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## THE OUTSIDER AND ORTHODOX JUDAISM

One common observation about the Jews in America is that they are less religious (Orthodox) than their European ancestors. This is not a totally new phenomenon; one of the biases of Orthodox Judaism is that time marks a drift away from the source of Torah, that we are not improving but regressing. The *Rishonim* (the "First") — the early commentators on The Law are greater than the *Achronim* (the "Latter") — those who came after. One theme, repeated in several prayers, states:

— "and there we shall serve You in awe as in days of old and as in ancient years." To be sure no generation was wholly free of sin — even the generation which received the Ten Commandments worshipped the golden calf. But if we limit our focus to the last two hundred years there is sufficient evidence to indicate that traditional religious practice has declined greatly. One intelligent guess maximally estimates the fraction of American Jews who are (observant) Orthodox as about 4% — a figure decisively lower than that of the European ghettos and *shtetlach*.

That so many people have been raised outside an Orthodox framework means that popular images are different — Orthodoxy is something removed, strange. Elsewhere I have examined the content of some of those images.\* Here the focus is on the background of that perception: the American Jew as outsider to Orthodox Judaism.

In order to examine popular views three books dealing with American Jewry have been selected: Roger Kahn: *The Passion-*

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\*See my paper, "Popular Images of Orthodox Judaism."

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*ate People* — (C); Morris Kertzer: *Today's American Jew* — (K); and James Yaffe: *The American Jew* — (Y). In spite of the fact that the authors had an opportunity to research the topic their biases are clear.\*

One of the salient characteristics of the outsider is his ignorance. Jewish education in America has been less than successful. Many have received no formal instruction and much of American Jewish education has been a distilled, Sunday school program, distilled to its core of Judaeo-Christian ethical principles, not dissimilar from the educational content of some of the upper class Protestant denominations, especially Unitarianism. The specific religious content is likely to be geared to history rather than Jewish Law, and to an understanding of other religions and other peoples. The general focus is America. The young American Jew is socialized to a special religious decorum: silence, bowed head, the clergy's concluding benediction and shaking hands with the clergyman waiting outside — a decorum befitting an American house of worship.

This reformed education has bridged the gap between Judaism and America. Since today's young people have been exposed only to American norms, it legitimates Judaism, or distilled Judaism, as genuinely American. But American Jewish education has not provided young people with the tools to understand or feel traditional Orthodox Judaism — not Mishnah, not Gemara, not Shulchan Aruch, nor the languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish; not the mentality, nor the prayer, nor many of the rituals. Orthodoxy is a strange religion, to be studied comparatively as is Buddhism, Bahai, or Episcopalianism. Thus James Yaffe can speak with understanding as well as sympathy of the

middle-aged southern Jewish lady who, when the rabbi says, "Let us pray," bows her head and assumes a devotional posture just like a worshipper in a Protestant church. Hebrew has an unpleasant sound to her, and she would walk out of the temple if she heard the cantor chanting; yet her piety is intense, and she never misses a service. (Y, p. 97)

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\*A very limited discussion of the legitimacy of this procedure appears in "Popular Images of Orthodox Judaism," pp. 2-3.

When he notes her intense piety he naturally means a very Protestant notion.

Yaffe, successful Yale graduate and novelist, admits that at the time of his confirmation he knew only one Hebrew prayer, the *Shema*. Note that he writes confirmation, not bar mitzvah. It is not unreasonable to suppose that this celebration was closer to an American confirmation than to a Jewish bar mitzvah. The orientation is to the world of confirmation, not bar mitzvah. Roger Kahn comments on the narrowness of a (Conservative) rabbinical seminary student who did not recognize the name of Paul Robeson, from whose record the author first heard a certain Hasidic *nigun*. Not from the Hasidim, whom he finds strange and distasteful, nor from other Jewish sources, but from a Negro entertainer did Kahn learn his only *nigun* — a chant, as he refers to it. Several rituals are seen not only as strange but with definite negative connotations: divorce as a cryptic, complex procedure culminated by the signing of the document with a special quill pen (Y, p. 123); grace after meals as transcendental glosso-lalia (Y, p. 99); conversion as humiliation (Y, p. 46).

The American outsider, typified by these authors, approaches Judaism with an American and not a Jewish background. Even the definition of Orthodox Judaism is tinted by the glasses of the outsider — it is anyone who prays in an Orthodox synagogue. And an Orthodox synagogue is usually denoted as any synagogue where the language of prayer is primarily Hebrew and the reading of Scriptures, in Hebrew, occupies a central role. Even synagogues with mixed seating, clearly contrary to Orthodox religious Law (*halakhah*), are perceived as Orthodox if the ritual looks sufficiently foreign. *Idem* for the identification of driving on Shabbat as a problem for Orthodoxy; there is no debate about the issue among the Orthodox. It is rather an issue for the non-Orthodox who wish to attend an Orthodox synagogue. Yaffe makes the distinction among the “pious” between synagogue attendance on “Saturday morning if he’s a purist, or Friday night if he’s more ‘modern.’” That distinction is between Orthodoxy and “Reformative” (Reform-liberal Conservative), not among the Orthodox. The Orthodox worshipper is likely to attend both and if he goes to only one it is more likely to be

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on Saturday morning. Here the outsider appears to be projecting his free time and schedule on the Orthodox, neglecting the fact that the Orthodox does not have better things to do Saturday morning.

The legitimate boundaries and definition of Orthodoxy are set not by its strangeness but by a long standing set of legal dicta — *Halakhah*. Few outsiders have taken the time to read these laws but they have heard, often incorrectly, about sundry exotic customs and superstitions and these remain with them as Law. Because of the authors' research and editing the mistakes here are of a limited nature; nevertheless they are many. An elementary case is Yaffe's contention that *shechitah*, ritual slaughter, occurs when the animal is insensible but not yet dead (Y, p. 93) — precisely the opposite of the *Halakhah*. This list is long and, among some outsiders, the aberrations sometimes preposterous.

Many errors are based on simple ignorance. Naturally comments were made about the custom of married women wearing wigs but their other attire — the long dresses, long sleeves, heavy stockings — drew no special comment. The reason for that style is the same reason that most girls at Stern College (Yeshiva University) do not wear minis — not, as Yaffe suggests, that "the social atmosphere of Orthodoxy discourages competition over such trifles," but it is the important halakhic notion of *tzniyut* (*modesty*).

On the more general level is the claim that there is no notion of heaven and hell and afterlife, or if it does exist it is so vague as to be unimportant. In America the notion of hell became *pareve* even during the latter days of the Puritan era, and afterlife is of little concern to most Americans. Yet among the ultra-Orthodox, as Yaffe refers to them, the notion is not only clear but real, though we should distinguish between *Olam Haba* (the world to come) as heaven and hell which is after death, and *Olam Haba*, which is after history. Kertzer writes melodramatically of his encounter with an Orthodox rabbi who said: "Our faith is in the coming of the Messiah. He will surely come." Kertzer, very much the American outsider in spite of being a rabbi, reacted as many of us would:

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I turned and stared straight into the eyes of Rabbi Ayin who, despite his beard and old-fashioned garb, was very much a child of the twentieth century . . . a man who drove an automobile, flew in a jet plane, and was comfortable in front of a television camera.

"Is this mere theological rhetoric, or do you really believe that someday the Messiah will come down to earth to redeem the children of Israel?"

Rabbi Ayin's eyes lit up, and he said cheerfully, with a tolerant smile, "What kind of question is that?" (K, p. 172)

Nor are the mistakes limited to the realm of Jewish law. A number of statements about the conditions of the Orthodox are contradictory or not true. And it must be noted that these are not just laymen but unusually intelligent men who have conscientiously studied the topic. One area where this confusion arises is federal aid to education. Kahn claims that "the Orthodox emphasis on parochial education is so universal and so consistent that one cannot find a single Orthodox spokesman who will publicly oppose federal and state assistance to schools affiliated with religious groups. Government aid to schools is now an article of the Orthodox faith." (C, pp. 135-6); whereas Kertzer notes that "while some Orthodox groups maintain that the American doctrine of separation of church and state forbids use of state funds for religious purposes, others welcome government aid to parochial schools." (K, p. 153); and Yaffe suggests that support for federal aid varies directly with the degree of religiosity which varies directly with the extensiveness of separate day schools. (Y, p. 249) Kertzer, a Reconstructionist rabbi, and the closest to Orthodoxy not only professionally but also educationally, is also the least skeptical. He notes the weekends at Grossinger's where Orthodox college students and girls from sororities of Northwestern, University of Pennsylvania and Ohio State University gather — the Orthodox all coming together to meet future spouses "who will keep kosher homes and rear their children in traditional fashion." The hotel where the action is located, if one is permitted to malappropriate an expression, is the Pioneer. The difference is important; the Pioneer really isn't Grossinger's and the action is of a different kind. Remember that among the ultra-Orthodox mixed bathing is forbidden. Further-

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more, at Ohio State University, for example, between the years 1968 and 1971 there were never more than eight students who were traditional Sabbath observers. If Sabbath observers could and did go to schools outside the big Jewish cities and maintained their religious practice the future of Orthodoxy would be more optimistic.

As should be clear this article is utilizing concepts most lucidly expounded by Will Herberg in *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*. American Judaism has become an American religion, an integral part of the American way of life. Even some segments of Orthodoxy have taken on an American look although Herberg neglected to mention that a portion of the Orthodox community has remained similar to what it was in Europe, albeit with new physical appurtenances.\* Nor did he sufficiently anticipate the movement by some young people back to a more traditional form. But this number is admittedly very small. On the whole Herberg was insightfully correct. The American Jew is very American. The second generation, encumbered by the European background, tended to overcompensate and became super-Americans. The third generation comes by its Americanness very naturally. In order to understand the attitudes of the American Jew to Orthodoxy he has to be seen as oriented to (Protestant) America, and as an outsider to Orthodox Judaism.

One of the first manifestations of this tension is language, especially traumatic for the second generation. For the immi-

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\*Orthodoxy in America is, with few exceptions like the tiny Syrian and black communities, a remnant of the third and fourth major Jewish immigrations to America: 1890-1920, and 1946-52, that is predominantly East European. The history of the earlier Spanish-Portuguese and German immigrations is the dramatic story of Americanization and secularization. The (American) Reform movement derives almost exclusively from German sources. A radical formulation of their program can be seen in the "Pittsburgh Platform" (1885) under the leadership of Kaufmann Kohler which "represented a drastic revision of traditional Jewish teaching along lines of German idealism and American Protestant liberalism" (Herberg, p. 176). *Kashrut*, the priesthood and most traditional ritual were summarily rejected. More radical forces wanted to switch the Sabbath to Sunday — the American Sabbath, a notion, which in practice, still appears among some Reform congregations. Cf. J. Blau, "The Spiritual Life of American Jewry," in Blau et al (eds.), *The Characteristics of American Jews*, pp. 65-99, and Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (1955), ch. 8.

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grant groups, especially the Jews, language meant cultural continuity and the fathers tenaciously clung to the old, though they also learned the new. The sons, embarrassed by their parents' accents and inability to completely master English, reacted against this sign of foreignness. Yiddish was a black mark and the sons sensitive to its use. Yaffe hears of sermons in Hebrew, Yiddish and English, according to the age of the congregation. In fact virtually no congregation uses Hebrew as a means of daily discourse. And except for a few areas where older Jews remained, too poor to leave the inner city, and the ghettos of the Hasidim, very few congregations or rabbis are capable of understanding or lecturing in Yiddish. But these ghettos leave an impression. When Kahn visits a Hasidic community he feels the need of an interpreter — he is in another country. And Kertzer takes note of his Rabbi Zadik's speech:

he hasn't what one might call an accent, but the timbre of his voice and the cadence of his words betray a non-Anglo-Saxon origin. Generously interspersed in his speech are Yiddish phrases, Talmudic allusions, Biblical references, literal translations from the vocabulary of the ghetto [which] fall from his tongue as though they were part of universal Americanese. (K, p. 193)

This special dialect, seemingly English, is actually strange — it *isn't* Americanese.

Language is but one acute example of the strangeness of the Orthodox community, a feeling expressed in other terms. Yaffe summarizes one very popular notion:

One thing all Reform services have in common, however — an overall atmosphere of decorum and dignity. There is nothing "foreign" about them. Indeed this was the original attraction of Reform to the more successful East European immigrants. The Orthodox synagogue seemed dirty, shabby, unruly, *un-American*. "It wasn't the sort of place," one of them has said, "that you wanted to bring your wife and kids to." (Y, p. 154; emphasis added)

Underneath this dirty exterior there is something unsavory, unwholesome, vulgar, primitive. A real Orthodox synagogue, a *shtibl*, is portrayed as small, crowded, pushy, noisy and dirty.

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There is no order. And anybody externally dirty, or so appearing, is un-American.\* Elsewhere derogatory remarks are made about the cruel methods of the *cheder* where students were often beaten by their teachers.

These un-American qualities are most personified among the Hasidim — “the most Orthodox of the Orthodox.” Of sallow complexion, often speaking Yiddish with animated gesticulation, there is something suspicious about these long bearded, strangely attired men. They are foreigners, remnants of another time and culture; even their language and dress is from 17th century Poland. They are not perceived as Americans nor as having any allegiance to America, rather as insolent of national boundaries and authorities. Thus, although only a few Hasidim have been convicted of diamond smuggling that tag remains with them because it fits this image. (Y, p. 120) And when a small community of Hasidim, in order to insure a proper environment for their children’s socialization, resort to a clause which restricts purchase of homes to Sabbath observers, Kertzer does not neglect to mention that this covenant is illegal in the American courts.

One example of a specific practice very much at odds with the American mythos is the institution of arranged marriages wherein the couple hardly know each other before wedlock — the antipode of romantic love and free choice. Not that the marriages are less stable — precisely the opposite, as most observers note, but it is so alien to the American spirit. It is not surprising that all the authors make note of this practice.\*\*

This feeling of Orthodoxy’s strangeness is graphically limned in Kahn’s account of an incident during his visit to the Hasidim.

“Bist a Yid?” the young Hassid asks. Are you a Jew? The Hassid talks a streak of Yiddish. He holds out his right fist, showing a cylinder of quarters. It takes time to comprehend what the young Hassid wants.

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\*This may be one of the reasons the hippies and beatniks have aroused so much more hostility than other dissident and minority groups.

\*\*In fact this practice has been eroded in America. Though matches are still not based on Hollywood romances there has been movement away from the parents’ almost virtual control. And this practice was never totally pervasive, even in the ghetto and *shtetl*.



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He is begging. The well-dressed visitor [Kahn] remembers that in Havana once he saw a Jewish beggar, and gave him a few pesos. But that was in another country.

Here, on this cold *Purim* night, something in the man rebels against a healthy Jewish boy begging alms in free America. He shakes his head.

Another torrent of Yiddish assaults the man in the finely-tailored coat. He shakes his head again. His companion falls back. The young Hassid embraces the man, pleading. He tries to kiss the man on the mouth. (C, p. 140)

The non-Jewish world is often the reference point for the American Jew. When he wishes to show that Leo Pfeffer is indeed an eminent constitutional lawyer, Kertzer notes that he is very well respected by the Christian community. And when Yaffe wishes to demonstrate that the yeshivas graduate excellent students he notes that "half a dozen students from the Yeshiva of Brooklyn [Yeshiva University High School] have applied to Yale every year for the last five years — and not one of them has been turned down. Neither Andover nor Exeter has as good a record as that." (Y, p. 109) One suspects that Yaffe feels much more at home in the company of Exeter graduates than yeshiva *bachurim*.

The perspective of the modern American Jew is a result of Western intellectual development. He sees Orthodoxy not only as old fashioned but primitive. It is a difference not only of time, place and specific institutions but of mentality. If the modern outsider Jew believes it is in science and technology. It is with despair that he learns that certain yeshivahs refuse to teach evolution — that is heresy. (Y, p. 109) When he looks at Orthodox Judaism it is with the perspective of a pseudo-rational twentieth century man. Like the modern rational reformers of the nineteenth century he is confused and offended by the Temple service which, to the outsider, appears to play such a central role in Orthodox liturgy. When he actually reads the Bible it is with the glasses of a biased anthropologist, not a believer; hence, he is amazed and repulsed by the sacrificial rites. This is not the religion he has personally encountered — not the conviviality of the cosmopolitan rabbi nor the gastronomical Judaism of

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bagels and lox, but the culture of Semitic tribes, or, in its updated form, the ghetto of eighteenth century Eastern Europe.

America has been described as a pragmatic, technological society. Whereas religious institutions may flourish (or have flourished) quantitatively and financially, paradoxically they are becoming more secular. True belief requires a commitment and adherence to a system of doctrines and practices that the modern sees as irrational and irrelevant. The American sees fervent Orthodoxy as based on the irrational, on the absurd, *kashrut* the example *par excellence*. "It takes a strange kind of person to be an Orthodox Jew. Orthodoxy, after all, demands obedience to the Jewish law even when reason, logic, and ordinary common sense are violated." (Y, p. 117)

Not only is the intellect suspect but so is the psyche. Many people have their own theories of psychological conditions which lead to acceptance of Orthodoxy. These conditions tend to be abnormal since commitment implies acceptance of a system that defies normal sensitivities. For Yaffe this condition is one of a superdeveloped guilt. "We must return to the source of *all* Orthodox attitudes and behavior, that pervasive sense of guilt." (Y, p. 134, emphasis added) In addition Yaffe mentions the concurrence of anonymous psychologists as definitive ratification of his analysis. In using psychology, the American refers to the familiar — a secular body of pseudo scientific thought, to explain the exotic — Orthodoxy.

The ideological cornerstone of America are egalitarianism and liberalism. Although often not honored in practice they are significant and real cultural norms.\* One modern development of egalitarianism has been extension of rights to women, a process not yet completed, but sufficiently developed to challenge the discriminatory patterns of Orthodoxy. The inferior status of the woman evokes comments from all the writers. It is she who shaves the head, who is ritually unclean and must undergo monthly purification. She receives separate and unequal treatment; women sit not only apart but upstairs, removed from the

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\*A good deal of social science research has found that Jews are much more likely to support egalitarianism and liberalism, in attitude and behavior, than their non-Jewish countrymen.

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service from which they are effectively barred. Women do not participate — they watch the men. Long before the recent upsurge of the women's liberation this discrimination became clear to modern Jewish men and women. Both the Reform and Conservatives eliminated the daily prayer said by Orthodox men, blessing God for not making him a woman,\* and steps were taken to incorporate women into the service.

The American is a liberal whose philosophy is based on individual, free choice. Theoretically, except for the kernel of Judaeo-Christian ethics, there is neither absolute truth nor a universal good, rather the good varies with the individual. Orthodoxy appears to exemplify precisely the opposite: it is a system professing absolute truth, it claims to be obligatory for all Jews, and furthermore one is not free to select within Orthodoxy — “he is expected to obey each and every mitzvah.” (Y, p. 83) In the yeshiva, training ground for Orthodox leaders, not only is scientific thought limited but so is dissent on religious law.

“Make a strong case for your point of view,” a teacher said to one of his brightest boys, “but don't make it too strong, because in the end, don't forget, we'll have to come out the way it says in the Mishna.” This is the fundamental philosophy of Orthodox religious education. (Y, p. 107)

The American, for whom free choice is a *sine qua non*, is repelled by this process. In addition the Orthodox sees Talmudic Law as binding both in ritual and “moral” obligations — the Fifth Commandment of keeping the Sabbath is as integral to the Ten Commandments as the Sixth — the prohibition of murder; the American, on the other hand, sees Orthodox religion as a set of discrete, fragmentized rituals, an essentially private sphere and hence for the individual conscience. It has not the force of law but rather custom, individual preference.

Because religious law is both central and Divine the Orthodox tend to be strict in its observance and unwilling to permit deviance. That is no more surprising than the connoisseur of art,

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\*In the same spirit they eliminated the same blessing with negative reference to non-Jews, substituting a blessing to God for making him a Jew.

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music or cooking insisting on exactitude. But to the outsider, for whom religion is more peripheral, such an attitude appears dogmatic.\* Kahn calls it the "arrogance of the devout" and explains that "with such total dedication to a creed, one is bound up to certitude. If the creed is wrong, the man himself is destroyed." (C, p. 135) Yaffe entitles his chapter on the Orthodox as "Holier Than Thou" and explains it as the guilt feeling of a believer who sees his neighbor outperforming him in *mitzvot*. These are classic reactions of the liberal to claims of absolute truth.

According to the liberal, this Orthodox mentality, when carried to its logical extreme, leads to theocracy — an absolute rule by the religious leaders.\*\* And this absolutism is precisely the system against which liberalism rebelled, literally made war. For the American Jew it crystallizes in support for separation of Church and State, a notion from which the Orthodox have broken away, primarily to support their own parochial education.

The American sees a fundamental antagonism between Orthodoxy and the secular world in which he lives. This obtains even at the physical level. Orthodoxy requires so much time and special attention that it interferes with enjoyment of "regular life." The Orthodox must pray three times a day, go to the synagogue, build a *sukkah*, specially cleanse meat, etc., "setting aside, in all, a quarter of each year for the observance of religious holidays. To be a totally observant Jew leaves time for little else,

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\*The word dogmatic comes from the Greek word for opinion or belief; "in theology a doctrine or body of doctrines formally and authoritatively affirmed." According to the Western mentality someone who is not dogmatic, literally, is not formally religious. The word orthodoxy, from the same root, means literally "correct (straight) opinion."

\*\*Yaffe writes: "This belief [separation of Church and State] has no real basis in Jewish religious tradition. When the ancient Israelites were finally led into the Promised Land, they quickly turned it into a theocracy. The *shtetl*, within its limitations, was a theocracy too. And separation certainly doesn't exist in Israel today. 'As a religious Jew,' an Orthodox scholar told me, 'I have an obligation to make other Jews religious. And I believe the state must assist me — that's why Israel requires public observance of *kashrut* and of the Sabbath, though in private, of course, people can do what they please.' His view is shared by many other Orthodox Jews." (Y, pp. 248-9)

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even in a lifetime of eighty years." (C, p. 131) Orthodoxy is inconvenient: it means not eating in most places, not watching television nor going to entertainment nor travelling on Saturday — all normal activities for the American. Even for the Jew who wants to be religious, Orthodoxy is seen as impractical: "The suburban Jew cannot practically be denied a Sabbath chariot." (C, p. 131)

According to popular impression free interaction in the American world leads to secularization and deviation from Orthodoxy. When Kahn's Rabbi Chaim had to go out West — the real America — it is without any uncertainty that there "he could not, of course, pursue strict Orthodoxy." That impression is supported by the history of the American Jewish community. And no group is more aware of this antagonism and the attrition from their ranks than the Orthodox themselves. In order to protect their souls the Orthodox attempted to fence in their members or to fence out the secular. This notion of fence is an important theme in Judaism. The sages established the precept of a "fence around the Torah" to prevent any infraction of a Commandment. During the later middle ages the fence, now quite literal, became imposed on the Jews to preserve the ghetto. Jews were forbidden to intermingle freely in the outer world. When the fences started to crumble, especially in Germany, the result was a great assimilation. In America, without any official ghettos, the Orthodox have voluntarily maintained this separation, not only ideological but physical. Only among their own kind can the Orthodox find the necessary physical institutions — the yeshiva, synagogue, kosher food, mikvah, etc. as well as the social, educational and spiritual reinforcement.

The salient example of this extreme separateness is the adamant refusal to marry outside the faith — an occasion, among some of the ultra-Orthodox, for detailed mourning rites. Today this long standing prejudice against intermarriage is beginning to change among the large segment of American Jewry; more people are coming to see the extreme Orthodox reaction as barbaric. Even the extreme physical separateness of the ghettos, though it is tolerated by Americans, is against the American mythos, which Jews are somewhat likely to believe. Kertzer's

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note about the exclusive covenant of the Hasidic housing development is not just a whim.

The ultra Orthodox is involved almost entirely in his own world. Kertzer's Rabbi Ayin, a Lubavitcher and hence one more involved in the world, devotes virtually all his time and effort to his work and study. In addition to learning, "Rabbi Ayin attends worship twice a day and twice a day he conducts a study group. He is a hospital chaplain, and also teaches at a girls' school — an Orthodox one, naturally. The rabbi has little time for any diversions." (K, p. 171) Again there appears the notion of the impingement of the mitzvot on time. As to the extent of his participation in the secular world he mentions reading *The New York Times*, *Time*, and voting regularly; but Kertzer adds little to suggest that this involvement is more profound. Not only is he consumed by his commitment to the Orthodox world but he is wary of the outside world.

This closure and self-preoccupation is seen as both cause and consequence of two salient characteristics of Orthodoxy: narrowness and irrelevance. In order to appreciate this perception it must be understood that the orientation of the preponderant majority of American Jews is toward America: technology and physical appliances, American sports and entertainment, American politics, secular education, the job market, the American economy. The seminary student was chided by Kahn for not recognizing Paul Robeson whose world Kahn sees as more central. Religion is, at most, peripheral. Any group that is concerned totally with religion and ritual, to the exclusion of the American interests, is perforce seen as narrow. And for similar reasons the content of Orthodoxy is seen as irrelevant. The American is naturally struck by the exotic features of Orthodoxy, of which it is not lacking (from an American perspective), and he tends to emphasize these aspects. Of what relevance to the American is an extended discussion of the ritual specifications of an animal for sacrifice in the Temple as a guilt offering?\* Even if he is genu-

\*"The subject matter of any particular Talmud class seldom has much connection with what the students are studying elsewhere or with what may be going on in the world at the time. It is determined by nothing except the page in Mishna or Gemara which the class happens to come to that day." (Y, p. 107)

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inely interested in expressing himself in prayer, what part of his education will permit him to appreciate a discussion of the ablutions of the High Priest before entering the Sanctum; or even of daily prayer which is written in a foreign tongue and which uses a means of expression created by Semitic wanderers, people expelled from their homeland, or in its more modern form by persecuted, impecunious scholars of the early Middle Ages. The American Jew more likely feels that America is his homeland, he feels relatively free, and his standard of living the highest that man has ever enjoyed.

The rapid secularization, or rather the Americanization of American Jewry explains this orientation, less of hostility than of distance and ignorance. And yet the process has not yet been completed; there are still memories, often personal, of the Orthodoxy of the *alte heim* — the old home, of a parent or grandparent who practiced the ancient, sacred rites. No less important than the criticism and misunderstanding is the nostalgia. Even such critics as Norman Mailer and Philip Roth reflect this feeling, the latter in the briefly mentioned fictional grandfather in "Goodbye Columbus" and Mailer reverently talking about his own grandfather, a "saintly Talmudic scholar." Countless others have sanctified their grandparents, often an unfounded sanctification. The extensiveness of this need to recreate ancestral piety bears examination. More than the entire system of Orthodoxy, of which he is primarily ignorant, the American Jew may remember discrete rituals and festive, warm occasions. And the passage of time sweetens our memories. Because they are still a little insecure about their own identity, specially the second generation these people occasionally look back wistfully at their ancestors, at their spiritual security and presumed inner calm. This identification expresses itself in other forms, in the pride that famous persons acknowledge their Jewishness, at Mike Todd requesting an Orthodox burial or Sandy Koufax refusing to play in the World Series on the High Holy Days, and especially in the achievements of the State of Israel which Americans, unlike Israelis, see as a Jewish, if not religious, State. And Americans are surprised, often amused, though not without some dismay, to find that Israelis are no more "Jewish" than the

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Americans — often less so. It is not simply hypocrisy; it is based on a guilt feeling and the guilt feeling on the notion that Orthodox Judaism, however old fashioned, silly and irrational, is really an important part of being Jewish. That explains many of the jokes about the Reform rabbis who are ignorant of Jewish Law. And that explains why so many second generation Jewish men feel so uncomfortable in a temple without a yarmulke and *talis*. Not that they are about to start putting on *tefillin* every day.

By virtue of his being removed from the system he observes, the outsider has both advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantage is that he does not know enough to discern that which is important, he misses subtle clues, sometimes he is just ignorant. Because they are intelligent men who conscientiously studied the topic these authors were able to discern that which other outsiders often miss: the diversity that exists within the broad framework of Orthodoxy, the in-fighting among the various sectors, even among the Orthodox themselves.

The primary advantage is that the outsider, because he has less vested interest, can more easily see shortcomings; that is not to claim that the outsider is without his own prejudice. Some of these insights are precisely the observations of an American of the European ghetto culture: the pushiness, roughness, dirtiness, vulgarity.\* As much an observation as criticism is the traditional Reform argument that the ritual has become outdated and fossilized — it refers to a period and culture of the past, events meaningful to our ancestors but not to us. The usual referent is the Temple Service, so alien to modern thought and practice. Another practice which naturally attracts attention is *kashrut*, not only exotic but, unlike sacrifices, very real. For a number of reasons it has assumed, within Orthodoxy, an importance which would not seem to be warranted by its face value. Yaffe does not entirely grasp why it has become so important though he notes that legally it is but one of a number of practices, others of which are not as religiously observed, though not fallen into a state of total desuetude. For similar reasons those within Or-

\*These characteristics tend to be attributed primarily to the Hasidim and other more European sectors. They can be seen more exaggeratedly in Israel, a society much closer to Europe and the Levant.



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thodoxy who are most aware of the disparity between secular and Orthodox norms, e.g., the role of women, the reluctance to address modern social-political issues, are those on the periphery of Orthodoxy; they are the most open, both physically and psychically, to the outside world.

The comments about irrelevance and narrowness bear repetition. The Talmud, once a record of living Judaism, is seen as less relevant partly because the outsider does not share the same religious framework, partly because he does not know the actual content of Talmud, but also partly because the Talmud does not address many of his problems in a language which he can understand. Separation from the larger world has led, especially among the *followers* of the ultra Orthodox, to narrowness.\* He who thinks that only Torah is worth studying is excluding himself from a great deal of other interests. This includes separation from the civil, political and social activities of the state; and man, as he has been defined in the Western tradition, is a political-social animal. Thus it is a system that results in only a partial man. Those who do interact with the secular world, e.g., scientists, are seen as highly fragmentized men, rational during working hours only.\*\*

Fencing off the world has affected not only ideological orientations but personality as well. As Yaffe insightfully notes the faces of the youngsters in the Hasidic *shtetl* were not those of boys but of men. The yoke of Torah is a yoke which has consequences for those who bear it, even willingly. There is less of the joy of childhood, of unbridled inquisitiveness. Yaffe perceives that the *shtetl* produced a community and a great love and respect for learning but in the process it minimized grace, properness, politeness, gentility, respect for others' personal desires; the enthusiasm for the written word was matched by the lack of a love of nature, and books are not always a sufficient substitute; and the highly scholarly-legal culture suppressed spontaneity,

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\*Interestingly, among the leaders there is a patina of worldliness. The usual example proffered is the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Talmudic scholar, owner of an engineering degree from the Sorbonne, presumably possessor of a keen mathematical mind, and master of literally a dozen languages.

\*\*See Yaffe, p. 125.

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the *joie de vivre* that is so removed from the serious, regular devotion to the Law. Only the Hasidim captured part of that feeling but as the authors note, most of the present Hasidic groups, with the partial exception of Lubavitch, precisely because today they represent the ultra-right, have also lost that spontaneity, that willingness to venture forth and face life, and of responding from the heart and senses and not just according to the letter of the Law. Anyone familiar with the *Shulchan Aruch* or particularly the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* must surely know exactly what is meant. There is, in Western intellectual thought, a recurrent pattern of universalism, sometimes subdued by nationalism, but inevitably resurfacing. To the contemporary Jewish intellectual outsider whose perspective is not totally dissimilar from his non-Jewish milieu what is so praiseworthy about Judaism is that which he can share with the goyim, that which is ecumenical rather than parochial. The chosenness and the special obligations of the Orthodox to God and the Jewish people are secondary, even rejected, in favor of that ethical heritage which applies to all men. Thus Morris Kertzer says in the name of Morris Abram:

"I once asked Ben Gurion which he thought was the more authentic bearer of Jewish tradition — Albert Einstein or one of the rabbis of Meah Shearim (the ultra-Orthodox section of Jerusalem). He answered, 'Without question, Einstein. He represents our universalism, our intellectual, prophetic tradition.'" (K, p. 129)

The ultimate logic of this universalism might lead the outsider to reject not only Orthodoxy but Judaism as well.\* The same problem appears in the Talmud under the influence of Greco-Roman culture and as a result of the European enlightenment. But it was then a problem among the intellectuals. The Mendelssohn stock may have been lost eternally to Jewry but there were millions of others in the *shtetl* who carried the yoke of Torah. But that condition, perhaps for the first time in history, is no longer true, certainly not in America. And even for the

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\*This is essentially what Yaffe desires — to salvage from Judaism those experiences and even rituals which are universal, but within a framework which is not Jewish and which rejects the singularity of Judaism.

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errant Jew there was always a powerful source of Orthodoxy, if not in his personal upbringing then in the immediate environment. In America, with the largest Jewish population ever found within one state, more and more Jews are growing up in a secular and/or Reform environment so distant from Orthodox Judaism that Orthodoxy is something to be known only by stories or books.