ultimate ideal of Torah is the perfect equality of men and women, in which there is no mandatory role differentiation and no difference in obligations and rights as to mitzvot. Any movement in that direction counseled by Halakhah, through creative legal interpretation or the adoption of minority opinions or the creation of new religious forms, is to be applauded.

ATTITUDE #2: The Torah protects but does not mandate a distinctive role for women centered only in the family. Changes of, and additions to the common practices of Jewish women of the past, when they are halachically justifiable and potentially religiously enhancing, should be encouraged. Special creativity and effort must be applied to the elimination of women's distinctive vulnerability in situations of divorce.

ATTITUDE #3: The narrative descriptions and halachic regulation of male and female roles in the Torah are meant to be prescriptive and eternal and make clear to us that the Torah has fully regulated the separate and innately valuable role of women as primarily engaged with the home and family. Any change of, or addition to, the traditional practices of Jewish women is prohibited as an offense to the Mesorah and is a threat to the stability of the Orthodox family and community.
As opposed to a philosophical, historical or psychological perspective with respect to fanaticism in day schools, I chose to adopt a phenomenological approach to the Jewish day high school context. Based upon my personal experiences as well as numerous interviews that I conducted with senior day school educators, I found that I could not identify significant instances of “fanaticism”, as defined for example by

**CHUMRAH**

ATTITUDE #1: Whenever possible, severity should be avoided on legal decisions since it would reduce the experience of permissible pleasures. The Torah values permissible material pleasures as vehicles for the experience of religious joy.

ATTITUDE #2: Severity and leniency are relevant only in circumstances of factual doubt (segulit), not in situations of debate (mishloket) or varied practice. In the latter situations, the conclusion should be based solely on the legal analysis of Torah, Talmud, Midrash, and Acharonim.

ATTITUDE #3: The most severe position is not innately more religious. However, it is the most likely basis for unity and commonality of practice within the Orthodox community and is therefore to be preferred.

ATTITUDE #4: Whenever there is debate or alternative practice as to the performance of a mitzvah, it is preferable to adopt the most severe position or practice. Such severity maximizes ascetic withdrawal from material pleasures and results in the greatest certainty that God’s will is being performed.

**JEW AND GENTILE**

ATTITUDE #1: Non-Jews are created with the same tzedem Elohim as Jews. The major religions are not to be classified as pagan Idolaters. Rather, all non-Jews are to be viewed as gerei toshav (observers of seven mitzvot B’nei Noah) toward whom our obligations in all economic and ethical matters are the same as those we have toward fellow Jews. While social interaction is limited in favor of Jewish society, exposure to non-Jews creates an opportunity for Kiddush Hashem.

ATTITUDE #2: Non-Jews are created with the same tzedem Elohim as Jews. However, idolators (including Christians, Buddhists, and many other religions) are to be avoided—contact with them minimized to the extent socially and economically possible to prevent our being influenced by their culture. In the interest of maintaining peaceful relations, we extend to non-Jews substantial equality in regard to economic and ethical duties imposed by Jewish Law.

ATTITUDE #3: Non-Jews were created with different form of soul than Jews. They are different both in regard to Providential governance, and in regard to halachic duties resting upon Jews towards them in economic and ethical matters—including duties of rescue of life and property.
David Shatz in his “Religion and Fanaticism”, among student populations of Modern Orthodox schools per se. Consequently I took the liberty to redefine the emphasis of the question from one of fanaticism to extremism, which in fact could serve as a precursor for some individuals to fanatical or fundamentalist convictions and outlooks at some later point in their personal development.

2 An example of halachic malfeasance was described in Steve Lipman’s article on June 22, 2011 in The New York Jewish Week, entitled “For Many Orthodox Teens, ‘Half Shabbos’ Is A Way Of Life: Texting on Saturdays seen as increasingly common ‘addiction’” (http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/national-news/many-orthodox-teens-half-shabbos-way-life). While the article triggered an extended give-and-take regarding how widespread a phenomenon this is and who exactly are the individuals engaged in this practice, there seemed to be agreement that this takes place at least to some extent.

3 E.g., prayer, particularly in a minyan, Tora study, engaging in acts of kindness, love of God, love of Israel, love of Jews, etc.

4 Samuel Heilman, in his classic study, Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction (U. of Chicago, Chicago, 1976, pp.19-20) was the first to attribute to Modern Orthodox Jews a self-awareness that reflects ambivalence regarding their level of observance:

   In talking about strict ritual observance, one member says of Kehillat Kodesh (the fictional name of the Modern Orthodox synagogue that the author is studying ethnographically--jb), “We probably don’t come up to specs. The Yeshiva (the more right-wing institution in the community) probably comes closest to it.” While shul members admit when questioned, their collective deviance from the Orthodox standard, their behavior and unsolicited comments belie the sincerity of this admission...

   Although shul members “understand” and even sympathize with the more Orthodox way of life, they still do not “like” it, and wish, therefore to distinguish themselves from it.

Since children are naturally influenced by parental attitudes and behavior, it is to be expected that ambivalence towards Orthodox observance on the part of parents will “trickle down” to their children, and manifest itself in the manner in which children conduct themselves in school and shul, among other places.


6 Heilman, pp. 18-9

   …One...Orthodox man, a recognized halachic virtuoso by virtue of his leadership in various study groups, is described as “crazy frum” (senseless and totally unsound in his Jewish observance) by members of Kehillat Kodesh because, among other of his practices, he recites psalms as he works, or invites people whom he is with at prayer time to join him in worship...

   …One must remember that, if pressed to explain the label “crazy frum”, members of Kehillat Kodesh will ultimately explain that this man is probably right on his observance and that they are just kidding. Like a slip of the tongue, the label becomes denied upon closer scrutiny and when the labeler is asked to defend his “slip”.

7 Most of the recent initiatives within day schools designed to create more spirituality within the student body consist of essentially short-term or occasional extra-curricular activities. Some examples are: “Ruach” Minyanim featuring singing and even dancing, experiential activities such as slow-singing Kumzitz’ and Yemai Iyun on topics that would not be covered as part of the standard curriculum, trips away from the school campus designed to create a heightened spiritual atmosphere, Shabbaton and retreats.

A much more ambitious program is the proliferation of Tora MiTziyon Kollelim in Modern Orthodox schools. Kollels usually consist of a “Rosh Kollel” (lit. head of the group), someone who is more experienced and comes for a number of years with his family in order to live in one of the school’s feeder communities, and a number of “Bachurim” (lit. young men) usually recently having completed army service, educated in Hesder Yeshivot (Israeli institutions combining Tora study with army service) and have to date not attended university. High school students study with the Bachurim and the Rosh Kollel often gives an honors Talmud class in Hebrew for exceptional students. While the major motivation for schools to sponsor this type of Kollel appears to be making available on-site Israelis who will be able to
promote Zionism among the student body, the Kollel members also represent to the students with whom they come into contact particular approaches to Judaism and the general world based upon their age, experience and education. This type of Kollel was begun in Cleveland in 1994, and currently, according to the program’s official website, ‘our ‘School Based Kollelim’ include Detroit, Greater Washington, Memphis, Cleveland, (and) Chicago” [http://www.torahmitzion.org/eng/aboutus/ in the United States. (Schools in Montreal and Melbourne are also listed.) Given that these Kolles have operated in Modern Orthodox schools in the United States for almost twenty years, there should be sufficient data available for study regarding not only the Zionist impact of the presence of such a Kollel (e.g., changes in the percentage of alumni that decide to relocate to Israel, the number of students that annually decide to spend their “gap year” in Israeli Tora institutions, etc.), but also the religious impact on behavior and attitudes, if any, that such programs might be having.

8 In the United Kingdom, outreach groups, also intended to raise the level of enthusiasm, commitment and observance of the student body, are apparently exclusively Charedi in orientation. Miriam Shaviv, writing in The Jewish Chronicle on January 2, 2008, in a feature article entitled “Outreach Groups ‘Target JFS Pupils’” [http://www.miriamshaviv.com/jfs.php] described a controversy swirling around the Jewish Free School, the largest of the six non-Charedi State-supported day high schools, defined as “Modern Orthodox” institutions. Some parents were quoted as complaining that Kiruv organizations such as Aish HaTora and JLE (Jewish Learning Exchange) were invited to address students, and there was an official school trip to the Gateshead Yeshiva. In a number of email exchanges, Rabbi Johnny Solomon, who taught in and led schools in the UK, explained that schools called “Modern Orthodox” in England are quite different from comparable institutions in the United States. The majority of the students are non-observant, most class time is devoted to general studies, and Judaic studies faculty members are either Kollel members or identified with Chabad, i.e., Charedi Jews. While some faculty members in Modern Orthodox institutions in the US also view their contact with students as Kiruv opportunities, in England, this appears to be de rigueur in non-Charedi schools, leading to a disconnect for families who are seeking a different type of religious education for their children.

Choices in the United States appear to be broader, and Modern Orthodox schools are able to hew more closely to their public definition and perception because of the availability of a greater variety in the religious orientation of teachers. Yet even if in the United States, Modern Orthodox institutions are staffed by at least some Charedi teachers, and some of the same outreach groups active in England are invited into American schools. How these configurations of schools, staff, student body and outside organizations ultimately impact upon the religious perspective of the student body is worthy of study.


10 A particularly public, sensationalistic instance of a disaffected individual who had rejected the Modern Orthodox community in which he had been brought up and educated, is the case of Noah Feldman. In an article entitled “Orthodox Paradox” in the New York Times Magazine of July 22, 2007 [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/22/magazine/22yeshiva-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0], the author extensively attempts to articulate what he considered were the major factors that contributed to his ultimate disaffection from the community. Regarding the schooling that he received, after effusively praising the virtues of the educational program in which he participated, he writes the following:

...One time... a local physician addressed a school assembly on the topic of the challenges that a modern Orthodox professional may face. The doctor addressed the Talmudic dictum that the saving of a life trumps the Sabbath. He explained that in its purest form, this principle applies only to the life of a Jew. The rabbis of the Talmud, however, were unprepared to allow the life of a non-Jew to be extinguished because of the no-work commandment, and so they ruled that the Sabbath could be violated to save the life of a non-Jew out of concern for maintaining peaceful relations between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities... he added that he himself would never distinguish Jewish from non-Jewish patients: a human being was a human being. This appealing sentiment did not go unchallenged. One of my teachers rose to suggest that the doctor’s attitude was putting him in danger of violating the Torah. The teacher reported that he
had himself heard from his own rabbi… that in violating the Sabbath to treat a non-Jew, intention was absolutely crucial. If you intended to save the patient’s life so as to facilitate good relations between Jews and non-Jews, your actions were permissible. But if, to the contrary, you intended to save the patient out of universal morality, then you were in fact guilty of violating the Sabbath, because the motive for acting was not the motive on the basis of which the rabbis allowed the Sabbath violation to occur…

Later, in class, the teacher apologized to us students for what he said to the doctor. His comments, he said, were inappropriate — not because they were wrongheaded, but because non-Jews were present in the audience when he made them. The double standard of Jews and non-Jews, in other words, was for him truly irreducible: it was not just about noting that only Jewish lives merited violation of the Sabbath, but also about keeping the secret of why non-Jewish lives might be saved. To accept this version of the tradition would be to accept that the modern Orthodox project of engagement with the world could not proceed in good faith…

He follows this anecdote with a discussion of his perceptions regarding how, in his opinion, his co-ed Modern Orthodox school inadequately handled interrelationships between the genders. Whether or not one feels that the article is ultimately intellectually honest and accurately represents the author’s high school experiences—e.g., even if one teacher might articulate views with which the student disagrees strongly, should that result in a rejection of everything else the school has to offer and stand for?; but of course the impressions made as a result of such incidents outweigh more rational, analytic observations—what can be concluded is that certain incidents and policies can make a profound impact upon adolescents who are unsure of, and therefore searching for their religious and personal identities.

A deeply disturbing contemporary expression of the relativism with which some view “extremism” is the saw “One man’s terrorist (a form of extreme activism) is another man’s freedom fighter” (see http://www.ict.org.il/ResearchPublications/tabid/64/Articlsid/432/Default.aspx for an article that takes issue with this claim). An articulation of the same idea within a Jewish ritual context states, “Someone who ‘davens’ the ‘Amida’ two minutes longer than I do is a ‘Chinyok’ (a disparaging term for one who is extremely pious), while an individual who takes two minutes less than me is a ‘Shegetz’ (a disparaging term for someone who is extremely impious)”.

The following is part of a statement issued by a Chabad organization, addressing the following (hypothetical ?) question: “I admit I am attracted to many of the aspects of traditional Jewish life—a beautiful Shabbat family meal, a kosher kitchen, a good Jewish education for my kids. But I don’t want to be one of those religious extremists. I don’t want to go that far. I’m trying to set what my borders are. Can you help me?…”

“What is an extremist? Is someone who keeps kosher an extremist? A man who wears a beard? Someone who won’t answer the phone on Shabbat? Someone who believes in God? Someone who prays? Every day? Three times a day? Someone who will not marry out? Everyone’s definition of extremism is different—and a lot of it is relative to where you are at a particular stage in your life (emphasis mine—jb)…”


13 These questions assume that a “successful” outcome for a student who studied in a Modern Orthodox institution, and, for that matter, grew up in a Modern Orthodox community, is to live his/her life in accordance with the religious lifestyle and outlook with which he was educated and brought up. But is that necessarily so? Is it reasonable to expect that an individual will remain “true” throughout his life to his childhood and adolescent experiences, religious or otherwise? Even if a person’s formative years offer a grounding for his ultimate values and identity, shouldn’t there be room for him to grow, develop and make his own way? While the “extreme” outcome of complete disaffection and alienation should probably be viewed by all accounts as a failure of at least the Jewish day school educational system—it is possible that an individual’s personal challenges, his home life, and the vagaries of adulthood and independence overwhelmed the effects of education, however potent and well thought-out they may have been—were the person to choose the opposite “extreme”, i.e., to pursue a more intense Jewish life
than his Modern Orthodox schooling advocated, should that be viewed as a failure per se? Just as a parent can hardly expect his/her child to turn out to be a literal clone of himself, why should an educational institution expect such a thing?

Perhaps a dichotomy must be made between the school’s avowed and articulated educational aspirations and how to evaluate actual student outcomes. An institution would not be true to its philosophical and theological orientation if it would not design its program so that a certain type of graduate emerges upon completion of all requirements. A precise formulation of how a school wishes to impact upon its student body is the development of a profile of the school’s “ideal graduate”. A description of how such a concept can be formulated as well as a case study of a school system where it was undertaken can be found in Eli Kohn, “A Case Study for Commitment” at http://www.lookstein.org/online_journal.php?id=359. And if it would be discovered that a significant (what would constitute “significant in this regard?”) percentage of graduates did not conform to such a profile, questions would have to be raised whether the school is somehow missing the mark because of the gap between its aspirations and the manner in which its graduates are going forward. And those questions in turn might lead to an overhaul of the school’s approach or at least a tweaking of some aspects of the educational program. However, would such a “disconnect” necessarily constitute a failure on the part of such a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school?

A less comprehensive, yet nevertheless enlightening school ritual that implicitly projects a school’s definition of a graduate’s “success” is the practice to have a “Ten-Year Speaker”, i.e., someone who graduated a decade earlier addresses all who have come to celebrate this important rite of passage. Who that person is and why he was chosen constitutes a symbolic statement of what an ideal graduate would be doing “down the road”.

A new variable that complicates this question even further is the relatively newly identified phenomenon of the Odyssey Years, (see three essays in the Orthodox Forum volume entitled The Next Generation of Modern Orthodoxy, ed. Shmuel Hain: “The Modern Orthodox Diaspora as a Strategic Asset” by Aharon Horwitz; “How Orthodoxy and Orthodox Synagogues Can Meet the Needs of the Odyssey Generation” by Asher Lopatin; and “An Emerging Approach to Emerging Adulthood and Modern Orthodoxy” by Michelle Waldman Sarna) where it has been demonstrated that currently, serious lifestyle decisions may not be made until one is 40! Students might have to be followed for a very long time before conclusions can even begin to be drawn about the effects of their high school educations.

However, it seems to me that such critical analysis is not being undertaken currently, however significant it might prove with respect to gaining insight into the effectiveness and results of Jewish day school education, since virtually no Jewish day schools have/are conducted(ing) longitudinal studies of their graduates designed to investigate their religious lifestyles and attitudes. Only three such studies have come to my attention: a) a study of Ramaz graduates published by Nathalie Friedman (“The Graduates of Ramaz: Fifty Years of Jewish Day School Education” in Ramaz: School, Community, Scholarship and Orthodoxy, ed. Jeffrey Gurock, Ktav, Hoboken, NJ, 1989); b) an earlier 1979 unpublished study presented as a doctoral dissertation at Yeshiva University and written by Joseph Hymowitz: “A Study of the Graduates of the Yeshiva of Flatbush High School”; and c) a third internal study conducted by a Modern Orthodox day school, and to date has not been released to me.

The British documentary series “Up” (http://movies.nytimes.com/2013/01/04/movies/56-up-adds-to-michael-apteds-documentary-series.html?_r=0), a visual longitudinal study that has followed fourteen children since 1964, with one episode being filmed every seven years, could serve as a inspiring example of what could be done in the world of Jewish education.

14 “Extreme” attitudes that might manifest themselves within a general day school context include: a) the promotion of athletics and/or the arts at the expense of academics, or vice versa; b) inordinate emphasis upon post-high school acceptance to various institutions in general, and admission to certain universities and/or Yeshivot and Seminaries in particular; and c) the promotion of excellence in secular studies as opposed to Judaic studies, or vice versa.

15 A comprehensive inventory of Orthodox attitudes and beliefs reflecting views from left to right as well as the center, was compiled by R. Saul Berman and published by Edah in 2001. In order to determine the
degree of “extremism” within a day school population, such an inventory could serve as a template for action research (a method of investigating all sorts of educational issues by enlisting faculty as researchers—see e.g., Richard Sagor, The Action Research Guidebook, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2005.) See Appendix 2.

With respect to attitudes towards 5) the importance of secular studies vis-à-vis Tora and Jewish studies, or “Tora U’Madda”, the sociologist Chaim Waxman, as part of the Torah U-Madda Project (this is the official spelling of the Project), led by R. J.J. Schacter,* developed an undergraduate student questionnaire designed to investigate attitudes towards this particular aspect of the type of dual curriculum education that is offered by Yeshiva and Stern Colleges. The questions could be adapted for high school students in order to study their outlooks. In addition, it would be very interesting to be able to study these attitudes “over time”, i.e., to administer these questions over a period of years in order to not only evaluate student outlooks at a particular moment, but also over the course of a number of years. This could be informative not only for particular schools, but also to better understand the evolution of perspectives on the part of Modern Orthodox young people as they live their lives. See Appendix 1.

* It was with a desire to clarify the term “Torah U-Madda” and all that it represents which motivated Dr. Lamm to found The Torah U-Madda Project at Yeshiva which it has been my privilege to direct since the Fall of 1985. The purpose of this Project is to sensitize primarily the undergraduate student bodies at Yeshiva—Yeshiva College, Stern College for Women, and the Sy Syms School of Business—to the complexities, challenges, and truths that lie in the interaction between “Tora” and “Madda”, and from there move to raise the level of discussion about these issues in the Jewish community at large. To that end, the Project has sponsored a number of public lectures by leading rashei yeshiva and scholars from Yeshiva as well as other institutions: Club Hour and other presentations by members of the faculties of Yeshiva College, Stern College for Women, and university affiliate, RIETS; a questionnaire aimed at determining current student opinion on the issues relevant to Torah U-Madda; and Student Think Tanks and Faculty Colloquia...

16 “Chareidi”—(lit. “trembling”), based upon Yeshayahu 66:5
Shemu Dabar Yekov Dorkrim Al Dvera
Hear the Word of the LORD, ye that tremble at His Word...

...The most conservative form of Orthodox Judaism, often referred to by outsiders as ultra-Orthodox. Haredi Jews consider their belief system and religious practices to extend in an unbroken chain back to Moses and the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, and they regard non-Orthodox, and to an extent Modern Orthodox, streams of Judaism to be deviations from authentic Judaism. Its historical rejection of Enlightenment values distinguishes it from Western European-derived Modern Orthodox Judaism. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chareidi

17 While many pluralistic day schools call themselves “community schools”, the latter term suggests the geographical area from which they draw rather than a particular ideological approach. In fact, there are schools under specific denominational auspices, often the single Jewish educational institution in a particular community, that would consider themselves “community schools”. Consequently when a school does not purport to follow a specific denominational approach, rather than categorizing it as a “community school” it is probably more accurate to speak of a pluralistic institution. Consider the mission statement of the umbrella organization of “community schools”, RAVSAK (an acronym derived from Reshet Batei Shifer K’hilati’im, i.e., Network of Jewish Community Day Schools), an organization that claims the membership of 120+ institutions (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAVSAK) :

The mission statement of RAVSAK, the network of Jewish community day schools throughout North America and abroad, speaks to the lofty goal of “fostering authentic Jewish pluralism.” (emphasis mine—jb) But what exactly is pluralism? Diana Eck, writing an introduction for the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, posits four points that define the term. Pluralism, she writes, “is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity.... [P]luralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference.” She notes that pluralism “is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments,” which means “holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.” The fourth critical component, in Eck’s view, is dialogue because “the language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue
means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the ‘table’ will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with one’s commitments.”

http://www.ravsak.org/hayidion/hayidion-archive/pluralism

18 According to the 2008-09 Census of Jewish Education conducted by Marvin Schick on behalf of the Avi Chai foundation (http://avichai.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Census-of-JDS-in-the-US-2008-09-Final.pdf), no distinction is made between elementary, middle and high schools. The study claims that there were currently fifty Solomon Schechter schools, eighty-six Modern Orthodox Schools and seventy-two Centrist Orthodox schools. The Solomon Schechter schools appear to be in a state of flux as a result of the difficulties that the Conservative movement is experiencing, and many of these institutions are redefining themselves as pluralistic schools. In an Avi Chai Foundation Blog press release summarizing findings for 2011-12, (http://avichai.org/2011/12/2011-12-day-school-enrollment-sees-modest-decline/) Schick noted the following numbers of schools:

Solomon Schechter 43; Modern Orthodox 86 and Centrist Orthodox 65.

19 In my “Orthodox Educators in Non-Orthodox Educational Settings” (The Relationship of Orthodox Jews with Believing Jews of Other Religious Ideologies and Non-Believing Jews, ed. Adam Mintz, Ktav, Jersey City, NJ, 2010, pp. 58-9), a delineation is made between different approaches in pluralistic schools with respect to allowing for individual denominational differences. In this paper, I am focusing upon denominational schools and therefore nuances distinguishing pluralistic schools from one another will not be addressed.


21 Excerpts from mission statements of “Modern Orthodox” schools that reflect a distinctive approach (naturally in order to do justice to the total articulation of the mission of the school, the entire statement should be looked upon and the reader is encouraged to follow the links in order to see the statements in their entirety):

a) ...We believe that Judaic and General Studies curricula are complementary and mutually reinforcing. General and Judaic studies classes are both given full emphasis and interspersed throughout the day. Aspects of both curricula are often intermingled, putting our Jewish and global heritages in perspective. Talmudic concepts enrich comprehension of the humanities, while literary insights deepen understanding of the Bible. Jewish history is learned in the context of the history of the greater world... http://www.ramaz.org/public/mission_s2.cfm

b) ...The school philosophy is a synthesis of Judaic studies, liberal arts and extracurricular activities that places great emphasis on the students’ character development. It has evolved into a unique complement of Jewish and American values that focuses on all aspects of education and enables our graduates to meet the challenges of college and life... http://www.flatbush.org/content.aspx?rec_id=100001

Excerpts from mission statements of “Centrist Orthodox” schools:

a) ...With a primary focus on Talmud Torah in the daily Shiurim, which in the traditional Yeshiva fashion, span the entire morning and in many cases, the early afternoon as well, our talmidim are taught not only to learn Torah, but to live it and indeed to love it and all that it stands for. Under the caring guidance of devoted and learned Rebbeim, they are exposed to the depth and breadth of Torah, they are inspired to strive for Torah greatness themselves, and they are imbued with the values of Yiras Shamayim, of Chessed and of mentschlichkeit. At the same time the college preparatory program is likewise exceptional, featuring exciting and challenging courses taught by a superior faculty in a wide array of General Studies subjects, designed to engage the minds of our students, to teach them necessary skills and to help develop them into well-rounded, accomplished young men... http://www.yuhsb.org/about-yuhsb/

b) Rambam is designed to produce a Ben Torah who approaches all aspects of life from a Torah framework. A love of learning is fostered by showing talmidim the ‘conceptual’ beauty of Torah. A Rebbi/Talmid relationship which is built on mutual love and respect is fostered.
Midos, sensitivity and concern for others is a constant theme at Rambam. The creation of the State of Israel is one of the seminal events in Jewish history. Recognizing the significance of the State and its national institutions, we seek to instill in our students an attachment to the State of Israel and its people as well as a sense of responsibility for their welfare.

http://rambam.org/mission.php

22 One veteran educator remarked that in some Orthodox schools, when a boy decides to wear his Tzitziyot “out”, he is complimented and made to feel that he has raised his level of observance; in others the same student would be eyed with concern in terms of perhaps he is experiencing some form of maladjustment or emotional upheaval.

An educator who is also a parent of high school age children compared two schools by describing how at one, the students would all enthusiastically and excitedly would return to school in the evening for Thursday night Mishmar, something that just wouldn’t happen at a different type of Orthodox school.

23 In an on-line conversation that was conducted on the Lookjed Jewish education listserve, editions XV:28-30, regarding why a significant percentage of Modern Orthodox students are going “off the Derech” (for the purposes of this paper, going far to the right is being considered parallel to going far to the left), R. Scott Berman, a veteran day school administrator, appears to categorically state that the following things are being done in Modern Orthodox day schools:

- Do schools have mashgichai ruchani/m’chanchim/m’chanchot/class religious advisors responsible for addressing theology and hashkafa?
- Do schools run programs and classes that address theology dead on?
- Do schools/teachers promote critical inquiry?
- Do schools/teachers create safe and supportive environments for the skeptic and cynical if not simply the pure seekers amongst our students?
- Do teachers of Tanach and other Jewish studies subjects raise the theological issues that arise from the text in the natural teaching of their subject?

My interviews and experience does not support such an emphatically positive conclusion.

24 It concerns me that the invocation of parents as both a prime cause of religious indifference, as well as driving some students to become religiously “extreme” could serve as a means for a school to “pass the buck”. When blaming parents for student religious problems becomes almost a knee-jerk reaction, the school might be led to feel that it plays no role in this phenomenon. Even if it could be demonstrated that student religious attitudes on both extremes can be attributed to parental influence, should the school therefore conclude that this is not an issue with which it has to contend?

25 Rabbi Steven Pruzansky stirred up controversy when in his blog, in a posting of October 19th, 2012, entitled “Why Are Our Teens Going Off the Derech” (http://www.ou.org/life/parenting/why-are-our-teens-going-off-derech-steven-pruzansky/) he essentially pointed the finger of blame at Modern Orthodox parents for the negative attitudes and practices of their children.

26 Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat and Chancellor of the Ohr Torah-Stone Institutions, once told the story that an individual had inherited from his father a Siddur, but was curious why the first few pages were blank. A Rabbi explained to him that his father had the prescience to recognize that at some point, his son would be upset with Judaism to the point where his frustration would lead him to rip pages out of his Siddur. “Better that blank pages be destroyed, than the words of ‘Adon Olam’”. Rabbi Riskin went on to note that this is the kind of attitude that underlies parental decisions to educate their children in institutions that are more religiously stringent than they are—there is an expectation of a drop-off, and hopefully the drop-off will result in the child in the end assuming the same religious orientation as his parents maintained.

27 Due to a Modern Orthodox school’s commitment to university education, it can find itself in a difficult predicament with regard to the adults with whom students have to deal in order to even apply to certain schools. I recall many years ago, that for a time, the alumni interviewer for a very prestigious Ivy university would, we thought quite deliberately, schedule interviews with students on Shabbat! The school was initially afraid to complain because this might adversely impact the acceptance rate to the school in question. But in the end, the complaint was lodged and the interviewer replaced. Might the attraction of this prestige university, at least for some students, pushed them over the edge leading to their sacrificing their Shabbat observance for an interview; and once they violated Shabbat, may they
have continued to move in an extreme direction as a result? While eventually all observant individuals will find themselves tested regarding the extent of their observance, should this take place in high school with a college acceptance on the line?

28 E.g., ignoring the principle of teaching Ivrit B’Ivrit, either walking out of or not attending at all student performances, opposition to Yom HaAtzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim celebrations, refusal to teach certain segments of the school population certain subject matter, disrespect of general studies as well as enrolling in a university, flouting of school rules, etc.


30 In fn. 6, it was noted that Tora MiTziyon Kollelim are sometimes school-based in order to try to inspire Zionism and love of Tora study in the student bodies with whom they come into contact. While the Roshei Kollel and the young Israelis who make up these Kollels are certainly not Chareidi in outlook, nevertheless to expect their religious perspective to be in keeping with Modern Orthodoxy as Schick categorized it (see p. 3) is not reasonable. The difference between Israeli “Dati Leumi” (National Religious) and Modern Orthodox, are significant, as implied by the following definition of the former:

“Dati’im Le’umi’im” is a general term for a group within Israeli society who see as a central value the observance of Jewish law and Jewish tradition, and at the same time supports Zionism and active integration within the general society in the State of Israel. This group is an extension of the Religious Zionist movement whose roots go back to the end of the 19th century. The term “Tziyonim Dati’im” (Religious Zionists) serves to this day as a synonym for “Dati’im Le’umi’im”. In Israeli circles, “Dati’im Le’umi’im” are sometimes called “Benai Kippot HaSerugot” (wearers of knitted yarmulkas), the type of head covering that is representative of most of this group… (my translation from http://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%93%D7%AA%D7%99%D7%9D_%D7%9C%D7%90%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9D)

No mention is made of university studies, although at least some—science, math, professional studies—would obviously pragmatically assist one to take an active part in Israeli society. There does not seem to be an emphasis upon the humanities—literature, history, sociology—and there is little context for considering and even studying the dynamics of Jews interacting with non-Jews, since for the most part, this is not something in which most Israelis regularly engage.

A more explosive issue would be whether encouraging students to relocate to Israel, which is certainly part of the mission of the Tora MiTziyon Kollelim, should be deemed in any way an “extreme” response to the educational program of a Modern Orthodox school, many of whose mission statements proclaim how they prepare students to be good citizens in the United States. Is going on Aliya (emigrating to Israel) the ultimate “normal” response to an education that views life in Israel as ideal for Jews, or is it one thing to internalize and espouse Zionist ideas, quite another to actually expect students to act upon them. This offers yet another interesting area in need of investigation.

31 For this reason, the ideal counter example in a Modern Orthodox school would be Jewishly observant members of the secular studies staff, or better yet, individuals who teach on both sides of the curriculum, i.e., courses in Judaic and secular studies. Over the years, I have been fond of saying that in an Orthodox day school, usually the only members of the school community who have to try to understand how all of the experiences and subject matter that is presented fit together, are the students who are required to study them all. The administrators and teachers are typically mono-dimensional in the sense that they are conversant in and concerned about only their own subject areas. It seems to me that the impression that I am sure many students come away with, i.e., that one decides to be “either/or”—focused upon either religious matters or academic matters—needs to be countered by living examples of individuals who straddle both worlds. While it would be helpful if such people were invited from time to time to address the student bodies of these schools, it would be even more effective if they would actually be members of the faculties.

32 Different schools will draw their “red lines” at different points. I recall many years ago that when a Jewish staff member married someone of a different faith, he was not rehired, because of “what this
represented to the student body.” Similarly, in light of the recent discussions, controversy and changing attitudes among some regarding homosexuality, would Modern Orthodox schools have different approaches to staff members who were openly gay? Another interesting area for research.

33 Paradoxically, those who become more religiously “extreme” during their gap year in Israel, could be seen to be giving in to forces of conformity within their Yeshivot and seminaries, in contrast to those who undertake such behaviors and attitudes while attending a Modern Orthodox high school and still living at home. See Flipping Out? Myth or Fact: The Impact of the Year in Israel by Shalom Z. Berger, Daniel Jacobson and Chaim I. Waxman (Yashar Books, Brooklyn, New York, 2007). A control group that might be able to shed significant light on this phenomenon are those who board in order to attend Modern Orthodox high schools. To what extent do some of this population become religiously “extreme”, if at all?

34 Robin Williams, in the 1989 film Dead Poets Society, plays the role of a teacher who presents himself as being opposed to the school and its approach, and becomes the object of admiration and emulation by his students.

35 I recall an instance where a teacher attempted to convince students in his class to transfer to a “real” Yeshiva. Unsurprisingly he was not rehired the following year. While one can understand how influencing students to leave the institution that you are working for will be considered very negatively by the school leadership, are there “red lines” short of this type of message?

36 When invoking such terms as “Kiruv” or “enlightenment”, the question of education vs. manipulation and indoctrination arises. This type of critique applies not only to the faculty member dedicated to disavowing his students from religious attitudes that he finds lacking in one way or another, but even to the educational approach of a school that consistently promotes a Modern Orthodox agenda. For a philosophical discussion of this issue, see Michael Rosenak, "Jewish religious Education and Indoctrination," in Studies in Jewish Education, Vol. 1, Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1983, pp. 117-38.

37 A phrase that connotes a student who is studying in an Israeli Tora institution, becoming significantly more careful in his/her religious observance. The specific application of the term was originated by the Orthodox Rock group “Blue Fringe” in a song entitled, “Flippin’ Out” (http://www.thelyricarchive.com/song/2318564-385189/Flippin-Out), describing some of the typical transformations that take place when some students study in Israel. Here is one of the song’s irreverent refrains:

...And now I’m thinking that I’m super shtrark
Cause I only wear white shirts and dark pants
And maybe a black hat too
Now let me take a good look at you.
I’m flippin’ out
And my Rebbe’s shepping nachas
I’m flippin’ out
And my parents will kick my ...

38 See fn. 12 in which reference is made to the current observation that the period of personality formation and lifestyle choice might extend far beyond the age of 20.


40 Such an explanation is reminiscent of the famous Aggada in Menachot 44a where a man’s Tallit Katan prevents him from becoming intimate with someone who was prohibited to him.

41 E.g., Experimentation with drugs, drinking, sexual intimacy, etc.

42 Some parents express the view that if their child is going to rebel, they will sooner accept a rebellion that involves becoming more religious than less so.

43 These take the form of dress code, attendance requirements, participation in school activities such as communal prayer, restrictions on types of food that can be brought into the school building or consumed on school trips, appropriate language, etc.

44 Whereas general studies teachers usually need to be licensed before they are hired in a Modern Orthodox school, there is no comparable certification method with respect to Judaic studies. And just
because an individual is ordained or studied in a seminary for a number of years does not necessarily mean that they have been prepared to teach their subject matter properly.


I remember a meeting of the Talmud Department at a Modern Orthodox co-ed school being devoted to how the Tosafot in Pesachim 4b d.h. Himnuhu Rabanan B’D’Rabanan could and should be taught since it suggests that women cannot be believed in certain situations where a Tora obligation is involved. While such material could be skipped since there never is time to teach all sources and commentaries in a particular subject area, on the other hand, if it is taught, hopefully consideration has been given so that the material will not prove either explosive or offensive.

While studying in an Israeli institution for a year or more between high school and university can have untold benefits, preparation for the college experience that follows does not take place. It is possible that the powerful experience of spending a year immersed in Tora and Mitzvot will inoculate the student against the challenges that could potentially undermine his faith and observance. On the other hand, if unanticipated problems arise, and the student feels inadequate in order to respond positively, extreme reactions are possible.

An interesting perspective was recently presented to me by a colleague. He suggested that a powerful dynamic that is experienced by a student in an Israeli Yeshiva is the impact of the peer pressure emanating from the student body which is relatively homogeneous. If a visiting American student becomes attuned to responding to such peer pressure rather than thinking for himself, when the individual returns to a secular college campus, the values that the majority of his new set of peers bring to bear upon him might sway him religiously and ethically in the completely opposite direction! I recall that when one of the day schools at which I worked underwent an evaluation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, part of the challenge presented to the faculty and administration was to attempt to formulate our educational goals. One staff member stated that it was the responsibility of the day school to imbue within its students “the ability to be comfortable being different”. While such an attitude could in certain instance contribute to student extremism as I have defined it, it could just as well mitigate against the development of these types of extreme positions.

One educator commented that as long as a speaker comes on a one-time basis, students should be able to approach what that individual says as informative rather than reflective of the school’s outlook and religious attitude, especially if they are allowed to question the speaker during the presentation. While that might be true intellectually, can one be certain that students might not be affected emotionally by what is presented?

I recall one instance when after the yearbook was published but before the volume was distributed, an administrator personally cut out one page and blacked out references on other pages that he found objectionable. While some students laughed, others were quite incensed. The question is will the animus be isolated and directly exclusively at the individual who took the action, or will be extended to others and even traditional observance itself?

In one Modern Orthodox school, when Inherit the Wind (a 1955 play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee) was recently presented, all sorts of strong reactions on the part of not only the student body, but the faculty and parent body as well, came to the fore. While in my opinion, the entire experience precipitated a great deal of important learning and debate on the part of the entire school community, I wonder if some students became somewhat radicalized upon observing how some individuals, particularly faculty members, reacted to the production.

I was first made aware of the psychological conflicts that attending a dual-curriculum school could create when I read a powerful ethnographic description of a Chabad “public school” (the British term for “private school”) in Australia. Brian Bullivant, a non-Jewish anthropologist teaching in the school, writes

about the cognitive dissonance created by attending Judaic studies classes under Chabad auspices followed by secular studies classes in the best British public school tradition:

...Boys demonstrate clear ability to cope with the omnipresent dualism of the two matrices by the apparent ease with which they switch from activities appropriate to the Great Tradition to those of the Academic Tradition...

Despite the ease with which some boys cope with the dualism, others find it less straightforward, judging by the anxiety, conflict and tension that shows in their behaviors during both secular and religious work. One possible explanation for this is that enculturation interference may operate at an unconscious level...dissonance produced by enculturation interference may go unrecognized and may therefore persist as an inner source of tension, anxiety and conflict...(pp. 66-7).

52 Sally Mayer (“Educating for Modern Orthodoxy” in Sh’ma, 31/579, February 2001, p. 8) writes, (To some, Modern Orthodoxy) is the sociological description of people whose observance is lax. I have heard countless times the expression “He’s very modern” used as a euphemism for “he is not strictly observant of all Halachot”. This sense, that the more modern one is, the more lax his or her attitude towards Halacha, does not engender respect among our young people for Modern Orthodoxy...

Students who feel that Modern Orthodoxy is nothing but a compromise will ultimately either reject it (whether moving to the right or to the left) or live a life in which they are embarrassed by the religious lifestyle that they lead...


54 ...His (Schwab’s) invited address in 1969 at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association challenged the field of curriculum research... His proposal that the field must identify and solve its own practical problems continues to energize curricular debate. “The Practical” requires that five bodies of disciplines and experience be represented in a collaborative group that undertakes the task of curriculum revision. Schwab called four of these the “commonplaces” of educational thinking, which require representatives of the affected learners, teachers, subject matters, and (sociocultural) milieux... from “Joseph Schwab” in Encyclopedia of Education, by the Gale Group, Inc.

Read more: http://www.answers.com/topic/joseph-schwab#ixzz2JrbfOJpk

55 Even those schools with mission statements, to what extent are these formulations promulgated and reviewed from year to year? One school posted its mission statement in its hallways and in every classroom in order that what the institution stands for should be clear to all. It would seem that this type of activity would be helpful to convey to the entire school community what is expected and the messages to which all participants should aspire.

56 “Three Models to Inspire the Objectives of Torah Instruction in the Modern Orthodox Day School” in Ten Da’at 7:1, Fall 1993, p. 11.


58 There has been controversy regarding this book’s authorship.

In 1980, Professor Israel Ta-Shma of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem demonstrated convincingly that the author of “Sefer ha-Chinuch” was in fact ... Pinchas ben Joseph ha-Levi, who had written the work for his son, Joshua.”


http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sefer_ha-Chinuch

“Odyssey” is a reference to the interregnum period between graduation from college, and for some, fifteen to twenty years, that many young people seem to traverse while delaying marriage, commitment to a career and other significant life choices.

Projects involving applying Jewish values to various real-world endeavors that Horowitz identifies as reflecting how day school graduates translate what they learned and transfer their creativity, energy and commitment from Jewish ritual to other forms of Jewish engagement include:

Teens for the World... PresenTense Group, Avodah, Hazon, Jdub, Media Midrash, Omanoot, Jewish Heart for Africa, Challah for Hunger, Impact Aliyah, Teach for Israel, and Bible Raps...

The following is an articulation by R. Binyomin Frost (THE LAWS OF KASHRUS: A Comprehensive Exposition of their Underlying Concepts and Application, ArtScroll Mesorah, Brooklyn, NY, cited at http://www.aish.com/jl/m/pm/Reasons_for_Commandments.html) of the idea that Ta’amei HaMitzvot can be catered to each generation, with the assumption that the obligation to fulfill the Commandments is independent of what one thinks of the rationale that either has been offered or what comes up with himself:

Since any theory or explanation advanced as a rationale for a mitzvah is merely conjecture, one can never draw Jewish legal conclusions from any interpretation of a mitzvah, even one presented by earlier authorities. As valid as any interpretation may be, it certainly does not reflect the complete spectrum of the meaning of the Jewish law. Just as the Torah itself is infinite, so too is each of its laws. Yet, simultaneously, since we are enjoined to ponder the meaning of mitzvot, any hypothesis about their rationale, congruent with the known principles of Torah guidelines, is valid and enhances the effect of the mitzvah upon man.

See my “Vision of a Modern Orthodox Education” at http://my.mli.org.il/mli_pdf/visions/Bieler.pdf