Secularism and Religion in Jewish-Israeli Politics

Traditionists and modernity

Yaacov Yadgar

Israeli History, Politics and Society

Secularism and Religion in Jewish-Israeli Politics

Common discourse on Jewish identity in Israel is dominated by the view that Jewish-Israelis can, and should, be either religious or secular. Moving away from this conventional framework, this book examines the role of secularism and religion in Jewish society and politics.

With a focus on the "traditionists" (*masortim*) who comprise over a third of the Jewish-Israeli population, the author examines issues of religion, tradition, and secularism in Israel, giving a fresh approach to the widening theoretical discussion regarding the thesis of secularization and modernity, and exploring the wider implications of this identity. Yadgar's conclusions have significant social, cultural, and political implications, serving not only as a new contribution to the academic discourse on Jewish-Israeli identity, but as a platform upon which traditionist positions on central issues of Israeli politics can be heard.

Offering a detailed investigation into a central and important Jewish-Israeli identity construct, the book is relevant not only to the study of Jewish identity in Israel but also within the wider social-theoretical issues of religion, tradition, modernity, and secularization. The book will be of great interest to students of Israeli society and to anyone looking into the issues of Jewish identity, Israeli nationalism and ethnicity, religion and politics in Israel, and the sociology of religion.

Yaacov Yadgar is a senior lecturer in the department of political studies at Bar Ilan University in Israel. His research deals with issues of nationalism, ethnicity, religion, and Israeli identity. His previous book, *Our Story: National Narratives in the Israeli Press*, was published in Hebrew in 2004 and he has published a number of articles on the subject of nationalism and national identity.

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Contents

Introduction

This book aims at filling a significant void which exists in both public and academic discourses regarding Jewish identity – or, rather, Jewish identities – in Israel. This void stems from the overbearing dominance of what I shall term "the religious vs. secular discourse", which presents a bipolar, binary model of two mutually exclusive opposites. These opposites are supposed to define the horizon of possibilities available for the construction and maintenance of Jewish identity. As far as this discourse is concerned Jewish-Israelis can (and should) be "either religious or secular". These are, allegedly, the only real, substance-filled, coherent, and consistent alternatives available for the definition of Jewish identity in the modern age. As such they define the borders and, thus, the form of the field of Jewish identity in Israel. As I will argue below, this discourse, which owes much to the thesis of modernization and secularization, is based upon erroneous assumptions and misinterpretations. One could go so far as to say that this model not only fails to help better understand Jewish identity in Israel, but also distorts our view of the social, cultural, and political reality.

Of the many negative implications of this "religious vs. secular" discourse, the one which stands out most is its inability to digest, understand, and interpret the identity construct of people who together comprise – to use survey data collected by researchers who seem to adopt the "religious vs. secular" axis as the basis for their study of social reality – over a third of the Jewish-Israeli population. I refer, of course, to those Israeli-Jews who choose to self-identify as "*masorti*" (pl. *masortim*) when asked to categorize their Jewish (religious) identity in such surveys.

The label "*masorti*" has served over the years mostly as a residual category lacking any independent, positive content or meaning. It was meant to include all those who did not "fit" the binary modal and its rigid division of the Jewish-Israeli population into either secular or religious. Assigned to this residual category, *masortim* were seen as Jews who just couldn't "do the right thing" and choose one of the two coherent and systematic options. They were held to be "a bit of both" and hence, in fact, "neither secular nor religious," devoid of a "clear" identity, and best recognized negatively, by what they were not. Academia barely attempted to make sense of those who identified

themselves (and were identified by others) as *masortim*, while political discourse, which has been increasingly defined and framed by the bipolar discourse (as the "secular–religious cleavage" became a prominent issue shaping Israeli party politics), did not pay them much attention – rarely representing their unique positions on issues of Jewish identity in Israel.

This book thus wishes to contribute to existing academic research as well as public discourse regarding the (Jewish) identity of those who identify themselves as *masortim*. My research project and the book reporting it were guided first and foremost by an attempt at understanding this identity structure and decoding the world of meanings associated with it. I should stress, however, that although the main purpose of this book is one of scholarly, academic research, a significant byproduct of it is ultimately social and cultural – and, indeed, political – in nature. Inevitably, an emphatic yet critical interpretation of the world of meanings associated with *masorti* identity also serves to voice, often for the first time, *masorti* positions on various issues, which have preoccupied the Israeli public sphere. Needless to say, it was academic, empirical interest which dictated my research and which underlies the interpretive, critical tone apparent throughout the discussion.

A note on terminology and translation is of crucial necessity at this early point of my discussion. The Hebrew label *masorti* (in its current, sociopolitical usage) is problematic from the outset: it has been used as a sociological discursive solution to the irreconcilable tension between a one-dimensional image of reality – the image portrayed by the scientific discourse regarding the "religious vs. secular" dichotomy – and the complexity of social reality itself. The English translation of this label is even further complicated by the various lexical meanings attached to it, as "*masorti*" can be translated both as denoting the adjective "traditional" and the noun "traditionalist". The fact that the latter English term, "traditionalist" (and "traditionalism"), is often used in academic literature to denote a form of adherence to tradition that is markedly different from Jewish-Israeli *masorti* lifestyle only further complicates the issue. As I will elaborate below – and, indeed, as the title of this book already manifests – I would suggest that the best way to solve this interpretive conundrum is coining an English neologism, "traditionist", as the proper translation of "*masorti*".

Moreover, the label "*masorti*" probably has its origins in another categorically binary distinction, which until recently has been immensely popular with social scientists. I mean, of course, the dichotomous distinction between the "modern" – that is to say: those who have successfully undergone the process of modernization (as well as secularization, assumed inherent to it) – and the "traditional", or "pre-modern" (or simply "primitive"), who have yet to undergo this process and are identified as being, among other things, predominantly inherently religious. It is here that the term *masorti* was used to denote those who are somewhere on the axis of progress – necessarily leading away from religious pre-modernity towards modernity and secularization – but have yet, for whatever reason, to complete their journey.

In this context, tradition (*masoret* in Hebrew) is understood as the opposite of liberty, modernity, and progress. Advocates of the modernization narrative have thus often claimed that fidelity to tradition means the subjugation of the individual to dictates of the past and its anachronistic customs and beliefs. "Tradition" would thus also be used as a kind of politically correct synonym for "primitivism"; it was understood in this context to be typifying those who are not "modern" and "progressive", branding them by the adjective "traditional" (= *masorti*). The implications of the modernization and secularization discourse for the field of research dealing with Jewish-Israeli identities are quite overwhelming in this regard. This theoretical framework presents those identified as "traditional" with a clear plan regarding their future. It expects them – if not even demands and implores them (through state institutions which have accepted the modernization thesis as a guideline of their activity) – to choose one of the two directly opposing options (i.e., to become either "secular" or "religious"), thus removing any demographic and meaningful substance from the "*masorti*" category. The problems stemming from the use of the adjective "*masorti*" by anyone wishing to study their identity positively as an independent identity, endowed with substance and meaning not necessarily originating in the "religious–secular divide", should thus be clear. Moreover, the theoretical literature dealing with tradition and "traditionalism" (a term often used as an alternative translation of "*masorti*") tends to increase, rather than decrease, the confusion by presenting several, often conflicting, usages of the term "traditionalism".[1] I do not presume to offer a wholly new, "accurate" or "more correct" label. That is beyond the scope of this research. (My use of a different syllogism is meant to differentiate past discourse terminology and the conclusion of this present one.) Furthermore, the social reality upon which this book is based clearly shows that many Israeli-Jews actively choose the label *masorti*, charging it with significant, meaningful values. Whereas the origin of this term is somewhat problematic, one can fill a close variance with a new, positive meaning. Thus, as mentioned above, I suggest a possible, though by no means perfect, way to overcome the inherent difficulty facing those wishing to use this label: I shall henceforth use the term "traditionist" and "traditionism" to denote not an adjective but a noun, signifying an identity group of chosen belonging, filled with independent, positive (as opposed to being defined by "what it is not") substance.

Traditionism as a modern choice of identity

My central argument in this book is that a positive, empathic, yet critical investigation of the world of myriad meanings associated with traditionist identity clearly shows it to be of a rather "modern" character, largely dominated by the element of choice. As such, traditionist identity offers a fertile and intriguing alternative to the "religious vs. secular" dichotomy, by offering a model of modernity not necessarily accompanied by secularization, or at

least exempt from total secularization of all areas of life. This argument is based mostly upon the central role and unique significance of choice in the construction of traditionist identity, as well as the active and highly apparent characteristic of what I shall term, paraphrasing Zygmunt Bauman (2000), the Jewish traditionist "mission of identity". To put it simply, the current self-identification of many Israeli Jews as "traditionist" is based upon their active choice of this identity and the way of life associated with it. This way of life requires many actions of maintenance as well as continuous actions of reaffirmation. These traditionists are far removed from the stereotype of those who unself-reflectively follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. They do not continue their "near religious" way of life merely because they were so educated, nor because they fear changing it (fearing the burden of total observance, the wrath of God, or their parents' reproach). Their traditionist identity did not "simply" come to them by way of inheritance, it is not forced upon them, and it is most definitely not taken for granted – neither by them, nor by their surroundings. Moreover, this conscious decision is taken with full and intimate knowledge of the dominant available alternative identities ("religiosity" and "secularity"), and is maintained against ongoing cross-pressures applied by the cultural field nourished on these alternative identity constructs. These cross-pressures revolve mainly round the demand that traditionists "pick a side" and be "consistent" and "methodical", thus abandoning their "hybrid" position of being "both – and neither – secular and religious". Despite all this, traditionists choose to be traditionist. They are aware of their identity and its distinctiveness, limitations and advantages (as seen by traditionists themselves, of course). Traditionists recognize their unique position within the spectrum of Israeli sociopolitical identities, and prefer it to any other. Put differently: Traditionists are well aware that their identity, behavior, way of life, and world of meanings are not obvious; a central part of the traditionist experience is the continuous dealing with the set of cross-pressures born from their "refusal" (their failure?) to conform with one of the two binary categories. Still, they repeatedly, actively, and consciously choose, despite a heavy toll, to keep a traditionist identity. As such, traditionist identity shows itself to be clearly modern. Traditionists thus exemplify the ability to move beyond both the "religious vs. secular" dichotomy, and the categorical distinction between the secular modern and the traditional/religious pre-modern. The case study of Israeli traditionists could thus shed new light on the academic and political discourse currently taking place regarding the politics of Jewish identities in Israel, as well as on the wider theoretical discussion regarding modernization and secularization. This book will focus mainly on the former, Israeli, aspect. In the concluding chapter I shall suggest some general, theoretical insights, relevant to the fascinating academic discussion about modernity and secularization.

I am well aware of the confusion which may ensue when considering the role of "modern" and "modernity" within my arguments: On the one hand

I repeatedly question the relevance of the "modernization" discourse to the understanding of traditionist identity, while making my point that traditionism is, when all is said and done, a (late- or high-) "modern" identity. I suspect that the root of this apparent contradiction is to be found in the multiple meanings of the term "modernity" – most especially those cultural-social usages identifying a certain worldview or mindset as opposed to its "chronological" usage, used for historical periodization (not to mention value-laden usages, constructing a power hierarchy in which the "modern" overpowers the "primitive"). The idea of "multiple modernities", which was born of the unease created by the modernization discourse's inability to account for non-western non-Christian models of modernity, stressing instead the simultaneous existence of myriad forms of modernity, might prove to resolve the abovementioned tensions.[2] However, I suspect that overtheorizing will only serve to further confuse the issue. I offer instead to focus on the "thick description" of the phenomenon as a main tool to understanding it.

One such relevant description is to be found, if I may stand on the shoulders of giants, in Zygmunt Bauman's (Bauman 2000) discussion of the current socio-historical period as the age of "liquid modernity". Bauman uses this term to refer to what others call "contemporary modernity", "postmodernity", "super modernity", "late modernity", etc. For our purposes, the pertinent point in Bauman's discussion is the way he chooses to describe and construct (following Ulrich Beck, who in turn draws from Norbert Elias) liquid modernity as characterized by "individualization". This term touches directly upon the quintessentially late-modern need of the individual to play a rather active role in the construction, affirmation, and continuous maintenance of his or her identity. Bauman's lucid argumentation is central to the made point, as his discussion of individualization as typifying (late-) modernity lays the ground for some of my main arguments with regards to traditionist identity:

> To put it in a nutshell, "individualization" consists of transforming human "identity" from a "given" into a "task" and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance. In other words, it consists in the establishment of a *de jure* autonomy (whether or not the *de facto* autonomy has been established as well).
>
> As this happens, human beings are no more "born into" their identities. As Jean-Paul Sartre famously put it: it is not enough to be born a bourgeois – one must live one's life as a bourgeois. (Note that the same did not need to be, nor could be said about princes, knights, serfs, or townsmen of the pre-modern era; neither could it be said as resolutely about the hereditary rich and hereditary poor of modern times.) Needing to *become* what one *is* is the feature of modern living – and of this living alone.
>
> (Bauman 2000, 31–32; italics in the original)[3]

In this spirit I wish to present in this book an interpretative investigation of the ways in which those who self-identify as "traditionists" carry out this modern mission of building their identity as Jews. Indeed, Bauman's interpretation, by which modernity forces the individual to invent, construct, maintain, and reaffirm her identity – which is neither prefabricated nor inherited nor merely "given" to her – reveals quite clearly the modern character of traditionism. As I shall explain shortly, this book can thus be viewed as an interpretation and a record of the ways in which traditionists continually reinvent their identity, maintain it, reaffirm, and update it, especially in the face of relentless criticism by other identity-constructs who either deem themselves to be distinctly modern, while depicting traditionism as premodern (secularity), or self-identifying as anti-modern (though inherently modern in nature; orthodoxy), while depicting traditionism as an expression of religious and spiritual weakness.

The "mission" of identity discussed here is that of the construction, reaffirmation, and maintenance of one's identity as a Jew. The will to reaffirm this identity alongside the conception that Jewish identity is not to be taken for granted, that it requires the observance of a certain lifestyle, is what stands at the base of the traditionist choice. This conception can also be seen as holding the key to understanding what has been wrongly perceived as traditionism's lack of coherence and inconsistency. If I may borrow Sartre's famous words, quoted by Bauman above, the traditionist choice can be described as driven by the notion that "it is not enough to be born a Jew – one must live one's life as a Jew".

Bauman's description of the heavy burden carried by the individual should be reiterated here: it is the individual, and him or her alone, who must bear the consequences of this "*de-jure*" autonomy and the choice of identity that comes with it, and it is s/he who must pay the price for the identity-building mission, without receiving social support (as society and community both lose their significance, as Bauman shows). This quintessential modern condition receives an illuminating expression in the case of traditionist identity construction and maintenance. It sheds new light on what I shall term the "traditionist loneliness". Other than their family and a small circle of friends, traditionists do not enjoy the support of any social establishment able to articulate and reaffirm their identity. Traditionists are thus a minority (though a symbolic one, as they are often a demographic majority) within varying secular or orthodox dominated socio-political contexts. Inspired by Bauman's (2000, 67–71) emphasis on the role of celebrities as substitutes for social-institutional support for identity construction in the modern age, the pointed absence of traditionist sensitivity in the world of the Israeli media should also be mentioned. This absence forms the basis for a larger absence – that of the traditionist voice within cultural and political discussion on issues of Jewish identity in Israel.

This case study also affords us a fresh and interesting perspective through which to examine Bauman's thesis shedding new light on it. After all, this

patently modern "mission of identity" undertaken by traditionists, this active choice of identity, its construction, affirmation, and maintenance – is a choice of an identity which sees itself as bound by tradition, as loyal to what is commonly perceived as the opposite of modernity, or at least as having reservations about the modern spirit of "progress". Moreover, it does so without shunning the modern world, or segregating itself from it; traditionists thus exemplify a ("liquid") modern choice of an identity which questions secularized modernity. I shall return to this matter in the concluding chapter after having set forth and substantiated all the relevant elements of my argument.

All these topics, as well as many others, are to be extensively explored in this book. However, before discussing the traditionist alternative, we must first examine the terminology to be used and review succeeding attempts to investigate and understand traditionism in Israel. Both topics will stand at the center of the introductory chapter. Any reader not seeking to delve into this theoretical issue should skip the introductory chapter and go straight to the discussion of traditionist identity, starting in Chapter 2.

* * *

This book was conceived as an idea for a joint research project, developed with my dear friend, teacher, and mentor, the late Professor Charles Liebman. Charles' premature death prevented us from realizing even the preliminary research plan (some of the groundwork for this research was laid down in our co-authored article; (see Yadgar and Liebman 2009)). His death also charged my research and the book reporting it with the unique character which accompanies the special sense of commitment associated with, if I am not mistaken, commemorative undertakings. I would not presume to claim that this book commemorates Charles' versatile, multifaceted work. That task is far too vast and demanding for this book, and I believe others have very successfully begun that undertaking (see Cohen and Susser 2007). It is, however, undeniably true that his spirit is interred in many of the arguments and ideas raised herein. We did have a chance to discuss some of the ideas explored here, as we first set out to sketch a general outline for our planned project. Other ideas were born out of the constant dialog between a writer and his imagined reader, whose memory continues to serve as a role model of intellectual commitment, boundless curiosity, a constant, demanding striving to understand, and an uncompromising obligation to integrity. I can only hope that this book can in some way live up to that and honor Charles' memory.

This book owes its existence to the interviewees who were generous enough to share with us so much of their personal world. I am forever indebted to them for allowing me to better understand their world, and mine. Some of my ideas gained further focus and clarification through my conversations with many colleagues, and I thank them for allowing me such a privilege. Special thanks should go to my colleagues at the research group on Jewish Identities, which was hosted by the Hebrew University's Institute for Advanced Studies:

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And one last, special and loving thank you to Ester.

1 Theoretical framework

In this chapter I shall explore and attempt to clarify some of the terms and ideas central to the investigation of traditionism (*masortiyut*) and traditionist identity. I will then review previous discussions of Jewish-Israeli traditionism within the academic field. The research approach I have chosen to stand at the base of this book will also be elaborated upon. A presentation of the subjects and themes to be dealt with throughout the book will follow, closing the chapter.

Tradition, traditionism, and traditionalism – towards a terminological definition and clarification

In its simplest meaning, *masortiyut*, or "traditionism", identifies and describes a specific, positive, and binding relation to tradition or, more precisely, the self-image held by either the individual or the community as to their relation to tradition; it signifies fidelity (or, as above, the self-image of fidelity) to tradition. Such an interpretation does not, as I shall explain, sufficiently clarify the issue at hand – as the meaning of "tradition" is itself somewhat ambiguous. "Fidelity to tradition" as a primary component of traditionist identity would therefore require clarification of the term "tradition". More confusing is the use commonly made by international research literature of the term "tradition*alism*" (as the Hebrew term *masortiyut* is often translated) to describe at least two major attitudes to tradition, attitudes that are distinctly different from each other. It is only to one of these attitudes, indeed the one most intimately associated by political culture in Israel with *masortiyut* (which I shall term here "traditionism"), upon which I will focus the attention within this book.

Three terms, then, require clarification: "traditionism", "traditionalism", and "tradition"; within the next few pages I shall attempt to explore the meaning of "tradition" and consequently distinguish the term "traditionism", which I wish to discuss here, from "traditionalism" and its various uses. I will use this investigation in order to clarify some of the central components of the traditionist approach as applied and discussed within this book.

Tradition

The first and foremost step to be taken in order to correctly comprehend "tradition" is to abandon its image as a vestige of the past transferred to the present "as is/was". Tradition, our attitude toward the past, belongs to "present times". It is given to a historical, social, cultural, and political context: it reflects contemporary perspectives that are true for a specific collective during a specific period and in a certain place; it is the past as seen through the eyes of the present formed around a certain community. This focus on the contemporary nature of tradition stresses, amongst other things, the necessity of historically and culturally contextualizing any discussion of tradition and traditionism.

The great complexity of the term as well as the heavily charged value-system it entails have caused "tradition", despite a marked and consistent presence throughout academic discourse, to elude any commonly held definition. Though the adage, famously coined by Edward Shils (1981, 12), by which tradition is "anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present" is widely known, it is also widely referred to, most especially by those who utilize it, as lacking many dimensions and unable to properly explicate the term (as should be obvious from my previous comment, this definition specifically fails to address the dynamic, contemporary nature of tradition).[1] It is thus easy for researchers to repeatedly claim, over a period of more than three decades, that despite continuous discussions, an acceptable definition of the term does not exist and that more attention should be paid to it (S. N. Eisenstadt 1972, 119–20; Thompson 1996, 91; Jacobs 2007, 139).

Academic discourse (at least in the field of social research) clearly demonstrates how a "working definition" of the term is commonly supplied by a description of the "function" of tradition: It is the conserving agent for the major social and cultural units, seen as the most "eternal" element when it comes to the communal and cultural structuring of reality. Tradition outlines the primary foundations of the perspective on human existence; it poses questions as to reality while delineating limitations on possible answers through both institutional and symbolic constructs. Tradition is seen as molding social and cultural reality and instilling it with significance (S. N. Eisenstadt 1972, 18). Indeed, Shils' (1958, 154) own, more elaborate description of tradition manages to capture this "current" character of tradition in a rather lucid manner:

> Traditions are beliefs, standards and rules, of varying but never exhaustive explicitness, which have been received from the preceding generation, through a process of continuous transmission from generation to generation. They recommend themselves by their appropriateness to the present situation confronted by their recipients and especially by a certain measure of authoritativeness which they possess by virtue of their provenience from the past. Their authority is engendered by the sheer fact of

> their previous observance by those who have lived previously. Max Weber went too far when he declared that the legitimating of traditional authority rested on the belief that "it had always been that way." It is not essential that rules legitimized by tradition should be thought to have been observed or valid "from time immemorial." To appreciate the weight of the past, it is not necessary that the past be seen as an indefinitely backward-reaching span of time. Its backward time span is usually much more vague and indeterminate.

My point of departure when referring to tradition will be its foundational, or constitutive role. Seen from this perspective, tradition is perceived as a metastructure – a Khunian "paradigm" (Kuhn 1962) – into which one is born and within which one is raised. Within this framework the individual grows aware of herself, her past and her community, thus building both her independent, "private" identity, and her "collective" identity as a member of a group.

This understanding of tradition receives its most comprehensive and systematic formulation in the thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989) and Alasdair MacIntyre (1984). Although the two are nourished by diverging philosophical traditions and rarely refer to each other in their writings, their conceptualizations of tradition seem to be complementary, aiming at a rather similar notion of tradition as a constitutive narrative of both community and self. This notion stresses that tradition, which is inherently collective, is not only unavoidable but also vital to the shaping of any individual, private identity.

As Gadamer (1989) stresses, though we do not choose the tradition into which we are born and within which we grow, the continuous shaping of our identity occurs via a dialog between ourselves, as individuals, and our tradition. Gadamer calls this process a "fusion of horizons"; it leads to the expansion of our personal horizons as well as new and renewed understandings and interpretations of tradition itself (meaning that even this metastructure is neither final nor rigidly defined, but is rather constantly updated and redefined). Thus understood, tradition is revealed to be not only unavoidable, but also vital to the shaping of any private identity. Tradition is the primary, basic condition (whose practical meaning, as already mentioned, is also constantly being shaped and redefined) under which the liberty to build one's identity privately and as a member of the community is constituted.

According to this view, tradition is, by its very essence, as every "text", realized – that is to say: becomes actual, present, filled with meaningful content, significance, and ontological existence – only when it is comprehended, that is to say, interpreted, loaded with meaning (which is ever "current"), internalized and applied by us, its bearers. In other words, the understanding of tradition (always requiring its interpretation) is a condition of its existence: "Understanding must be conceived as a part of the event in which meaning occurs, the event in which the meaning, of all statements – those of

art and all other kinds of tradition – is formed and actualized" (Gadamer 1989, 157; see also Bernstein 1983, 124; Shils 1958, 154).

Gadamer also points out and reiterates the positive value of prejudgments or preconceived ideas, with which tradition equips us, as our primary tools for dealing with reality, that is, for comprehending it. Conceding that this is a provocative argument, Gadamer nevertheless claims it is our prejudgments, or prejudices, rather than our rational judgment or supposedly "objective" opinions which underline and stand at the base of our being. He thus sets to "rehabilitate" prejudice as a positive, valuable idea:

> Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified or erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us.
>
> (Gadamer 1976, 9)

Moreover, tradition (alongside authority, which Gadamer also aims to "clear" of its negative connotations) is what permits us to make the crucial distinction between "blinding" prejudices (those that prevent us from adequately dealing with reality) and "enabling" prejudices, which deserve our positive attention.

Gadamer resists the dichotomous opposition, so central to the project of Enlightenment, between logic and reason on the one hand and tradition on the other. He emphasizes that tradition is the basic condition within which logic is able to exist in the first place; every logic functions *within* a certain tradition, and, as he repeatedly insists, our action within that frame of tradition means, amongst other things, a continuous interpretation and updating of its meaning:[2]

> It seems to me . . . that there is no such unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason . . . The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only innovation and planning appear to be the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal.
>
> (Gadamer 1989, 282–83)

To summarize, tradition should be seen as an influence, or weighing in, of the past on the present. As the basis, the foundation, upon which our ability to understand and deal with reality relies, it both enables and limits our horizons, while itself constantly being reinterpreted and updated (Gadamer 1989; see also Bernstein 1983, 109–70; Taylor 2002).

This dynamic understanding of tradition is further elucidated upon by Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), who distinguishes tradition thus defined from its conservative, set, and "frozen" perception, which he identifies with the father of conservative thought, Edmund Burke (1790). It is in the spirit of this distinction that MacIntyre sets himself against ideological uses of the idea of tradition. He argues that conservative thinkers who make ideological use of tradition tend to follow in the footsteps of Burke and adopt the suggested polarity between tradition and critical reason, and between the stability given by tradition on the one hand and the revolutionary, anti-traditional conflict and instability on the other. MacIntyre claims that both these contrasts are confusing and, worse, misleading, as tradition itself is dynamic, evolving, and developing. All discussion, argumentation, and resulting practical conclusion, he explains, "take[s] place within the context of some traditional mode of thought, transcending through criticism and invention the limitation of what had hitherto been reasoned in that tradition" (MacIntyre 1984, 221).

MacIntrye thus puts forth a dialogical, deliberative concept of tradition by which the continuing discussion and argumentation along with the ensuing updating and augmentation of this ongoing discourse are essential to the idea of tradition. All social, cultural, and political institutions – the bearers of any tradition, on its customs, norms, and rules – are "partly, but in a centrally important way, constituted by a continuous argument" as to their substance and the correct way in which they are to function.

> Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict. Indeed when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always dying or dead . . . A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.
>
> (MacIntyre 1984, 222)

It would seem quite evident that criticism of atomistic conceptions of both individual and community, conceptions so typical of liberal thought, is based upon a similar understanding of the foundational role of tradition. In this vein, the accentuation of tradition's role as the enabler of possibilities, or feasibilities of the existence of an independent self, became a main point of departure for much of the communitarian critique of liberal thought (see, for example: Sandel 1984; Avineri and De-Shalit 1992; Taylor 1994). The critical argumentation follows that the image of the individual as an independent, rational, and unfettered player (unfettered by history, customs and, of course, tradition) is cut off from the reality of a cultural, social, political, and

historical setting into which one is born and within which one is raised. It is from this setting that growth occurs – as an individual, a person and a member of the community. It is in the spirit of this criticism that MacIntyre sets forth a "narrative" understanding of the individual, criticizing the futility of what he terms the Sartre-ian, "existential", individualistic image of the self as a being devoid of history, of tradition: "For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationship" (MacIntyre 1984, 221). Our historical and sociocultural identities, he explains, enable each other and are constituted one upon the other: "What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition" (MacIntyre 1984, 221). MacIntyre thus arrives at an especially dynamic definition of tradition, by which,

> A tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflicts: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretive debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted.
>
> (MacIntyre 1988, 12)

The appreciation of the constant process of definition and redefinition undergone by tradition – by way of "internal" arguments amongst its adherents and "external" friction with a tradition's critics and repudiators – naturally bars any frozen, set or "eternal" image of tradition as some sort of "package" given to us, in the present, by the past, in a transaction where we are but the passive receivers devoid of influence upon it.

A fruitful way to capture the dynamic, dialogical, and changing nature of tradition is to describe it as interaction and communication – a long-term conversation – built by "communicative events", that is to say: texts (Boyer 1990, 8, 23; Carey 2008). These events create and express the dialog between a community, in its present form, and its past, that is to say: its previous forms. As such these communicative events highlight the adjustable nature of tradition which is "human dialogical communication substantively open to changes" (Sagi 2006, 101). This terminology also stresses the communitarian nature of tradition since, as a communicative process, it does not exist as a set and fixed object – "a sealed chest, passing down through the generations from a transcendent past to the present" (Sagi 2006, 103) – rather, it exists as a collective memory which by definition is living, present and changing. As put by Sagi (2006, 99, 104):

> Tradition is not defined by a past that was; human beings living in tradition are not passive deliverers of the past that was, unchanging and set. Human beings that live within a tradition constantly verify the tradition in light of contemporary reality. From the present and the future they return to the past . . . Tradition . . . is not something into which we come when it is sealed and final; we take part in its design and development. This partnership is not a new aspect typical to modernity; it is a basic characteristic of tradition itself. Every generation is in dialog with the totality of its legacy. In this dialog there occurs a "fusion of horizons" between that which came from the past and the present. Tradition is therefore a constant process of merger and dialog.

It is in this vein that Sagi clarifies the dynamic and dialogical character of the term "return to tradition". Indeed, Sagi's point of view originates from an assumption of a "miscommunication" – though a necessary one (it is by no means irreparable) – between, on the one hand, modernity and modern identity, between what he sees as "the autonomous, skeptical, reflective, and modern man" and, on the other hand, tradition. This rupture is described by Sagi as a fertile challenge that not only releases our minds from the orthodox, frozen, and conservative image of tradition but rather permits us, through a dialogical relationship between one and one's past (Gadamer's "fusion of horizons"), to broaden our horizons, to self-reflect and to re-establish our "self" in dialog with tradition. As Sagi explains, such an understanding of the notion of "return to tradition" encompasses two main implications: The first is the appreciation of the complex and changing relation between past and present, between tradition and its bearers:

> [T]his return means, above all, a change in disposition. Returning to tradition means acknowledging the links between past and present that come to the fore in the persistent dialog between these two time dimensions. Returning to tradition means overcoming the presumed alienation between what was, what is and what will be.
>
> (Sagi 2008, 11–12)

The second implication deals with the existential state expressed by this relationship:

> Tradition provides the precondition of human freedom because it sets up the options that instill meaning into the concept of choice . . . Impositions that had appeared as a given become a product of human choice. Personal identity, then, is not a return to the past, but a free return to a process of dialog with tradition as a process that constitutes identity.
>
> (Sagi 2008, 11–12)

John Thompson's (1996) distinction between the four facets of tradition

composing its foundational, constitutive role, helps shed light on how "fusion of horizons", "communication", or "arguments extended through time" are realized in the social, political and cultural world. The first, interpretive or "hermeneutic" facet is aimed at tradition being a set of "prejudices", a set of base assumptions which exist in the background of daily life, both for the individual and for the community. In this context tradition forms an interpretative setting, a lens through which to understand the world. It is historical by character and goes through the generations as an ever-developing legacy. The second, "normative" facet aims at tradition's role as a normative criterion for practice in the present. It presents tradition as a set of inherited assumptions, belief structures, and behavioral patterns. The third facet of tradition touches upon "legitimacy", or what Max Weber described as tradition's potential role as a form of authority and justification. Here tradition serves as a source of support for the exercise of power, influence, and authority. The fourth and final facet deals with "identity" and the double role tradition plays in the constriction of both private and collective identities. Where tradition serves as a system of beliefs, symbols, practices, and norms ("transferred" to us from the "past"), it supplies the building materials for a person's individual as well as collective identities. Thompson claims that this distinction between various aspects of tradition allows us to more sharply capture its changing role in the modern and postmodern ages. Thus, while the normative and legitimist aspects of tradition suffer from devaluation in late-modernity, tradition nonetheless keeps on playing a major role as a structure which instills the world with meaning (the "hermeneutic" aspect) and substantiates one's feeling of belonging (the "identity" facet).

Traditionism vs. traditionalism

Recognizing the present, current, and dynamic character of tradition is the crucial step to clarifying the second term which stands at the base of the current discussion – "traditionism". This recognition allows us to understand the tension which exists in our treatment of tradition – be it as adherents, dissidents, or researchers of its associated identities. To put this fundamental point in a nutshell, tradition is, as opposed to all frozen and eternal images of it (images that are often promoted by the "conservative" or "orthodox" – or, to use a more confusing term, "tradition*alist*" approaches to tradition) dynamic. It updates and changes in a process which is constantly developing where the bearers of tradition actively reflect upon and re-establish the meaning of tradition to them (either as individuals or as a community). Any investigation of the identities constructed around tradition must bear in mind that the totality of beliefs, symbols, practices, and norms – be they loyally adhered to or rebelled against – known as tradition, is neither set nor clearly and unanimously interpretable as the ultra-conservative, orthodox approach describes it to be (see Sagi 2008; Sagi 2006; Sagi 2003).

It is from this dynamic point of view that Sagi's (2008, 15–26) discussion

of the distinction, if not outright contradiction, between "tradition" and "traditionalism" highlights the issue that must be dealt with by those wishing to research Israeli traditionism as a framework, or structure of identity. As Sagi clearly shows, the term "traditionalism" (which, as mentioned above, is often used to translate the Hebrew term *masortiyut*) is commonly used, in sociological and philosophical discourse outside of Israel, to represent a rigid and ultra-conservative image of tradition, viewing it as a frozen and eternal framework.[3]

As Shils (1958, 155) explains, a traditionalist would be someone "for whom anything which once existed is entirely sacred by its very connection with the long past". The "trouble" with such a sanctification of the past is its all-encompassing character:

> Traditionalism, which is a form of heightened sensitivity to the sacred, demands exclusiveness. It is content with nothing less than totality . . . It is satisfied only if the traditionalist outlook permeates all spheres – political, economic, cultural and religious – and unifies them in a common subordination to the sacred as it is received from the past.
>
> (Shils 1958, 160)

This image serves the constitution of (or attempts at constituting) all-encompassing social arrangements, allegedly aimed at observing and preserving tradition, which in turn is perceived as a firm and eternal body of values, practices and norms. The suffix "ism" (of the term "traditionalism") is understood in this context as implying a strict, rigid, ideological attitude toward tradition and suggests the ultra-conservative nature of this view of tradition.[4]

It would seem to me that within the context of Israeli political culture the common use of the terms "*hared*" (pl. *haredim*, meaning "the fearful" and referring to the ultra-orthodox) and/or "orthodox" (as well as the more general term "religious", which in Israel often denotes a category of social identity rather then a measure of belief or practice) is close to the term "traditionalism" as it is used by Shils and others. Thus, for example, Avi Sagi (2006, 87–121) discusses *haredi* ultra-orthodoxy as exemplifying that rigid attitude towards tradition, or at least its self-image as doing so (this view of *haredi* society is also widespread in the mainstream academic research on the subject). Other terms, referring to the same phenomenon, abound. Clifford Geertz (1968), for example, having examined a similar phenomenon within a Muslim context, referred to its modern manifestations as "scripturalism", highlighting the absolute position held by sacred scriptures in such cultures. Ernst Gellner (1992), discussing the same phenomenon, preferred to use the term "fundamentalism", as was also done by Jurgen Habermas (1994). Whatever the term used, it is obvious, even to those only familiar in a cursory manner with the identity tagged in Israel as *masorti*, that its use in Israel is nowhere near the abovementioned ultra-conservative and rigid stereotypical image.

The terms at hand must be further clarified. My neologism, "traditionism" (to be discussed shortly), is intended, among other things, to reiterate that *masorti* should *not* be understood as denoting the abovementioned rigid, entrenching, ultra-conservative form that is associated with the term "tradition*alism*". I mean to use the term "traditionism" as aiming at a construct of identity associated both by its bearers and by others with a certain principle – loyalty to tradition – that is also distinctly non-tradition*alist*.

It may be that the greatest variance between the ultra-conservative "traditionalism" (as set out by the *haredi* or "orthodox" approach) and the spirit of traditionism which I wish to discuss herein is the dimension of choice and reflection: I would argue that traditionist identity is an identity of choice which exists within a continuing and constant process of reflection. It is the result of the choice of individuals who view themselves as free to choose their identity (even if this choice is inherently limited, and they are aware of these limitations), and by so choosing they demonstrate their fidelity to what they – and their community – view as the "substantial nucleus" of tradition, maintaining it as the foundation from which they grow and are able to define their identity. Choice serves as such a marked gulf, differentiating the terms, since it is perceived to be completely absent from the "traditionalist" world. As Sagi, following Peter Berger (1979), explains:

> Traditionalism assumes that tradition rules human subjectivity and individualism, or assigns them a marginal role, given that all individuals must and actually do shape their lives according to a fixed and self-evident order that precludes autonomy, namely, the development of a personal lifestyle.
>
> Traditionalism also assumes that people living in a traditional culture are not reflective. They live spontaneously, since individuals become reflective only when they face choice and need to decide. The decline in the power of tradition forces reflectivity. In this new reality, people must ask themselves what do they truly know and what do they only think they know, unlike the situation when tradition is dominant.
>
> (Sagi 2008, 9)

One might prefer to describe those who adhere to the ultra-conservative, orthodox (= tradition*alist*) option as choosing to consciously relinquish their freedom of choice to the vague yet authoritative notion of "tradition" – most especially into the hands of its qualified interpreters. Be that as it may, what is clear is that this ultra-conservative, traditionalist option is based upon such an "eternal", unchanging, image of tradition. Again, in the words of Sagi (2006, 99): "Traditionalism is not a conscious positing, committing, act of tradition, but rather using an imagined set of terms in order to grasp tradition, thus setting it within a static past – in a way incompatible with its true, ever contemporary character".

Nevertheless, this frozen image of tradition has been used as a tool with which to draw the outline of a binary construction sharply distinguishing between "modern man" and "traditional (or pre-modern) man": "The perception of tradition through the image of traditionalism creates a split and a rift between pre-modern and modern life. Traditionalism views modern individuals – reflective, skeptical, autonomous creatures, wielding sole authority over their agenda and choice of identity – as the absolute antithesis of traditional ones" (Sagi 2008, 9).

As I shall insist within these pages, this book wishes to rise above such dichotomous and binary conceptions.[5] It is within this framework, as set forth above, that I intend to present an understanding of traditionism (as opposed to tradition*alism*) as a clear manifestation of (late-) modernity, within which an identity, any identity, is a living, continuing project involving the individual and the community in a conscious act of choice, preference, and construction of meaning.

As the following discussion aims to demonstrate, this image of the "traditional" world as one characterized by lack of choice and "pre-modernity" could be misleading, as the sanctification or affixation of tradition, with which this traditional(ist) culture is identified, is itself a choice made when faced with the challenge of secularization. It is in this spirit that Jurgen Habermas points out the great irony inherent within this framing of "traditionalism" – which he also terms "fundamentalism" – a framing which wishes to enforce upon its surrounding reality a dimension of "ultra stability" by rehabilitating and re-enacting the past: "The irony lies in the way traditionalism misunderstands itself. In fact, it emerges from the vortex of social modernization, and it apes a substance that has already disintegrated. As a reaction to the overwhelming push for modernization, it is itself a thoroughly modern movement of renewal" (Habermas 1994, 132).

The tensions surrounding the *contemporary*, *present* character of tradition – seen, from the traditionalist point of view, at the very least as an accurate representation of the past, if not, quite simply, as "the" past – thus appear as essential both to the understanding of tradition*ism* as a positive term, and to distinguish it from other uses assigned to tradition and its adherents, namely the ultra-conservative, tradition*alist* approach to tradition. This tension is at the root of what Zygmunt Bauman (1996, 49) recognizes as the paradox of the very discourse of tradition: "once it has been spoken, tradition is no longer what its spokesmen claim it to be". Turning to tradition as a source of authority removes it from the realm of the "obvious" and "self-evident" (where it is most powerful and influential, working "silently"), and makes it an object to which the individual or community choose to turn as a source of authority. Seen as the object of discourse and as a rhetorical instrument used to validate authority, tradition becomes but one of various options, the predicate of a declared loyalty, and as such, replaceable. The source of authority (when this term is applied to tradition) is not tradition itself but rather loyalty – more precisely the declaration of loyalty – towards it.

The choice of fidelity to tradition, explains Bauman, exists within the wider context of alternative choices, that is to say: competing loyalties, the staple of late- or post-modernity. In this context "traditionalism" – the rigid, uncompromising, allegedly unchanging, ultra-conservative adherence to the one, eternal and fixed "Tradition" dissolves naturally. It is revealed to be part of a new motion towards the future and the present (rather than the past, as the ultra-conservative/traditionalist terminology would have us believe), deconstructing tradition by turning it into the subject of a discussion on authority. It is, moreover, this ultra-conservative appeal to tradition which highlights the fact that its "self-evident" authority is no longer valid. It is challenged and attacked, a fact stressed by orthodoxy's defensive response:

> It is said that human conditions do not exist until they are named; but they are not named until they are noticed, and they are hardly ever noticed until their existence becomes a matter of concern, of active search and creative/defensive efforts.
>
> (Bauman 1996, 49)

The very fact that these human conditions – including tradition – attract our attention and become the subject of discussion is what demonstrates their weakness as sources of authority. Such discussions testify to the anxiety created around such human conditions, as moves aimed at protecting these conditions and recreating them are brought into being: "To be seen, named, and talked about, tradition must first be challenged by novelty. It is the novelty that conjures up the tradition as its other, as something it is not, something it is up against, or something it lacks and misses . . . Tradition lives only posthumously, in the experience of detraditionalization" (Bauman 1996, 49).

Further inquiry into the meaning of "orthodoxy" would prove of value as it can be viewed as the embodiment of the project aimed at setting and affirming "traditional truth". Such inquiry would stress orthodoxy's active role in trying to preserve that which has lost its place as part of the "self-evident". In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 159–70) suggestion that we distinguish between doxa, orthodoxy and heterodoxy proves to be of special value. In Bourdieu's terminology, doxa is the "obvious" and "self-evident" – that which is accepted as truth and requires no further discussion, interpretation, or explicit articulation. It is "tradition" before tradition was named and explicitly identified as the object of individual and community fidelity. Orthodoxy, in this contextualization, is the "right way" – the official and binding version which is a declaration of absolute loyalty to the fixed image of tradition. Orthodoxy, it is important to point out, is fashioned also through its confrontation with heterodoxy – that challenging "novelty" of which Bauman (1996, 49–50) talks – which presents an alternative version to the "truth" of the "right way".

Departing from the above distinctions I would like to explicate the other option, that of approaching tradition out of an attitude that does indeed

recognize that tradition is no longer "self-evident", no longer Bauman's "quiet" power, while not turning to the ultra-conservative, traditionalist "fixating" of tradition but rather to tradition*ism* – i.e. a principled fidelity to tradition rather than a "fanatic" one – as a way of dealing with reality. There can be no doubt that traditionism identifies itself as loyal to tradition (albeit somewhat "conditionally" so) when faced with the reality of "secularization" (or, more accurately, a predominant *image* of such reality), most especially "Israeli secularization" (with its origins going back to the Jewish enlightenment – *haskala* – and the Zionist revolution), which is to be identified as the novelty challenging tradition, constructing it as its "other". It is such an attitude which lies at the base of traditionist identity, thus laying the foundations of the definition of "traditionism" as the term is to be used herein.

This perception of tradition and the principled fidelity to it differs from the ultra-conservative, orthodox (i.e. tradition*alist*) approach in that it awards the individual more independence when dealing with tradition. If the orthodox or the *haredi* individuals and community can be described as those who "do not relate to it [= tradition] reflectively; they do not ask about it, since they do not live outside of it" (as Sagi 2008, 8 describes the traditionalist), then traditionists, as will be explained, are characterized by an especially high level of self-reflection – continuously putting religious tradition, as well as the nature of fidelity to it, to the test. In the "orthodox" or "tradition*alist*" context, tradition "cannot become a subject for criticism, just as a person wearing glasses sees through them but not them" (Sagi 2008, 8). In the world of Israeli traditionists, however, such scrutiny, and the reflection which permits it, is held to be a manifest, acknowledged fact.

Traditionism

The view of traditionism I wish to put forward here is especially close to the view William Graham (1993) constructs, as he deals with the role of tradition in a Muslim context. As a point of departure Graham asserts that two major interpretations of the term "tradition" must be recognized – the specific and the general or collective – as the first step towards understanding what he, rather confusingly, still terms "traditionalism" (hereafter "traditionism"). The first, specific, and simplest explanation is the one given by Shils (1981, 12) and mentioned above (i.e., tradition is anything handed down from the past; Graham stresses that tradition is also anything *perceived* to have been handed to us from the past). The other, collective aspect of tradition deals with the communitarian sides of tradition. According to this conception:

> Tradition is the modus vivendi of a society insofar as it is understood as congruent and continuous with the past; it is the "cumulative tradition"[6] peculiar to any community, large or small . . . In this collective sense, "tradition" is the sum of a society's specific "traditions".
>
> (Graham 1993, 496–97)

Based on this understanding of tradition, Graham offers a more sensitive approach to the notions of "traditional society" and "traditionism" (again, in Graham's terminology: tradition*alism*; although as his text makes clear, the referent of this term is distinctly different from the above discussed "traditionalist" mindset) – an approach which rises above the strict dichotomy separating the "modern" from the "traditional".[7] Graham explains that the term "traditional society" is applicable to any society, in any age, be it "modern" or "pre-modern", in which most members see their way of life as rooted in the past and as a direct extension of it, deeming this continuity to be virtuous and valuable, "even while newer values may openly compete for authority in the society". Those who see themselves as "traditionalists" (= traditionists) in such societies – be they even societies undergoing vast and extensive changes – regard themselves as adherents of past values, loyal to symbols, institutions, and worthwhile customs. Of special importance is the historicist "continuous" perception which "traditionists" hold: "they do not perceive recent history as a major rupture with the past that has decisively broken the authority of that past as normative for, and intimately linked to, the present" (Graham 1993, 497).

It is not a coincidence that this conceptualization by Graham comes as a first and primary step towards better interpreting and understanding non-western societies (Graham focuses on Muslim societies, but as he himself points out, this observation holds true in other social and religious contexts). The character of traditional (mostly non-western) societies, he explains, is further illuminated when contrasted with those "modernized" (mostly western) societies, "in which a majority, or perhaps only the dominant elites, already have experienced, or see themselves as having experienced, a decisive rupture with the past and thus perceive themselves as no longer 'traditional' ". Such "modern" societies, symbolically identifying major historical changes with a rupture from the past (such as the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, or the French and American revolutions) are, in fact, founded upon new traditions.[8] As a result they tend to see old traditions as outdated. This last point must be emphasized: both "modern" and "traditional" societies have an influential tradition; the crucial distinction being, as Graham (1993, 498) points out, their self-perception and the authoritarian role given to tradition within each society.

Based upon this theoretical conceptualization, Graham puts forth his definition for "traditionalism" and "traditionalist": "a person's or a group's strong preference for recourse to tradition (genuine or invented) as the primary source of authority" (Graham 1993, 498). And, rather confusingly, Graham makes a point of distinguishing this definition of what he calls "traditionalism" from what was discussed above as "ultra-conservatism" or "orthodoxy". He stresses that his definition of "traditionalism" and the "traditional" individual do not in any way depict traditions and traditional societies as firm and unchanging; "On the contrary, as [Joseph] Levenson noted: 'an idea changes in its persistence as well as in its rejection . . . while

iconoclasts relegate traditional ideas to the past, traditionalists, at the same time, transform traditional ideas in the present' " (Graham 1993; for the Levenson quote see Levenson 1958, i, xxxi).

This more complex grasp of "traditionalism" (or, herein "traditionism") as containing an important component of acknowledged change and revision stemming from the principled, positive attitude towards tradition and its values, institutions, symbols, and present usages, makes distinguishing it from the above-mentioned orthodox ultra-conservatism all the more crucial. Traditionism is not necessarily aimed at ultra-conservatism or at opposing changes in political, social, or religious life. Just as traditions can serve as guardians of the status quo, so they can be a basis for change and innovation: "[It] is not the opposite of modernism, although it may oppose modernism where the latter is perceived as destructive of important traditions in society" (Graham 1993, 499). It is in the same vein that some "western" and "modernized" societies can be portrayed as being traditional to a certain extent. After all, in much the same way these societies, which celebrate progress, change and ascension beyond what they see as "the limitations of tradition", are built upon traditions (political, religious, ethnic, national, social, local, and others) that continue to play a certain authoritative role.

Based on this principle, arguments and terminology, which clearly rise beyond the "traditional vs. modern" dichotomy, Graham (1993, 499) suggests viewing the adjective "traditional" as applicable to "those societal norms and institutions that a culture perceives as congruent with or continuing older precedents and values, and as important if not essential to its identity". As should be evident throughout this book, a similar treatment of tradition is an unmistakable characteristic of those Israeli Jews who self-identify as traditionists (*masortim*).

The distinction between "modern" and "traditional" is therefore largely a matter of self-perception. Thus, though he insists that "no society is without elements of modernism and traditionalism", Graham still suggests a division between societies which have fostered their image as "modern" and untraditional,[9] and "traditionalist" societies. This differentiation leads to his definition of what he terms "traditionalism": "an emphasis upon the historical authority of, and the continuity with or recovery of, norms and institutions basic to a particular cumulative tradition" (Graham 1993, 499–500).

In short, any discussion of traditionism forces us to rise above binary preconceptions of "modernity" versus "pre-modernity" and "tradition" versus "innovation", "change", etc. Most importantly, traditionism does not see a fundamental divide or rupture in existence between "modern" man and society, on the one hand, and their past and traditions, on the other. It can indeed be said that, generally speaking, those traditionists with whom we have conducted interviews do not see themselves as attempting to overcome a rupture between themselves, or their immediate surrounding culture, and tradition. They do not believe such a rupture exists, at least not within their world. Indeed, they are aware of the alienation which exists in Israeli society

at large towards Jewish tradition – especially within certain cultural elite groups, identified as "seculars" or "secularists" (the ideological equivalent of the iconoclast as mentioned by Levenson above; it would seem that for these groups the Zionist revolution and the national tradition built upon it represent that historical image breaking point offered by Graham as typical of "modern" societies) – but they (traditionists) do not share the sentiment. Moreover, it can be said that an essential part of traditionist identity is constructed upon a differentiation and contrast of the traditionist "self" with the secular "other", who is characterized by such alienation. They tend to adhere to the trend noted by Graham as typical of "traditionalism" by *choosing* to highlight the historical authority of central elements within what they deem to be their ethno-national and religious tradition as Jews, seeing these elements as crucial to their private and collective identities as Jews.

It would seem to me that a return to Gadamer's dialogical conceptualization of tradition may assist us in better delineating traditionism's approach to tradition. Gadamer describes the tension between estrangement and alienation on the one hand, and intimate familiarity and belonging on the other hand, as that which typifies the constitutive and dialogical project through which we understand, interpret, appropriate, and "apply" tradition. This is not, however, a dialog amongst equals: "As Gadamer sees it, we belong to a tradition before it belongs to us: tradition, through its sedimentations, has a power which is constantly determining what we are in the process of becoming" (Bernstein 1983, 142). Our conditions of existence are those by which we are born and raised into a tradition – as MacIntyre put it, we are, *ipso facto*, the bearers of tradition – and this basic condition is the (unequal) context within which our dialogical relationship takes place. This dialogical relationship embodies a continuous attempt to understand and interpret tradition in that process which Gadamer calls "fusion of horizons". It is not, therefore, a simple, one-directional scheme of tradition's "influence" upon us as already formed individuals: tradition plays a major role in the very constitution of our identities as individuals and collectives. As summed up by Bernstein (1983, 142): "[I]t is important to reiterate that a tradition is not something 'nature like,' something 'given' that stands over against us. It is always 'part of us' and works through its effective-history."

This function of tradition is realized through our constant dialog with it, which also exposes the crucial possibility of criticizing tradition. As Gadamer put it, we must not mistakenly assume that tradition's constitutive role nullifies our ability to criticize it: "It is a grave misunderstanding to assume that emphasis on the essential factor of tradition which enters into all understanding implies an uncritical acceptance of tradition and sociopolitical conservatism . . . In truth the confrontation of our historic tradition is always a critical challenge to this tradition" (Gadamer 1979, 108; see also Bernstein 1983, 154–55). The ongoing "conversation" with tradition entails criticism, change, re-evaluation, and constant updating of the tradition itself, this while constructing our own identity, thus better understanding ourselves. This

living, present interpretation of tradition means not only the release of tradition from its image as something frozen and set in the past, but also the liberation of our attitude towards tradition from the narrow constraints of strict, unilateral adherence or rebellion.

This is the context in which one must read Sagi's (2008; 2006; 2003) exploration of the various paths in which such a critical dialog with tradition can be undertaken. As Sagi points out, such a dialog does not signify either blind adherence to, or sweeping aversion from tradition – quite the opposite: it is precisely through such a critical dialog that tradition takes the shape relevant to us – bringing into sharper focus our identity as its contemporary bearers. Sagi concentrates on the textual and intellectual manifestations of possible dialogs, as articulated mostly by some of the more prominent, contemporary Jewish thinkers.

I shall argue herein that Israeli traditionists represent a different alternative, a "practical" rather than textual or philosophical one, expressing a similar dialogical attitude – even though it has yet to receive intellectually coherent and unified endorsement (that is to say: its philosophical tenants have not been formulated as organized doctrine). The way of life (or "modus vivendi", to recapture Graham's discussion) adopted by traditionists expresses a dialogical and critical approach to tradition. This lifestyle, along with the myriad choices and practical decisions it entails, are all part and parcel of the critical dialog being undertaken with tradition: this practical construct highlights what traditionists see as the "essence" of tradition (thus also signaling its "non-essential" parts), interprets it, and often updates what constitutes a loyal depiction of tradition in contexts mostly seen as "modernized" and "secularized". It is worth noting that this sort of practical dialog is in itself the type of understanding and interpretation (*phronesis*, or "practical knowledge") that Gadamer sees as the ultimate expression of a dialogical encounter with tradition. As he explains: "Such confrontation [with tradition] does not occur in the workshops of the philologist or historian or in the eagerness of bourgeois cultural institutions to impart historical education. Every experience is such a confrontation" (Gadamer 1979, 108).

As I intend to clarify below, I would prefer not to shackle traditionism to any one or other "exclusive" definition. Such rigid definitions of social phenomena, I suspect, tend to constrain the interpretive look, and infringe on the deep understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Instead, such understanding calls for a continuous, circular interpretation, which moves back and forth between an ideal typical notion of the phenomenon, and the specific case study (see Taylor 1987; Rabinow and Sullivan 1987; Gadamer 1989; Bauman 1978). More specifically, I suggest that we strive to understand the phenomenon through an ongoing interpretation of some of its major elements – as these emerge in conversations with men and women identifying themselves as traditionists. In this vein I shall concentrate on some of the key elements of traditionist identity, elements which, to the best of my understanding, comprise the "spirit of traditionism".

An insistence upon a clear-cut definition of what is at base a matter of "identity" will inevitably lead into the trap of "essentialism" – that is, one may be tempted to try and articulate the "essence" of an "identity", as if such an essence were to exist as a matter of (sociological) "fact". As I hope will become evident, I have no intention of "revealing" such an "essence", neither do I intend to construct an "exhaustive" image of the essential nuclei of traditionist identity. As can be inferred from the theoretical framework laid down at the start of this book, I do not believe it relevant to engage in an essentialist discourse. Nevertheless, it should be noted that throughout this book, when referring to statements made by the interviewees, I shall repeatedly return to their views and discussions about what they described as "the essence" of their Jewish identity. Many of them have described themselves as striving to retain the essence of Jewish identity, or the essence of Judaism. Moreover, as has been illustrated above, it is my belief that this ambition to guard what they perceive to be the essence of Judaism is what lies at the root of the traditionist "project of identity". At the same time it is not my intention to claim that such an essence does, in fact, exist, nor do I believe that a researcher should attempt to formulate the contents of such an "essence". In view of this, tempting though it is to answer the challenge and formulate a clear-cut definition, I have avoided doing so, focusing instead on the construction of a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of the phenomenon. Such a description inherently achieves what a definition, any good definition, is supposed to do: providing its audience with the sense that they (the audience) understand the phenomenon, can recognize it, and comprehend meanings it is associated with. In the final chapter of the book I shall broach the subject once more, offering – based upon the description, discussion, and analysis found throughout – some of the primary outlines of this spirit of traditionism in more general terms.

Before I elaborate upon my approach to the empirical research upon which I base my interpretation and arguments in this book, with whose tools I shall set forth and base my argumentation, we must touch upon the way in which Israeli traditionism has been researched, construed, and understood within academic circles.

Israeli traditionists in contemporary research: The predominance of the modernization and secularization discourses

In an article published in 1984, the anthropologist Moshe Shokeid described the development of the way academic research has approached Israeli traditionists as having three distinct stages. Initially traditionism was treated off-handedly, seen to be merely "part of a grouping of traits typically found in traditional society, and not highly regarded by the settled, older parts of society – both secular and orthodox" (Shokeid 1984, 174). The second stage described by Shokeid was marked by a complete disregard of traditionism by

Israeli sociologists, as it was seen to be an expression of folklore not worthy of real academic attention. The third stage, of which Shokeid himself, as well as his long-standing colleague Shlomo Deshen, were prominent examples, was characterized by a reawakened interest in traditionism, an interest that came mostly from the fields of sociology and anthropology.

The paradigmatic framework within which most research projects and debate on the subject of traditionists in Israel took place, as part of this third stage, was the framework supplied by the "modernization and secularization" paradigm. This paradigm tends to construct a web of dichotomous distinctions, contrasting the modern; progressive; rational, and universal (that is, the "secular") with the traditional (or "primitive"); backward; irrational and parochial (i.e. the "religious"). Notably, this paradigm/narrative tends to equate modernity with secularity, predicting (and expecting) that with the advent of modernization, religion is to be "privatized" (that is, excluded from the public sphere). It also predicts that religious belief and practice are bound to decline in light of progressive, enlightened, and scientific modernity (for critical reviews of the secularization paradigm see Swatos and Christiano 1999; Asad 2003; Asad 1999; Bhargava 2005; Berger 1996; Martin 2005; Stark 1999b; Stark 1999a; Taylor 2007; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008).

Stripping down this discourse to the historical narrative upon which it is based we find it telling the story of inevitable progress, leading necessarily and unavoidably towards secularization. Science and rationality are presented as the wind behind the sails of modern history, forcing the retreat of religion from the public domain to the private sphere. Extreme versions of this thesis present modernization and secularization as unbound by theological discourse and as the only way to real liberty. It is on this free and secular basis, so we are told, that humanity becomes self-aware, man becoming the maker of his own history. In such a context there is no more room for religion or tradition as a meta-framework of meaning and behavioral norms. A leading argument of the secularization discourse is that religion's vitality is hurt, and religion weakened in the modern age due to its need to choose between freezing and retreating to pre-modern patterns, on the one hand, and assimilation into the dominant secular order, on the other. The significance of such assimilation is a full retreat from the public sphere (culture, politics, and society) to the private one, ultimately leading to its complete disappearance (van der Veer and Lehman 1999; Asad 1999; Taylor 2007; Lilla 2007; Gellner 1992).

In short, the modernization and secularization thesis sees a fundamental contradiction between religion and tradition, and modernity, rationality, and liberty. In this context, scholars adhering to this thesis see the current, modern age (at least as far as "the West" is concerned) as a distinctly "secular" one. As summed up by one of the champions of the secularization theory, by way of negation, within an ongoing discussion over the theory's validity:

> If profound secularization had not occurred in Europe, the principle of religion and the religious establishment would, to this day, rule the lives

> of the inhabitants of the continent, serving as sources of state authority in law, public and private morals, as well as all other parts of the normative system. Democracy as we know it would not exist; research and science would be limited; churches and synagogues would be packed, and Jews would voluntarily live in ghettos, as their culture is mostly composed of studying holy scripture, their literature is rabbinical texts, and most of their intellectual prowess is invested in *halachic* debates and some mysticism.
>
> (Yovel 2007)

This theory has been the subject of much criticism in recent years. The ensuing debate has given birth to a "post-secular" perspective that has been gaining momentum during the last two decades. This perspective offers a "revisionist" reconsideration of the "orthodox" narrative of secularization. The revisionism at hand involves practically all of the narrative's components, questioning not only the descriptive-analytical merit of the secularization thesis, but also its political and philosophical implications. Critics have pointed, among other things, to the thesis's misevaluation of the role of religion – as an institution – in the modern world (Casanova 1994), its misunderstanding of the role of religious belief and practice in the modern, "secular age" (Taylor 2007; Lilla 2007), and its orientalist sense of the "universalism" of the European-Protestant case (Asad 2003; Casanova 2003; Nandy 1999; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008). As one prominent and heavily influential formulation of this revisionism argues, the secularization thesis is so deficient and lacking – whether in its historical assessment of the role of religion in times past or in its sociological (mis-)understanding of the role or religion today – that it is time to "lay it to rest" (Stark 1999b, 1). Eventually, this criticism amounts to a recognition of the label "post-secular" as adequate not only to describe the shape of the sociology of religion today, but also to identify the (post)modern experience as a whole (see also Hervieu-Leǵer 2000; Hammond 2000; Keenan 2002; Lyon 2000; de Vries and Sullivan 2006).

Most importantly for the purpose of the current discussion, the revisionist, post-secular perspective also argues against the secularization narrative's insensitive imposition of dichotomous, categorical distinctions on the ambivalent, complex, and ambiguous modern (be it "late modern", "high modern"' (Keenan 2002, 282), "postmodern" (Lyon 2000) or "liquid modernity" (Bauman 2000) "projects" of maintaining personal and collective identities (Connolly 1999; Taylor 2007). As Charles Taylor (2007) put it, although some individuals do find themselves comfortable identifying with one "side" or the other (let them be called "secularity" and "religiosity"), most people do not identify with either pole, and choose to conduct themselves somewhere along the continuum suggested by these poles:

> [P]eople take up a stance of this kind in a field which is polarized by the two extreme perspectives; they define themselves in relation to the polar

> opposites, whereas the people in the polar opposition don't return the favour, but usually define themselves in relation to each other, ignoring the middle (or abusively assimilating it to the other side). It is in this sense that the two extreme perspectives define the field.
>
> (Taylor 2007, 431)

And, as William Connolly (1999) shows, this abusive insensitivity, which tends to centralize political discourse around the religious–secular dichotomy, is, critically, ethically lacking. Hence, there is an acute need for an authentic decentralized perspective that transcends secularism's "endlessly circular chain of reference" (Bell 1992, 101; see also Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008). José Casanova's (1994, 38) denunciation of the secularization perspective in America seems to capture this sentiment rather straightforwardly:

> We may say with some confidence that currently, at least in America, both religious "fundamentalist" and fundamentalist "secular humanists" are cognitive minorities, that the majority of Americans tend to be humanists, who are simultaneously religious and secular. The theory of secularization should be reformulated in such a way that this empirical reality ceases to be a paradox.

Nevertheless, it has been in the confines of the secularization and modernization thesis that most, if not all, research on Israeli traditionists has taken place (Yonah and Goodman 2004). The distinction between modern and traditional society was used by many writers as a paradigm wherein the Mizrahi[10] religiousness – considered nearly identical to, if not synonymous with, traditionism – was studied as the expression of "pre-modern Judaism".[11] Large parts of the debate on traditionism were parceled off to the discussion surrounding ethnicity and ethnic identity in Israel (see Goldberg 2001; Goldberg 1985; Ben-Rafael 1982; Ben-Rafael and Sharot 1991). Special attention was paid also to some of the more striking examples of what is seen as a "popular religion" amongst Israeli Mizrahim, most notably the worshiping of saints and the pilgrimage to graves of holy men (for example: Bilu and Ben-Ari 1992; Bilu 2001; Ben-Ari and Bilu 1987; Bilu 1987; Goldberg 1984; Weingrod 1990). Another oft-explored area was that of gender and its place in the process of modernization and secularization as well as the effect of secularization on the "feminine religion" (see Sered 1997; Sered 1990).

The forecast arising from many of these studies is that, within the context of a modern, western, and secular culture in Israel, traditionism's chances of survival are extremely slim. The encounter of Mizrahim, seen to be carrying traditionism as leftover dead weight acquired during their prolonged stay amongst non-European, pre-modern communities, with the allegedly modern, secular, "Western" state of Israel was expected to encourage them, perhaps even compel them to choose one of two mutually and generally exclusive alternatives: secularization (i.e., the completion of the process of modernization

and integration within modern-western-secular culture) or what can be termed "religious fortification", i.e., a retreat into the fold of the religious (orthodox) world – meaning, amongst other things, a (at least partial) severing of the connection with the modern-secular world and shoring up behind the gates of the orthodox community and its culture. In this way Mizrahi traditionism was understood to be a transient phenomenon, empty of any real, positive meaning or essence. As such, traditionism was seen as a passive testimony regarding the incompatibility of Mizrahim with the dynamism of modern secular society. Alternatively, it was suggested that Mizrahi traditionism is surviving not because of any inherent quality, but solely due to some interest-serving function that it was able to fulfill. Thus, for example, it was suggested that traditionism was serving the Mizrahi community in its bid for public resources (Shokeid 1995, 236–37). In this vein, many studies listed those "interfering" elements which slow the process of modernization/secularization and conserve – albeit temporarily – traditionism. Among other things, researchers have highlighted the major role played by the family and the unique position held by rabbis in Mizrahi traditionist society as two primary elements which inhibit modernization/secularization.

Faced with this predictions and explanations, what becomes most poignantly evident is the relative resilience of the traditionist identity: Traditionism did not, despite predictions to the contrary, melt away into other identities. After three generations of "modernization", those identifying themselves as traditionists comprise approximately 35 percent of the Jewish Israeli population.[12] Moreover, if we take into account the rather elaborate system of cross-pressures applied to traditionists, along with the lack of any social institutions supportive of traditionist identity, the challenge posed by the enduring survival of this identity to the thesis of modernization and secularization and the binary constructions suggested by it becomes all the more significant.

In view of the above I would propose the use of an alternative route of investigation mentioned by Shokeid (1984) in the review previously discussed. Shokeid states, in his closing paragraphs, that a third option is available to traditionists (other than assimilation into orthodoxy or secularization), and that option is the transforming of Mizrahi Jewish traditionism into a collective identity structure, one in which traditionism will play a larger role than the one ascribed to it so far. Mizrahi Jewish traditionism, says Shokeid, may, under certain circumstances, influence the dominant secular culture. Shokeid predicts that in a situation in which the divide between Ashkenazi[13] orthodoxy and the dominant secular sector grows large enough, and the Jewish identity of the secular sector seems to weaken as a result, traditionism may become a cross-ethnic construct of identity (Shokeid 1995, 237). And indeed, it now seems possible to detect the first signs of a fourth stage in the attitude towards traditionism – a reawakening of interest which depicts traditionism as a continuous attempt to define, describe, and construct itself as a whole, independent collective identity instilled with positive (that is to say, not

merely a negation of the Other) content, and thus offering a new way in which to frame the debate on Jewish identities in Israel.[14] This book wishes to contribute its share to this new perspective.

The interviews

Guided by my aim of investigating in an interpretive manner the world of meaning constructed around traditionist identity, I have chosen to focus my research on interviews (I believe the term "conversations" would be more appropriate) conducted with Israeli Jews who would choose (at least when asked to do so by surveyors) for themselves the label of "traditionist" in order to define their Jewish identity. These conversation-interviews, dealing mostly with individual and collective identity, were based upon certain premises, or earlier though not exhaustively defined understandings, regarding traditionist identity. I approached these conversations intending to discuss a number of what seemed to me to be important subjects (chosen following preliminary investigations into the phenomenon). These subjects were raised during the course of the conversation. I made clear to my partners in these discussions what the purpose of my research was – inviting them to put any other subject they deemed to be relevant to the study of traditionism on the table. I must stress that these conversation-interviews were not meant to validate any pre-existing assumptions; these assumptions were used as a starting point for a wider debate, a debate which helped bring the insights from which these assumptions first arose into sharper focus, as well as to bring about many new insights. A personal, prolonged, and mostly unmediated familiarity with traditionist culture (I have reservations about such scientific terms as "participatory observation") has helped further my understanding and interpretation of that world, thus furthering the first stage of investigation.

As is natural in such conversations of identity and self-identification, the life stories of my interviewees were commonly raised and discussed. Many times the subject under discussion, namely their identity as traditionists, was placed within the wider context of the overall construction of their identity. Oftentimes they had not previously considered a specific question or issue, and the conversation seemed to challenge some of what they thought to be an unquestionable, obvious part of their identity. These conversations aided me in expanding and better defining the range of subjects to be raised in subsequent meetings with other traditionists, in an ever-dilating circle of interpretation and comprehension.

I found my interviewees using a method usually labeled as "snowballing": I asked to meet with people who would, were they asked to answer the question "How would you define your identity in terms of religiosity?", have chosen the label of "*masorti*". My interest in traditionism as a current phenomenon, typical of contemporary Israeli Jews, limited my search to native-born Israelis, aged 20 to 50. Most interviews were conducted in the interviewee's home. In a large majority of the cases the interviews were conducted without the

presence of any third party. Only on a number of occasions did family members (usually spouses), at home during the time of the interview, ask to join in with the conversation. Participants were promised complete discretion, and many times raised personal and private issues as part of the examination and investigation into their identity encouraged by the conversation.

During the first stage of my work I, personally, had conducted over thirty interviews. During later stages I was aided by three research assistants (two female and one male) who conducted, after having been instructed by me, interviews of their own, while I too continued to conduct these interviews. All in all approximately one hundred interviews were conducted. The interviewees come from several areas in the country, and over half of them are women. About 80 percent are Mizrahim. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. These transcripts were then used as a primary resource upon which my analysis was based. (The names of all parties have been changed in order to conserve their privacy; I shall henceforth use pseudonyms to denote the various speakers.)

I do not presume in any way to present these conversation-interviews as a "methodical", "systematic" research tool (at least not in the sense in which these terms are used by positivist research), one that may award statistical "validity" to my claims, thus "proving" them. Nor do I claim that the group of traditionists with whom I conducted these interviews represents perfectly all traditionists in Israel. Such positivist, "Galilean" (see Rorty 1991), quantitative language is quite at odds with the philosophical outlook which has guided my work. As can be understood from the language used here, I wished to construct my research as a continuous interpretative project, focused around the attempt to deeply comprehend the world of meanings tied in with traditionist identity. Without entering into the philosophical-scientific debate underlying these statements, I shall content myself with repeating my earlier claim that the quantitative-positivistic research methodology (underpinning most comprehensive surveys of religious practice and belief among Israeli Jews) does not help us understand the meaning and significance of the different categories of identity common in Israel. I have tried to use the information provided by these surveys whenever possible, but most of my attention and effort was focused upon trying to understand and interpret. Obviously, this aspect of my research project limits any claims for the universal validity of my findings. Hence, though I shall use general terms inclusive to "all" traditionists, I would like to make it clear that this study, much like any interpretive study, can only offer an indication of major trends, identify the most prominent elements in the construction of traditionist identity, shed light on the dilemmas, complexities, and subtleties of self-identification, and interpret the sets of meanings tied in with them. This study can in no way claim to have universal-statistical validity. All that an interpreter can offer is his interpretation, as convincing or not as it may be. Ultimately a researcher adopting an interpretative position can only say: this is my interpretation; you yourself must either accept it or reject it.

The structure of the book

During the course of the interviews many relevant subjects were raised, not all of which are adequately discussed in the current volume. I chose to focus upon those aspects that shed some light upon the major components of traditionist identity, as these came up throughout the interviews. The book is divided accordingly into chapters corresponding with these components. Chapter 2 delves into the issue of choice and traditionist identity. I shall focus on the ways in which traditionists describe and understand their choice of identity, its limitations, dynamics, and the responses it generates. The way in which traditionists explain this choice and the price they have to pay for it – that is to say: the justifications they build around their traditionist identity – will be the focus of the second part of Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will attempt to trace the "method" underlying the traditionist way of life. Such a discussion is especially important in this case, as traditionists are often accused of being "inconsistent", "incoherent", and people who "do what they feel like", free of any clear guidelines. As my argumentation throughout Chapter 3 attempts to show, I believe that cautious attentiveness to the world of traditionist meanings clearly reveals the traditionist "method" to revolve round what I have termed above (following Bauman) as the traditionist Jewish "identity project". Chapter 3 will also deal with the sense of guilt which could potentially arise from the alleged gap between theory and practice in traditionist life, a sense that some see as inherent to traditionist identity. Chapter 4 covers some of the main elements of traditionist practice in the realm of religious observance. Some readers may expect such a chapter, or one like it – presenting traditionism as the sum of all religious practices adhered to (and ignored by) the individual – would be a good starting point for the whole discussion. My view on this point is obviously different, as I shall later explain. Chapter 4 will instead deal with the world of meaning and significance associated with traditionist observance of *mitzvot* (commandment of Jewish Law), as well as the ways in which they perceive traditionist practice and construe it as a part of their identity. Chapter 5 will explore one of traditionist identity's defining experiences: the cross-pressures applied to traditionists, demanding that they "resolve" (that is to say: abandon) their allegedly hybrid, "inconsistent" identity which supposedly fuses together the two binary opposites of religiosity and secularity. Chapter 6 will attempt to explore the connection between traditionist identity and the components of other identities – as well as the mutual effect they have on each other. Of the myriad possible facets, or dimensions, of one's private and collective identity, two stand out within the context of this study: gender and ethnicity. The first part of the chapter will focus upon the distinctive place which ethnic, or communal (*adati*) identity holds within traditionist identity, investigating the relevance of the identification of traditionism with Mizrahi-ness. Of special interest will be the way traditionists view their ethnic identity as part of their Jewish identity. The final part of the chapter deals with the case of traditionist

women and the ways in which they resolve the potential tensions between their feminine and feminist identities and their proclaimed identity as traditionist Jews.

The following chapters will concentrate on the attitude and positions held by traditionists with regard to a series of relevant identities and issues. Chapter 7 is dedicated to considering the attitudes of traditionists towards the other two dominant identity structures in Israel. The chapter seeks the image of the secular and the orthodox as seen by traditionists, and the way in which these images are used to construct traditionist identity and hone the choice in traditionism. The final part of the chapter examines the traditionist stance on the existing as well as desired connection between religion and morality. As I shall demonstrate therein, the complex position held by traditionists in this issue reveals not only the ideal way in which Judaism should be perceived (an ideal which identifies between morality and religiosity), and their sober recognition of a reality which denies such an ideal (a reality which shows that religious Jews can be immoral people), but also the way in which traditionist identity is constructed upon that tension between desire and reality, between principle and action. Chapter 8 explores the place held by rabbis in traditionists' lifes, as well as what traditionists consider to be the rabbis' proper role in society. The traditionist criticism of the orthodox Rabbinate and their stance regarding reforms of the Halacha are then discussed. The chapter will also examine the traditionist attitude to the non-orthodox movements (the Conservative and Reform movements) seen to represent such *halachic* reform, and felt by some to be specifically targeting (especially in the case of the Conservative movement) traditionists. I hope that this chapter offers at least a partial explanation of the failure of these movements to appeal to the traditionist sector.

As previously mentioned, the matter of traditionist (Jewish, religious) practice is at one and the same time an incomparable point of reference for the study of traditionists' approach to their own identity, and a complex problem clouding the ability to study that identity. The central place awarded to religious observance in traditionist identity is clearly reflected in the interviews. All of the participants had a "grocery list" of the acts of observance which exemplify *their* Jewish practice. Moreover, as can be clearly understood from their explanations of the method guiding this practice and the reasoning behind observing it, practice plays a crucial role in their construction of their Jewish identity, awarding that identity a positive meaning. Using the theoretical terminology introduced earlier on, this practice can be described as comprising the "communicative events" (Boyer 1990, 23), which are the building blocks of tradition. All interviewees are well aware of the tendency to typify traditionists by their "partial" religious observance, and many of them referred to this repeatedly. But this tendency embodies the problematic nature of focusing on traditionist religious practice as the "essence" of traditionism. This approach, which has become dominant in the research field dedicated to the study of Israeli-Jewish identity, is largely responsible for the

inability of researchers to understand the positive content of this identity, preventing them from correctly grasping its complex nature.

To the best of my understanding the root of the problem is to be found in the adoption of orthodox interpretation of Jewish Law as a criterion against which traditionist (as well as secular) practice is measured. Moreover, researchers tend to accept – usually implicitly, but in a very conspicuous and significant way – the binary concept of "all or nothing": a "true" observance of Jewish lifestyle must, according to this attitude, necessitate strict observance of all laws, as construed by the orthodox interpretation of Jewish Law. Secularity is similarly expected to don an equally consistent mantle of disregard for the practices dictated by Jewish Law, or at the very least to deny their theological value.[15] Measured against this yardstick, traditionism is perceived as partial adherence, lacking and inconsistent, of only part of the practices ordered by Jewish Law. As one critic of the "secular vs. religious" system – the system from which the traditionist category in that form is born – put it:

> It is hard to pinpoint exactly what it [the traditionalist category] is composed of, but it is clearly a hybrid category, feeding off the two other categories: "religious" and "secular". In other words "religious" and "secular" are extreme categories representing stable and solid social reference groups; "traditionism", by contrast, is a category which exists between the two – it contains some of the practices and beliefs of the religious category, and some of the freedom and autonomy in fashioning those practices, gained from the secular category.
>
> (Sagi 2006, 202).

The focus given to "religious", orthodox observance inevitably depicts traditionists as trying to have their cake and eat it too: attempting to don the mantle of ("religious") observance of Jewish Law, while simultaneously enjoying the freedom of a "secular" disruption of it. This position is clearly exhibited in the analysis offered by surveyors who measure Israeli Jews' "degree of observance of *mitzvot* and tradition". They describe the traditionist category as divided between those adhering to the "religious aspects" of a certain practice (such as observing Shabbat) and those practicing the "secular aspects" of Israeli identity, eventually disregarding that certain practice.[16]

As I have argued earlier, and as I shall demonstrate below, such a perception of traditionism miscomprehends the phenomenon, undervalues traditionist identity, and lacks the capacity to rightly appraise its importance within the Jewish-Israeli identity structure. Guided by this critical assessment of a "practical" or "observance-guided" definition of traditionism, my discussion of traditionist practice is "pushed back", and is presented subsequent to my analysis of what I understand to be the issues allowing a sensitive understanding of traditionist identity.

2 Traditionism and choice

The element of choice is a crucial component of traditionism as a modern identity. Traditionists, as I have already stated, are not forced into this identity. It is a choice that they make while being intimately aware of the alternative Jewish identities dominant within the Israeli context – secularity on the one hand and orthodoxy on the other. Being aware of them, they reject them consciously. Traditionists often deal with contradicting pressure sources demanding, many times in a persistent and continuous way, that they renounce their "middling identity" and choose one of the above-mentioned dominant options. As such, the uniqueness of traditionist identity cannot be "implicit" and understated or hidden in any way; rather, it becomes explicit and strongly present, requiring a rather high level of self-reflection.

The issue of choice was raised in an overwhelming majority of the interviews. As will be demonstrated throughout the various chapters of this book, its centrality is raised in any number of contexts. Choice dictates traditionists' attitude and relation to many areas of life, from their private life to their social interaction, political stances and cultural preferences. Most generally, traditionists see themselves as choosing this identity in a conscious and basically (though not, as the discussion below shows, absolutely) free manner. The reasons given for this choice, which are explored in one form or another throughout all the following chapters, usually touch upon the traditionists' need to preserve a core of authentic Jewish identity through the changing conditions of modern society, which is commonly identified as secular by nature.

A discussion of the element of choice is important for a number of reasons. The first, more "theoretical", reason is that those who wish to see traditionism categorized as "pre-modern" tend to see it as a static, hereditary, and atavistic identity, not allowing its subjects to be aware of any alternative, thus not allowing them any real choice of other identities. This preconception gave birth to the failed prediction that traditionists' encounter with the allegedly modern and secular Israeli state would inevitably lead them to prefer a modern, national-secular identity over their "inherited" traditionism. An elucidation of the element of choice is, therefore, an important step towards the adoption of a new conceptualization and understanding of

traditionist identity, one which treats it as a (late-) modern, dynamic identity. The other, possibly more important, reason for studying the element of choice is that this investigation reveals some fascinating aspects of traditionist identity. The interviewees' discussions on the matter demonstrated the pressures they deal with, illuminated the components of traditionist identity and their interaction with each other, revealed the dynamism characteristic of this identity, and further clarified traditionists' treatment of other Jewish identities. These issues are all explored below.

Traditionist identity as the product of a conscious choice

The fact that traditionists see themselves as independently and actively choosing their identity was a recurring element in our conversations. Interviewees repeatedly conveyed – using diverse style and vocabulary – that they had, consciously, at a certain stage in their life, chosen to self-identify as traditionists; that this choice is constantly challenged by the non-traditionist environment; that the practical-symbolic implication of this choice varies; and that they find themselves regularly getting reacquainted with this choice.

At the most immediate, easily analyzed level, the element of choice surfaced rather directly and overtly. Thus, several interviewees explicitly emphasized their choice of this identity, stressing that they were not coerced into it, that they could indeed have elected other options, but they prefer traditionism to the alternative identities, the legitimacy of which they do not question: "I'm a traditionist because I chose it," explained, for example, Liora. "I choose. It's not because I'm Jewish and that's that. I'm Jewish. A Jew can be secular, traditionist [*masorti*], or orthodox. I chose traditionist". (It should be noted from the outset that, rather obviously, such a choice is made within a defined, predetermined horizon of the Jewish identities acceptable in Israel; more on this below). Similarly, Meir wished to stress that his traditionism is "absolutely, absolutely" the result of a personal choice, which he continues to actively uphold. This choice had been further put to the test when he left his parents' home and was forced to determine the level of *kashrut* (adherence to Jewish dietary laws) to be kept in the kitchen of his new home:

> I'm now renting a flat with friends, and I keep it kosher; we've made the dishes kosher and everything. I still observe it [*kashrut*], and it is completely my choice. I could have not done it. Most of my friends are completely on the other side.

Meir emphasized that his immediate social environment is not supportive of his choice in traditionism. It is this fact that brings the actuality of his choice into sharper relief. His Jewish identity is a choice taken "despite" and "even though" – a choice which seems to distinguish him, almost in defiance, from his close social circle.

Other people who spoke of such a conscious choice described their close

family as their immediate "audience", in front of whom their decision is finally clarified. For them the choice of traditionism was part of better defining their personal identity versus that of their parents and siblings, part of the consolidation of their identity. Ruth told of such an early experience. She started by conveying her early recognition that she was "different from the others": "As far back as I can remember myself I have defined myself as a traditionist from a traditionist home. I understood that there were secular people and religious people, and I was in the middle." Ruth made a point of emphasizing that this was not retrospective credit given to an identity dictated to her by her parents, because even as a child she decided to be "stronger" (i.e., more observant) than them. Moreover, from a very young age she was well aware of the high price she would have to pay for the choice she made:

> The traditionist way of life is the hardest. I feel I'm quite a social hermit. Being orthodox is easy, because the way of life around you is set for you. Also to be secular is the easiest. A secular person has no limitations.

Liat related a similar choice of a "stronger", more observant identity than the one characterizing her parents. She noted that while still a child she kept stricter observance to *mitzvot* than her parents did: "My parents don't read *Tehilim* [The biblical book of Psalms, which is often recited as a prayer book] . . . I make a point of reading *Tehilim* every day. My mother may light Shabbat candles, but I am more preoccupied by it." This choice does not go unnoticed by the family: "They always laugh at me that I am too much." Obviously – and this is the point Liat wished to stress – this relative "strengthening" is not forced upon her by any outside source: "I do it because I want to. I enjoy reading *Tehilim* and lighting Shabbat candles. It is not out of fear."

Traditionists' awareness of their personal choices plays a central role in the potential surfacing of feelings of guilt, or at least an increased self-awareness of their Jewish way of life in all its complexities and alleged "inconsistency". Traditionists often see themselves as making personal decisions and statements in areas which, for others, are predetermined. Dealing with the ramifications of this self-awareness does take its toll; see, for example, Sigal's discussion of the consequences of her choice of a traditionist lifestyle (adopted after leaving, with her husband, the orthodox community within which they lived) as a constant process of invention and construction:

> It is very difficult. I make the decisions at home because my husband [who became secular] would probably do everything [that is to say: would not respect any religious law]. I decide whether it is allowed to turn on the light and use the microwave, whether we can play on the computer [on Shabbat] . . . And I keep on trying to balance between tradition and

> keeping hold of the uniqueness of the day [Shabbat] and freedom, I don't know what to call it.

Sigal's description also clearly demonstrated the persistent sense of guilt for "not doing enough" that her choice produces.

The feeling of guilt, however, is but one aspect of the price this choice forces one to pay. This price has also a more concrete, material aspect:

> When it [traditionism] comes from a choice, as it does with me, you pay a very heavy price for it: [for example] you don't have sex [as a bachelor], certain things . . . You feel it every day, the guilt . . . for what you do and don't do. There is this horrible feeling like you are missing something, because maybe, if I were somewhere else, if I had made different choices . . . I, personally, don't regret it [choosing traditionism].
>
> (Tehila)

Such testimonies also reveal – though implicitly so – the central role played by the images of "the religious" (or "orthodox") and "the secular" in the traditionist choice; traditionists see themselves as constructing their identity in the face of these "prototypical" identities, representing (as I shall discuss extensively in later chapters) the polar limits of the available choices. As such archetypal, "total" poles, the images of the religious and the secular come to embody a seduction set against which the traditionist choice is made. "Absolute" secularity, for example, offers the allure of complete and unfettered personal liberty in which the individual is not restrained by any limits, thus highlighting the traditionist choice to accept external limitations and behavioral dictations. Revital's retelling of her experience with the secular way of life, prior to having chosen traditionism, is a direct, if somewhat "new age", description of a stance held by many others:

> I am passing [secularity] up after having tried. I'm giving up after having seen. Giving up on the comforts, the seafood [i.e., eating non-kosher food], certain forms of entertainment . . . I've had tattoos made [forbidden by the Jewish Law], had piercings, smoked dope, everything . . . I can't say I missed out on something. I have changed men like underwear . . . Quite the opposite, there was nothing to it, and there was nothing there. It gives you momentary pleasure. But spiritual things last much longer.

On the other hand, Revital's decision is shaped also by facing the allure inherent in the image of orthodox life as a life of all-encompassing, complete faith and absolute certainty in one's lifestyle, due to which "they [the orthodox Jews] have no fear". When confronted with that image Revital, having chosen to live in the midst of the secular temptation, does not enjoy the solace offered by complete confidence in one's way of life.

Faced with these temptations, traditionists view themselves as loyal to

a personal and collective Jewish essence. This is an empowering choice, allowing traditionists to deal with pressures applied from both secular and orthodox directions. In the same vein, interviewees' repeated assertions that the possibility of leaving traditionism is forever present and viable should be seen as the natural conclusion of choice. If traditionism is not dictated from above, then it cannot be constant, set, unchanging, either. As an option that does not force or dictate, but rather offers the possibility of self-expression, traditionism becomes the "right" choice, even where it seems characterized by inconsistency: "This is what is beautiful, I think, about traditionism, the part about choosing" (Ziva).

The limits of choice: family, emotion, and intellect

As can already be inferred from the discussion above, even where traditionists describe themselves as completely independent and free in their choice of traditionism, this contention is repeatedly qualified. The most poignant of these qualifications is the role played by personal history. Most of those claiming to have chosen traditionism were first introduced to it at home; they were raised in traditionist families and had acquired traditionist practices as children, and have learnt of the alternatives only at a later age (mostly during high school or their service in the military). Their choice of traditionism was further consolidated and shaped in light of their acquaintance and interaction with such alternative identities.

The choice of a traditionist identity turns out to be, therefore, a choice that is forever a rather restricted choice: It is a choice mostly – though not always – made on the basis of an early, intimate acquaintance with the traditionist lifestyle. As Limor explained:

> At first it is a matter of the home in which one is raised and educated . . . As time passes it turns into a choice . . . Certain things are embedded . . . much like brushing your teeth in the morning. And certain things stem from choice.

Without presuming to delve into an exhaustive philosophical investigation of whether one is truly free to choose one's identity, it can be said that, much like any other identity, traditionism is obviously not chosen out of thin air, but rather based on previous knowledge and early conditioning. What is important to us is the attention paid, as well as the point made by several interviewees to stress the tension between their feeling of having chosen traditionism independently and freely and their recognition of the fact that this identity is part of a family "inheritance". Gideon, for example, described traditionism as something "planted" within you, later to be chosen freely. Gideon's point of departure for this statement was his belief that traditionism is not a behavior that had been dictated to him by his parents: "I dictated it to myself. It comes from my choice." Traditionism, which he decided upon

as a child, is his way to preserve that "essential thing" which is vital to his being. And what of the influence of his home environment and education on this decision?

> Anything planted within a person, at a certain stage in life – it could be when one is fifteen years old, twenty, or more – a thinking man chooses his own way, his own limits and rules. He says: "That suits me more, that suits me less." For me, what was at my parents' house suited me.

Similarly, another interviewee explained that his traditionism is a "completely conscious" choice, brought on by the education he received at home: "It is all a choice. It is all my choice," he clarified.

> *Q:* And why did you choose traditionism?
> *A:* First of all that is how I was raised, but I liked it as well, so I stuck to it. (Liron)

The choice comes as the peak of a process of self-recognition; for most interviewees, those who come from traditionist homes, this is not a choice of a completely new and unknown identity, but rather a process of choosing based upon learning, or a choice based on the foundations of education received at home. This, for example, is how Zehavit described her choice to light candles on the eve of Shabbat, after having extensively elaborated upon her rebellion against any coercive dictation:

> It could be that this is something which was passed on to me from my mother, but it is a thing that stays, because it is out of my choice that I feel good lighting [Shabbat] candles. Because it is beautiful . . . I decide for myself that it suits me.

For Tzipora, this process of an independent choice feeding off the education given in the home explains traditionist identity as a whole, "like everything in life which you do and only later learn about yourself what its definition was". Another interviewee explained that the solution for the tension between an educational, practical legacy from home on the one hand and personal choice on the other is the formation of a personal "theory" based upon different sources, of which the education given at home is but one. He described his practices as a traditionist as based upon studying, reflection, examination, experiencing, and choosing: "It is the sum total of the things. When I was a boy, a child, you heard things at home. You also read books. They gave you a little something at school, too. You build your theory from a collection of things" (Tomer). This theoretical-practical amalgam is unique to the individual holding it:

> No one has the collection (of practices) that I have. Every person, he has

> his own collection . . . I have brothers, but they didn't go to school where I did, and even if they did, their behavior was different . . . You build for yourself out of the collection of things you accumulated in your life your theory, and with it you live.
>
> (Tomer)

What, with Tomer, seems to be an educated, theoretical reasoning is articulated by another woman as a matter of emotion. The traditionist lifestyle is familiar to her from her childhood and home, and she chooses – a conscious choice – to practice it as a positive response to those emotions:

> I decided that that is what I want . . . because I love it. I love the "before-Passover" – the cleaning frenzy . . . or before Shabbat . . . preparing everything because you do not light a fire or work [during Shabbat]. I love it; it does the heart good."
>
> (Ziva)

"The good feeling" is also what will determine if traditionism is to be abandoned. As emphasized by Ziva: "If I wouldn't feel it, I wouldn't do it."

Another interviewee seemed to be moving between the cerebral and the emotional when describing his choice of traditionism as a choice to demonstrate loyalty to something chosen not by him, but by his parents: "You do what was practiced at home. That is what I did, without understanding why" (Gidi). After having tested the limits of behavior, breaking the rules of observance he had inherited and learning "what it was like to be secular", he chose to return to that same traditionism "like Father was". Roni seemed to be following in Gidi's footsteps when he stated: "I choose to do what was dictated to me, what I learned at home from my father and grandfather." He was able to better clarify the consequence and meaning of choice under such conditions: The various practices and rules of conduct to be observed as well as the manner in which this is done were determined by others, by "father and grandfather"; the decision whether to keep on doing so, and if so which part, is already a matter of the individual's free decision and personal choice: "The element of choice is whether to observe [certain *mitzvot*] or not. What to practice, and how – that is dictated from above." This subtle play is demonstrated by Roni through a fairly familiar interaction – a father asking his son to join him in synagogue:

> I have a friend whose father keeps on bugging him to come to synagogue. With us it isn't like that . . . there is no coercion by the parents. The most it could get to is my father asking: "Are you coming to synagogue?" And this is where the element of choice comes in. My father wouldn't even be insulted if I didn't come. I choose to come and practice.

The parents' role in establishing the traditionist identity of their children is

both significant and limited. The most commonly held viewpoint was that of the parents as offering their children a framework, which the children are then free to adopt, reject or adjust if they so want. In other words, more in line with the tone adopted by the participants: Traditionism is not a coerced identity. Even parents cannot force their children to adopt this identity. In this manner, Ravit clarified that the element of choice completely voids her parents' capability to dictate her own behavior. Even were she not to observe *mitzvot* (in a traditionist way), her parents would have no way to compel her to do otherwise: "I don't think they [her parents] would say something to me. Maybe they wouldn't be happy with it [a non-traditionist behavior] but they would never force me; I'm in a place where I am content with it [her traditionist practices] now." This means that even if her parents present her with a "coercive" request, she has already agreed to it beforehand – which nullifies any coercive element. Roni offered the distinction between the explicit, overt level, and the implicit, subconscious level as a possible solution for this tension; no one forces traditionism upon him, he explained, "at least not openly".

The interviews reveal that Jewish practice – that is to say: the manner in which *mitzvot* are observed and the certain lifestyle adopted – are the distinct area in which the element of choice is most clearly evident. Participants also stressed that the children's choice can diverge from the limits set by their parents. They can be more or less observant, practicing more or less strictly any of the *mitzvot*. Keren, for example, explained that while she was searching for meaning in her life she decided, amongst other things, that she should, morally, keep stricter practice of more *mitzvot* than her parents do: "I choose to observe a bit more [than her parents do] and practice more of the *mitzvot*, such as the [ritual] washing of the hands [before meals] and the morning prayer. We have always had the freedom to choose."

Gideon, who also chose to be stricter than his parents, demonstrated the tension that could be created by these differences:

> We come to our parents on the eve of Shabbat, and they want to give the grandchildren [Gideon's children] pocket money. When my kids were young I kept my mouth shut, but when my daughter grew up I started telling my mother "Not today. There is enough money. Give pocket money on another day and not on Shabbat." That is part of the issues of choice or no choice.

Ruth had a similar story of being more observant than her parents. In her case they were only too happy to follow her lead:

> I started at the age of ten to make a point of not turning on the TV [on Shabbat]. My parents followed suit [up until then they used to watch TV on Shabbat]. I'm more observant than my parents . . . At the age of ten, due to no special situation, I realized that I am Jewish and that that

> obliges me to do certain things. [Observing] Shabbat seemed like the most elementary . . . I have practiced the same *mitzvot* since the age of ten.

Moreover, some see the whole spectrum of different levels of observance as the ultimate proof that even though "it [traditionism] is something that exists at home" (Ziva), it is still a matter of choice:

> It's not that when we were children someone told us, "Listen, kids, we are traditionists" . . . I have a sister who is a real heathen . . . my brother has recently become stronger [more observant]. You can see the different levels in the house. That is something that shows that it really does come from choice.
>
> (Ziva)

Sometimes the individual choice of traditionism is arrived at from within an orthodox or secular house, which does not encourage the traditionist way of life. This was the case for Bina, who had been raised in a secular household, and at the age of twelve decided along with some friends that she would fast on Yom Kippur: "I was the only one at home who fasted . . . I think I had leaned towards it [traditionism] from childhood. I felt like a heroine, that I am doing something important," she explained. An even more common story is that of the "former orthodox" who chose a traditionist lifestyle; I shall elaborate upon this issue later on in the chapter.

Dynamism, change, and choice

One of the most evident expressions of choice is the rather dynamic character of the traditionist practice of Jewish customs. Interviewees repeatedly told us of variations in their degree and manner of practice.[1] Many also made the point of stating that they expect their practice to change again in the future. The interviews make it clear that traditionist practice is perceived to be changeable, just as long as these changes remain within those borders dictated by traditionist identity. It would seem to me that it is this perception which demonstrates most clearly the traditionist element of choice: he who chooses his identity gets to choose also its practical content. Traditionists, at least, do see these changes in their lifestyle as an expression of personal choice.

This dynamism is possible within that pre-set boundary defined by "obligation" and "comfort", which establishes the essential core of traditionist Jewish identity; the option of change, as well as the choice upon which it is based, are limited to that realm between the traditionist desire to preserve his authentic Jewish identity (expressed by Jewish practices and observance of *mitzvot*) and the comfort of self-identifying freely. Within that prescribed (be it only in the broadest strokes) zone the variety of traditionist possibilities manifests itself.

The interviews show that traditionists do not hesitate in making such

changes. At times, emotion and personal values determine such moves. Such, for example, was Koren's discussion of the sense of well-being and wholeness that his traditionist identity provides him with. This feeling is reaffirmed and enhanced by the possibility of changing his behavior: "I am doing what feels comfortable and right, right now. If I were to feel, at another stage in my life, that it would be right for me to wear a *kippa* [= skullcap, or Jewish ritualistic headgear; a mark of orthodoxy in the Israeli context; pl. *kippot*], I will wear a *kippa*. It is fully my choice."

Changes in personal status are one of the most notable motivations for the changing of traditionist practices: Marriage and the birth of children especially appear to be key moments in traditionist practical choices. A spouse wishing to adjust him/herself to the new family situation, which could be either more or less tolerant of a traditionist way of life, and a parent seeking to endow his/her children with a sense of Jewish identity, are often obliged to modify their behavior-practice so as to match such new circumstances in life. Participants repeatedly commented about the relative ease with which these changes are undertaken.

Michal and Tuvia, a married couple, were amongst those who discussed such a process. Michal, who testified to being the force behind the couple's choice of traditionism, said that as a young girl her traditionism was (as in many other cases) characterized by a distinction between home and outside: "At my parents' house . . . I practiced, but with my girlfriends I partied like all teenagers." When they married, Tuvia was very far from a traditionist way of life (a counter-reaction, he explained, to religious coercion he experienced as a child). Their marriage and the birth of their children brought about the joint choice of traditionism, initiated by Michal: "After the wedding I grew closer to traditionism. I choose it [that they become traditionist]. My husband . . . had become very anti-religious. When the girls were born I strongly encouraged him to go to synagogue." Tuvia stressed that this is still a shared decision: "I feel good about it [their traditionist lifestyle] . . . If it didn't suit me I wouldn't practice it. I do it willingly." Both of them emphasized that they are very well aware – as they both grew up in orthodox homes and lived for long periods as non-observant seculars – of the available alternatives, and that they consciously choose traditionism. As such their choice is characterized by self-assurance: "If it wasn't good for me, I wouldn't flow with it. I am comfortable with what I am doing" (Tuvia).

The dominance of choice, as well as the dynamism which permits it (while at the same time nourishing on it) projects onto the way in which traditionists view the possibility of "strengthening" and becoming more observant. Many participants expressed the will – or at the very least discussed the option – in the future, to pay stricter attention to more *mitzvot*. Nevertheless, as they repeatedly emphasized, this "strengthening" too is reversible (and thus less threatening). Bina, who during our conversations considered positively the possibility of "strengthening", unequivocally set the limits on such a process. Should she "strengthen", she said, she would have to forego certain

indulgences that characterize her current lifestyle: "I will give up, but only to a certain limit. I will not give up everything, and it will be done gradually. If I were to see that it no longer suits me – you can always go back."

Choice and the social surrounding – choosing against the backdrop of cross-pressures

One of the elements highlighting choice, making it both explicit and conscious, is the pressure put on traditionists by both orthodox and secular Israeli Jews.[2] The criticism against their alleged "hybrid" lifestyle, accusing them of being inconsistent and trying to enjoy the best of two allegedly incompatible worlds, forces traditionists to be conscious of their choices. In fact, given that this pressure is both continuous and constant, the choice must be as well. A traditionist cannot "forget" his choice. Neither the orthodox environ nor the secular one, both of which are ever present in traditionist life, permit that lifestyle to be taken for granted; hence, it cannot remain unconscious and implicit.

The subject of cross-pressures or, in other words: the critical gaze directed at traditionists by both "the religious" and "the secular", was repeatedly raised by interviewees, most often when they wished to stress the adamancy of their choice of identity. Baruch, for example, demonstrated his contentedness with his choice by recounting a story about the weekly Torah lesson he attends every Saturday. The rabbi in charge had described the traditionist practice as desecrating Shabbat. This angered Baruch:

> He [the rabbi] started to say that it is enough that you made yourself a cup of coffee on Shabbat, and already you have done a deed that should not have been done, thus desecrating Shabbat. I told myself: "Oh God! I came to study the Parasha [The weekly portion of the Torah] and he goes and slips me one? That's out of place."

As far as Baruch is concerned such exaggerated *halachic* statements will not change his traditionist practice:

> This is already my fourth year of studying the Torah [on Saturdays, in the synagogue]. And I don't change – I do my thing: I take the car, drive [on a Shabbat, in which it is forbidden] to the pool, swim, refresh my body and then go to the synagogue to refresh my soul.

Baruch would probably agree with Tamir's statement, according to which the orthodox have become too extreme: "I don't know if they are closer to the Lord's way. I live in a way in which I am completely at peace with myself and don't need to prove anything to anyone. I don't regret anything." And yet, with all the assurance displayed by these and many other traditionists, it is obvious that continuous Rabbinical-orthodox criticism repeatedly challenges

their choice, practically forcing them to be constantly aware of its "uniqueness", if not to its perversion or defects (at least as far as the rabbis are concerned).

As already mentioned, such pressures are not uniquely orthodox. The secular gaze upon traditionists tends to be a critical one as well, implying that a change of practice is necessary. As can be seen in Ravit's statement, this insinuated demand for a change also encourages traditionists to be self-consciously aware of their choices, and in Ravit's case even putting her to the test:

> There is someone in my class who keeps on asking me why I won't eat pork or those sea insects, sea food. So I ask myself: why don't I eat them? Maybe I'm just used to not eating them because that is what God expects of me? So shouldn't I eat them? Because God said not to eat them?

Another interviewee, also talking of pressure from the secular side, painted a lighter, more positive picture of it: Despite the common view of traditionists as individuals who "do what they feel like", he explained, these pressures do not permit him to avoid essential questions about his identity. These questions seem to reappear constantly, requiring clarification, definition, and reaffirmation, as he has to define his identity not only to himself, but must, rather, market it as legitimate to his whole surroundings. He perceives this to be a pleasant experience: "It's a question of attitude. I find it pleasant; there are other people who find it hard" (Gil). The possible difficulty was demonstrated through a personal story dealing with the secular demands put to the traditionist:

> I grew up in a house in which we dealt with it in a much harsher way . . . because the environment was secular . . . I was in the Boy Scouts, when I was in seventh grade. I came home one day . . . and told my parents that we have a workday on Saturday in the Boy Scouts. That was one of the first times I heard my father say . . . "This is not what I came here [to Israel] for, we can go back". It was a cultural shock for him . . . I didn't go to the activities on Saturdays. As a child it was a very difficult thing to deal with, because I go to the fun activities [not on Saturdays] but I don't come to the workday. As a child I had something very difficult to deal with, but also a bracing one.

Without self-persuasion and self-assurance of purpose (as is evident in some of the above quotes), the traditionist could find herself giving in to the pressure. And, as a few interviewees testified, changes of behavior due to such pressures do not go unnoticed or without a social reaction – often further criticizing the traditionist for being "fickle". The interviews also revealed that the "surrender" to cross-pressures can propagate a sense of guilt or self-criticism, which in turn can also demand a reaffirmation of the traditionist choice.

When? Choice as a stage of self-identification

The social environment's attitude towards the traditionist choice hinges also on another issue: that of the timing in which the choice of traditionism was taken. The nature of this choice of identity – a choice with ramifications extending throughout the daily life of the individual as well as his position and general stance in and towards the social texture and structure – points to the general timing in which the choice was ultimately formulated. Even though the range in which this choice is distinctly made is not a manifestly narrow one (the range of ages is wide, starting at early childhood through to late adulthood), the question of timing of the choice usually elicits a similar "social" response: It occurs when the individual discovers the "others", whose behavior is different, and is thus required to understand and define his/her own uniqueness and its meaning.

The interviewees' encounters with various social institutions – most markedly school and the military – emerge as central to the process of choosing. The heterogeneity, especially present in the military, leads traditionists through a series of experiences which shed new light on their identity and practice: "In the army they tell you: traditionist, secular . . . you should define yourself" (Batya). Lacking the family's ready-made answers, one must define oneself. And when the traditionist identity is not the predominantly present one within the immediate social environment, this choice can become an act of seclusion, sometimes even isolation:

> In the military . . . you don't live with your parents, so you make your own rules. You decide what you will do on Shabbat, you determine what you will eat and how, you go out with friends, you set your behavior with the opposite sex; and I choose to distinguish myself from my surroundings.
>
> (Hila)

Liav's retelling of the process of choosing a traditionist identity captures some of the prominent elements discussed so far. His point of departure was the conflicting messages he received from his parents. "My father is a traditionist and my mother is completely secular. The house has always been kosher, but when she is out of the house my mother eats whatever she feels like." And, like many others, Liav too experienced military service as a place and a time in which personal freedom supersedes obligations of tradition and identity:

> There was a certain period in which I broke nearly all the possible rules of keeping kosher. During military service I was exposed to things I was never exposed to before . . . I had the freedom to do whatever I wanted.

His choice of traditionism, arrived at in his mid twenties, is portrayed as the result of a conscious, more cerebral than emotional, decision to be true to his

Jewish identity, which he demonstrated through a story about his decision to put on the *tefilin* (phylacteries) every morning:

> I decided about a year ago. I work with religious people, and I thought that one of the most basic Jewish *mitzvot* is that of wearing the *tefilin*. I thought about it and reached the conclusion [that he should do it]. After my Bar Mitzvah I kept on wearing *tefilin* for two years, but during adolescence it is easy to evade this . . . Now I am slowly returning to it.

The motive for this and other decisions made by Liav is his aspiration to be true to what he sees as the core of his Jewish identity. In his tale the Jewish and the Zionist identity merge to become a single, unified Jewish ethno-national conceptualization:

> When putting on the *tefilin* you consider your essence as a Jew. There are many things which lead up to this. The way Israeli society looks . . . And anyway, go as far back as you can – the Balfour declaration about the building of a Jewish home for the Jewish people in the land of Israel. And that Jew . . . I feel it is lost. You are educated here [in Israel] to be more Israeli than Jewish.

The case of the "formerly religious"

The impression of the traditionist choice is best felt in the case of current traditionists who were raised in orthodox homes and left that world. For many of those (who often term themselves "*datlashim*", a Hebrew abbreviation for "formerly religious") the traditionist choice came as part of a long process of self-reflection and dealing with difficult, profound questions regarding their identity. The exit path from the orthodox world is not the main subject here, and has received substantial academic attention elsewhere (see for example Barzilai 2004; Lev 1998). In the context of the current discussion it should be noted that this process involves dealing with the negative images commonly held of both traditionists and seculars within the orthodox world. Formerly orthodox interviewees presented their choice of traditionism as a continuous undertaking involving the examination of the different alternatives and dealing with their personal and social ramifications. This is exemplified in Tamar's explanation of her decision to become traditionist:

> I studied in an *ulpena* [religious girls' school] and there I grew "stronger" . . . When I joined the military I became, as they say, totally licentious . . . I was recalcitrant for a few years . . . I didn't even observe Shabbat . . . But some of the things have come back. I think they are the main things. That is Shabbat and keeping kosher; this is the base, when all is said and done.

For Tamar, then, traditionism represents a return to that Jewish essence she

had lost when she became "licentiously" secular. Traditionism allows her to conserve her Jewish identity and, in no small way, cleanses her of her sense of guilt for having left the orthodox world:

> It was a long and drawn-out process of leaving all that religious life . . . I felt pangs of guilt . . . I wasn't calm or at peace with myself. I'd go out on a Friday evening, come back home at five in the morning, and my father would be leaving for synagogue. I didn't feel right; I felt really empty. Throughout Shabbat I would torment myself. I'd tell myself: "Why did you have to light a cigarette on Shabbat, for what? For a momentary pleasure?" But if I can't feel at ease with myself, then why? So very slowly I told myself: "You owe your soul something, to go back to your roots." So I did, but not full throttle.

The process by which the "formerly religious" instill their newly found self-identification as traditionists with content and meaning (that is, the process of rebuilding their Jewish identity) is a present, conscious, and continuous undertaking, which demands much of their attention. These interviewees repeatedly stressed that their choice is a long and complex process. "All my life I am dealing with it," said one of the participants who followed her husband in leaving the orthodox world; "It's a process . . . All our lives we [her and her husband] deal with it" (Sigal). Her conclusion from this process is a preference for traditionism over secularity or orthodoxy:

> Now, after having gone through a lot, I don't want to be completely secular. It doesn't interest me. I don't consider it to be some fantasy I want but could never have. I am very attached to tradition. I want to keep that without being orthodox. You can get to traditionism even without being on both extreme ends.

The reasons for choosing traditionism and their meaning

Any discussion of the web of meanings with which traditionists instill their choice will be incomplete without a careful examination of the way they describe and explain the reasons behind this choice. The following discussion deals with these questions.

The interviews reveal a wide range of reasoning, which reflects a complex system of identification and meaning. These reasons-explanations shed light on the way in which traditionist practice and lifestyle form a basis of identity, being a system of behaviors which express and reaffirm traditionists' identification as Jews. In this context the sense of historical commitment and collective identity seem to be the main motivations for choosing the traditionist lifestyle. The interviewees also touched upon the emotional aspect of this choice, underlining the positive feelings they associate with traditionist life. The belief in God and the will to carry out His commandments also play a

central role in this regard. I shall open with what presents itself as the most central argument, which presents observance of a traditionist lifestyle as a means by which to conserve and reaffirm one's Jewish identity.

Identity and meaning

The important role traditionist lifestyle plays in expressing and reaffirming the interviewees' Jewish identity and their commitment to preserve their collective identity as descendants of the Jewish people surfaced repeatedly throughout the interviews. They choose traditionism because as far as they are concerned it is the right – and perhaps the only practical and possible, at least for them – way to conserve their identity as Jews, and to express their sense of commitment as members of the Jewish people. Traditionism and the Jewish identity it expresses provide the individual with a fulfilling, positive sense of meaning and wholeness. This, for example, was how Michal put it:

> We feel good about it [traditionism], and that is why we live this life . . . It's better, it's more normative and cultured, and it ties me in to the culture of the Jewish people. And that is very important because tradition is the culture. And without tradition we would have no existence as a people.

The connection between these seemingly separate levels – the collective obligation and the personal pleasure, the rational duty and emotional satisfaction – was commonly present in the interviews. This combination asserts the invalidity inherent in any attempt to artificially create such distinctions when dealing with questions of identity. In its simplest articulation, this argument says that traditionism means "preserving my Jewish identity. You have to hold on to tradition as part of the Jewish identity" (Ronit); "Giving my family this thing explaining where they come from. Not to completely shake ourselves free from Judaism. That, to me, is tradition" (Zehavit). In this fashion many participants argued there is a direct, necessary connection between Jewish identity and the observance of a traditionist lifestyle: "I observe *mitzvot* because I am Jewish. I define myself as more Jewish than Israeli" (Koren); "I'm Jewish, I'm supposed to do this [observe *mitzvot*]" (Batya). The observance of a traditionist way of life is, therefore, necessary "so as to feel Jewish . . . This is how Judaism is expressed" (Tamar).

This seems to be a powerful motivation for observing a traditionist lifestyle, as it touches upon the foundations of personal identity. The alternative to the preservation of this identity is seen as a meaningless void:

> Jewish tradition is your home, it's your roots, your sense of belonging to where you are. A person cannot live in a vacuum. I think it's a shame for those who do not hold on to the tradition. Their life seems pretty empty to me.
>
> (Tamar)

Accordingly, many have described themselves as having a deep internal feeling of commitment towards traditionism, in whose name they attempt to observe this lifestyle, which can be very demanding:

> I have a Jewish soul. I have something in my soul that will not leave me. And it's not a bother that will not leave me, it is something I love very much . . . I am proud, I go to synagogue gladly, because I want to. And when I go to the pool on Saturday [forbidden according to the Orthodox interpretation of Jewish Law], I also go because I want to. I don't like complete secularity.
>
> (Sigal)

The last part of Sigal's words emphasizes the need to contextualize our discussion of this Jewish self-identification. Sigal, like many other interviewees, sees her traditionist behavior as distinguishing her from secular Israeli-Jews, whom she views as ignoring and forfeiting their obligation towards their Jewish identity.

In the context of a culture which portrays secular lifestyle as free, enlightened, released from all archaic constraints, modern and progressive, traditionism may become a heavy burden, one which takes its social toll. In this vein, one of the interviewees conveyed how her adherence to a traditionist way of life distinguishes her as a Jew, but also differentiates and, perhaps, isolates her from her secular co-workers. Her discussion revealed traditionist identification as taking a heavy price. She told of various opportunities in which her observance of certain Jewish practices turned into a joke amongst colleagues. Her reaction reveals the way in which traditionism distinguishes her identity as a Jew as well as her exception from the non-traditionist majority:

> They all made fun of me. I was the only one who paid attention [to issues of Jewish practice]. It was very unpleasant. But my faith is so strong, so I'm proud of that. Because of being Jewish I behave in accordance with special expectations. Keeping kosher, for example, distinguishes the Jews.
>
> (Ruth)

The justification for such a social price touches directly upon the intimate feelings of identification, meaning and content: "I stick to it [the traditionist lifestyle] because the soul needs my place, my frame" (Keren). If this need goes unfulfilled life is perceived to be meaningless: "There is no value to a life like that [without observing a traditionist lifestyle]. What is the point? Where is all the money, the action, the meaning? When you relate to the meaning of a person's life" (Tomer).

Several interviewees also testified to having discovered the need to reaffirm their Jewish commitment only when they lived abroad, amongst a non-Jewish majority. It was in these situations that they were exposed to the improbability of the Israeli "Jewish by default" option, finding themselves called to

personally reaffirm their Jewish identity through the upholding of the traditionist way of life. One of these was Batya, who had lived a number of years in the US:

> When you are far from your group you have to take greater care of your identity, to externalize it. When you are amongst the Gentiles, what are you going to do? You have to further externalize [your identity] so that they know I do not belong to them. So that I, too, know that I do not belong to them. I would walk around with a [necklace medallion of] Star of David . . . At work they always used to ask me if I am Christian. And I answered that I am Jewish. I didn't eat at work events, because the food was not kosher. I explained why I do not eat it . . . There [in the US] we attended synagogue more often.

Batya explained that the experience abroad showed her the extent to which her Jewish identity is intertwined with the Israeli one, and just how easy is Jewish identification in Israel: "Traditionism is being Israeli," she explained, "because here people don't need to go to synagogue to be Jewish." She also did not hesitate to describe the practicing of a traditionist lifestyle within a non-Jewish majority as an uncomfortable, though necessary, chore:

> When abroad you have to [stick to a Jewish way of life], because if I don't no one will know, and at a certain stage I will also forget, and be assimilated. Because it is comfortable. Being Jewish is a task . . . it is a chore.

Other participants also discussed a similar need to reaffirm their Jewish identity in Israel itself, when faced with non-Jewish Israelis.

Seemingly, it could be deduced that the observance of a traditionist lifestyle in Israel, amongst a Jewish majority, becomes redundant, as one's Jewish identity is practically a "given" of one's very Israeliness. However, interviewees stressed that such a conclusion would be fundamentally wrong. Traditionists find themselves having to observe a traditionist lifestyle in Israel, when faced with that "taken for granted" version of Judaism held by many Israelis.[3] Thus, if a non-Jewish majority abroad naturally underlines the need to distinguish one's Jewish identity, Israeli secularity, whose Judaism is a "default" option, not seen to need any special, practical commitment, also fails to fulfill the need for Jewish identification. The secular Israeli (state-run) education, explained one interviewee, "has no values" (Liron), and causes the disintegration of whatever national feeling of identification there is. These issues will be dealt with later on, while discussing the image traditionists have of the secular world.[4] At this stage, suffice it to say that, being (an inclusive) base of identity reaffirmation and instilling meaning in one's identification as a Jew, traditionist lifestyle is also used to (negatively, exclusively) distinguish not only Jews from non-Jews but also those who preserve a measure of loyalty to their Jewish past from those who do not.

Judaism and Jewish identity are therefore seen as more comprehensive than a (secular) national identity. An authentic Jewish identification requires observance of a ("religious" or "traditional") Jewish lifestyle, and cannot content itself with a national definition of Judaism (i.e., "Israeliness"). A fascinating expression of this stance was to be found in the interview with Michal, when her daughter Keren (who identifies herself as secular) joined the conversation and presented the common version of the Zionist argument for a national-Jewish identity: "Judaism is not only a religion, it is a nationality," explained Keren. "A person is Jewish, much as he is German or French, by nationality. Jewish is belonging to a people." Her conclusion was that traditionism is an addition to Jewish identity, and not its essential core. Her mother, Michal, identifying herself as a traditionist, would not accept this nationalist argument. To her the traditionist way of life is necessary to the very definition of Jewish identity, to be distinguished from Israeli identity. As for the national identification described by her daughter, Michal explained: "That is Israeliness; it is the nationality of the Jew. In what does he [the Israeli] see himself as Jewish?"

In view of this, it is hardly surprising that Michal's (as well as that of many other participants) identification as a Jew precedes her identification as an Israeli, or, for that matter, her identification with any other group. As put by another interviewee: "I am first of all Jewish, then Israeli, and then Mizrahi" (Ruth). There is a general agreement amongst the participants that this hierarchy entails certain behavioral commitment, that is to say: the observance of a traditionist lifestyle, which is unfamiliar to those who hold being Israeli above being Jewish. Batya explained the point of this feeling of commitment as well as the price for neglecting it:

> It is my commitment because it is my identity. The second you lose it – you lose identity. If I do not educate the next generation, it will be lost, and there will be assimilation. To me, it is a part of me; you can't take it away from me . . . I define myself firstly as a Jew, and then as an Israeli. And it does not sound weird. "Israeli" is a geographic definition, because I live in Israel, but I am, first of all, Jewish.

Such opinions thus express not only the positive part of celebrating Jewish-traditionist identity, but also the negative aspect of criticism against (secular) Israeli identity as lacking insufficient Jewish content and meaning. While identifying Israeli identity with secularism, the interviewees described it as either completely disconnected from its Jewish heritage or at least as distorting Jewish identity by not practicing the lifestyle it demands.

This distinction has moral implications. As I discuss in Chapter 7, even if interviewees refrained from making explicit statements attributing to either them personally, or their traditionism in general, an "automatic" moral superiority over non-traditionists, such an assertion seems nevertheless to be implicit in their statements elaborating upon their choice of traditionism. As

far as they are concerned, the choice of traditionism is the choice of the right and good. Comparing the choice of traditionism with other choices only serves to enhance this. This can be demonstrated in the words of Tomer:

> If I were to judge according to my point of view, which is that a good Jew should be a great person, then the secular is the bottom of the barrel; the classic secular, the one that even eats on Yom Kippur.

And, as in the case of explaining the reasons for choosing traditionism, here, too, arguments of "values" and "logic" are raised alongside arguments of "sentiment" and "feeling"; a normative, logical distancing of oneself from "vacuous" secularity assures a good feeling. In this vein Tamar described her experience of living as a secular as a barren attempt, leading to a feeling of emptiness, of "lack":

> As a secular [woman] I felt incomplete . . . It [traditionism] is the way I choose, because I am comfortable like this. I am uncomfortable doing everything that has to be done [according to the orthodox interpretation of Jewish Law]. I am comfortable living this life.

In the context of a discourse which identifies Jewish orthodoxy as the "absolute" and "most authentic" expression of Jewish tradition, traditionists also find themselves required to explain why their Jewish identification does not "go all the way" and materialize into an orthodox lifestyle. Hence, while presenting traditionism as a tool for the preservation of their Jewish identity, interviewees hastened to explain that at the same time it is not religion which dictates their behavior, but rather "the need for tradition and special markers associated with my past . . . the Jewish, traditional identity" (Sigal). Observing a traditionist lifestyle is

> something important to me. It is not out of a fear of God's retribution, not because it is written in the Torah, and not because that is how I was taught to act. I do the things which seem to me to be those which make life a bit more Jewish, traditional, [the things which] preserve my and my children's connection to tradition.
>
> (Sigal)

These motivations are further clarified when dealing with the education of the younger generation, and the feeling of obligation by parents to construct the Jewish identity of their children: "Personal past communicates with national past. I want my children to grow up knowing what this is. If I do not teach them about tradition, who will?" (Sigal).

The traditionist advantage over orthodoxy is connected with the ability, the possibility, to share in the modern, secularized world. Interviewees repeatedly described their decision as one which enables them to keep on living their

lives as "normal" (a recurring term in many of the interviews) people, those who do not abstain from the pleasures available in the modern world, which is seen as quintessentially secular:

> You see so many fun things [in the secular world], and you know that the orthodox are missing it, not because it is forbidden, but because it [orthodoxy] is a wrong conception. Religion got stuck somewhere. I think I have an advantage over them [the orthodox], because I know things they don't know. I know the secular world. They are stuck in *halachic* dictates, some of which are correct, and some stemming from fear and conservatism. I am against conservatism. That is the point. Develop! This is where traditionism is – find your way in which you are also religious and on the other hand continue living.
>
> (Tehila)

The traditionist choice is thus further distinguished when compared to the prevalent images of "the secular" and "the orthodox". Viewed in light of these images, the choice of any lifestyle other than traditionism is seen by traditionists as too heavy a concession: "I am not willing to give up on anything that I currently have and practice [as a traditionist]," stated Vered, emphasizing that she is intimately familiar with the competing alternatives of secularity or orthodoxy.

Traditionism is, therefore, what provides a Jew with a sense of belonging and identification with the Jewish collective. "Traditionism is a matter of preserving some connection to my history. I want the connection to my history; I look for it. I do not want to be detached" (Liron). This connection can also be of a less national and more personal and familial nature. So, for example, in the words of Linor, the traditionist way of life is a symbol for the preservation of her identity as a woman and a member of a family:

> It symbolizes many good things for me. It symbolizes my home, my family. That is why it is difficult for me to make the separation and say if I observe the *mitzvot* because I really believe it is forbidden [to transgress those dictates] . . . or do I observe the *mitzvot* because . . . I don't want to disconnect from what I was, which is a very good thing to me.

As such, traditionism carries an inherently emotional aspect: The observance of a traditionist lifestyle brings about pleasant feelings. Jewish identification appears in this context, in the interviews, to constitute a need which demands to be fulfilled: "It is a need, not a duty. I feel empty without it. It's like if I want to feel feminine, I'll dress like a woman. Similarly I need to behave like a Jew" (Revital). Ignoring this need leads to negative feelings. In this spirit Koren, who could not offer a rational, logical reason for practicing only some of the *mitzvot* (and ignoring others, as he does), explained that this is, at bottom, an emotional issue: "I won't function properly if I do not lay the *tefilin* or fast on

Yom Kippur." The positive sentiment associated with the practicing of these *mitzvot* touches simultaneously upon identity and faith: "It is the feeling of belonging to a nation, a tradition; as well as awe of God" (Koren).

This emotional dimension was stressed by many interviewees who described their traditionist behavior as stemming from a basic pursuit of pleasure – the pleasure felt by those who feel secure in their identity and the meaning of their existence. The cognitive rationale of the identification and the positive feelings accompanying it are treated here as two separate sets of arguments – distinct categories of justification of the traditionist lifestyle. However, as I have already mentioned, this distinction (which I intend to utilize henceforth) is an artificial one, serving mostly to better organize the clarity of the debate and discussion. The interviews themselves clearly show these categories to be intertwined – practically indistinguishable. An interesting expression of this complexity can be found in the statement of Ronit, who wanted to explain why she observes a traditionist lifestyle. Ronit opened with an identity-ideological-based argument about distinguishing oneself and the positive feeling of collective belonging. If a minimum amount of Jewish practice is not observed in a reality in which all Jews lead a secular life, she explained, Jewish distinction will be lost: "[If all Jews were secular] we would be the same as everyone. What distinguishes us is our Judaism. Every religion has the need to be unique. It also gives you a feeling of belonging." This ideological-rational explanation was joined by an emotional rationale describing the positive feelings associated with the observance of Jewish practice. Ronit herself explained that her traditionism is simultaneously reasoned and emotional: "It is both. It is both a wise thing to do, and, I believe, it is also emotional."

Emotions as reasons

The expression of Jewish identity through the practice of a traditionist lifestyle – to recapture my point here – raises positive feelings and is connected with a pleasant feeling of security. In this context interviewees propose various explanations and rationales rooted in the world of emotions rather than logic as to why they keep a traditionist way of life.

On the most immediate, overt level, adjectives and verbs with emotional roots and significance were constantly reappearing in the interviews when dealing with the reasons behind the interviewees' choice of traditionism. See, for example, the way in which Liat explained her relatively strict Jewish behavior: "I like this closeness [to the Jewish religion] . . . it feels good. . . . it is fun for me." In the same vein, Liron explained that the compelling factor in his insistence upon a traditionist way of life in a secular environment is "because it is fun . . . I enjoy it".

The observance of Shabbat has proven to be one of the subjects around which there exists a sort of "emotional consensus": The underlying tone within the vast majority of the interviews is that the main point for observing

Shabbat is the unique ambiance and positive emotion connected with it and created by it. Participants repeatedly mentioned Shabbat as ensuring a pleasant feeling of coziness and familial intimacy: "Shabbat is fun, the festive days are fun, and the united, homely feeling is fun" (Karin). Emotion is also put forward as a first-class educational tool, as interviewees stressed the familial nature of the pleasure of Shabbat and its significance in educating the children and raising them into traditionist values. This is how Bina explained the significance of Shabbat to her:

> First of all there is the inner feeling, the calmness of Shabbat, the difference and distinction between Shabbat and the cumbersome, heavy days of the week. After the exhausting week, then along comes Shabbat and you connect with the family, and with yourself and also with God. And also for the children, the children learn a lot of moral and wisdom. They absorb it and sometimes apply it. It is part of education.

It must be emphasized that Bina's words reveal the role of belief in this good feeling. The pleasure of Shabbat is tied in with the sense of intimacy with God, which, as Bina put it, characterizes this holy day. The issue of belief and its place in the web of meanings, rationales and explanations advanced by traditionists as the basis of their behavior will be discussed below; at this point I shall content myself with pointing out the high emotional value of obeying belief.

The interviewees' discussions on the emotional world associated with traditionism also touched upon the gap between the rational judgment of their behavior and the feelings it evokes. Tamir, for example, challenged his own explanation by which "I do what makes me feel good", wondering whether it does, in fact, provide a sensible rationale for his traditionism: "If I say I do what makes me feel good, so why do I have to fast for a whole day [on Yom Kippur]?" Any possible explanation, Tamir explained, will forever be lacking, as it deals with the gulf between the reasoning of the brain and that of the heart: "It is an inner feeling which is very hard to describe . . . These are feelings . . . which are very hard to put into words. It is the feeling of 'this is how I want it and need it.' "

This distinction between the rational and the emotional was also used by interviewees in order to explain the misunderstanding which they meet with regard to their practice. If you do not feel it, many insisted, you will never understand the point of bothering with observing *mitzvot*. At the same time it is their unique position, enabling them to freely enter and exit the "sacred world" without feeling that they are undermining the whole structure of their identity, which gives them an insight into the negative (rational) judgment of their behavior. Traditionism is (here) an emotion, and those who have not experienced it will see it as merely irrational behavior:

> It is something you feel on the inside. People who do not feel a need, or

> don't think it warms their hearts or makes them belong to something, they think it is silly. I just don't think that. I just saw that when I didn't do it [practice a traditionist lifesyle] it was OK, but when I did do it [adheres to a form of traditionism] I felt a warmth in my heart; I felt a sense of belonging to a tradition, to a religion, to a people, to a way of life that I chose and in which I believe, and this distinguishes you in a certain way.
>
> (Ziva)

The positive emotion is thus tied in with all those other arguments – the obedience to belief, the fulfilling of a national, historical duty of belonging, and personal as well as collective identification. The pleasant sensation evoked by, and associated with, the traditionist way of life is the emotional expression of all these values. It is the internalization of these values into the personal, intimate level.

Historical commitment

The interviewees' discussions of traditionism's role in constructing and reinforcing their Jewish identity also highlight the heavy sense of duty they feel towards the conservation of this identity. Interviewees repeatedly described themselves as obligated to Jewish heritage, positioning the traditionist way of life as an essential instrument in fulfilling this obligation. They commonly described themselves as willingly carrying a historic, social and cultural burden made manifest in the traditionist way of life. When seen like this, the arguments in support of traditionism are of an ideological, national, rational nature. Hila gave this succinct form while explaining her choice of traditionism:

> I see value in preserving Judaism. If I am "lighter" [less observant] on some of the *mitzvot* than my parents are, then my children will be much "lighter" than me, and within three or four generations – that will be it, [Judaism] will be over. There will be no reason for them to stay in Israel, or observe Shabbat, no reason for anything. And that's it, they will marry Gentiles, and that's it, end of story.

The measure of her duty, Hila explained, is both and at the same time national and personal-familial: "You can say it is an obligation also to the family, my parents, and also a general obligation, to all of Judaism."

Several interviewees awarded the historic duty such a crucial role in reasoning their traditionist behavior as to reduce the significance of any other motivation. A notable, somewhat radical example of this approach was given by Reuben, in whose statement even God takes second place to historical duty. This is his response when asked if he observes *mitzvot* out of a feeling of duty towards the Lord:

> God? To me that does not play a role. To me tradition is for tradition's sake. I want to carry on a 3,800-year-old tradition; I don't want it to stop here. I think the people of Israel is a unique people, who have given a lot to the world, a lot of that due to the heritage received which makes this people what it is, consolidated it into a people. One can always be epicurean, leave Judaism and assimilate, but people chose to hold on to Judaism.

As we shall see, such a sweeping, unequivocal renunciation of the element of belief as a motive for the practice of a traditionist lifestyle is unusual and not indicative of traditionists in general. And yet this position is echoed in the prominence given to the observance of *mitzvot* as an expression and execution of a national and historical duty rather than a religious one. This is, in fact, another expression of the notion that traditionism is an instrument in the preservation and reaffirmation of Jewish identity. Here this duty to preserve Jewish identity receives its future-oriented significance: the duty to preserve this identity through the ages, not only continuing one's ancestors' way of life, but also instilling coming generations with its precepts.

Interviewees did not hesitate to express their sense of duty with explicit, unambiguous words: "I keep kosher because my mother's family kept kosher and because another six million died for keeping kosher," said Meir, insisting that he would not be the one to "break the chain". Another interviewee said that, though he felt no obligation to observe *mitzvot* in the name of any religious imperative, he does feel a sense of duty towards history, as well as toward the future continuity of Jewish identity: "We must pass it on to the next generation . . . Yes, tradition means continuing it" (Tamir). For Liat this sense of commitment has become a part of her personality: "For me it is by now part of my character . . . It is the issue of a way of life and historical awareness."

The duty towards heritage therefore takes on a private and distinctly intimate nature. It is a personal commitment towards the collective carried by each individual as a sort of personal need. Tom chose the image of connecting to one's roots in order to describe this sensation:

> It is conservation. I see it as an alliance with my antecedents, preserving the tradition they began, and continuity. And so it is some sort of connection to the roots . . . I am like a tree . . . a tree has roots. There is nothing that can be done about that; it has to be connected to its roots. So I am connected to my roots. I was born a Jew and I shall die a Jew, unless I break it in some way.

Tom further clarified that this feeling of connection to his roots served him as a comprehensive set of values, releasing him from the need to supply himself with clear answers to metaphysical questions: "It stops me from needing to investigate into the big questions of faith, what, why we are here."

The traditionist way of life is thus perceived as expressing a historical duty, as well as an instrument for its fulfillment and the preservation of Jewish heritage. Some even presented this sense of historical duty as the best criterion by which to decipher the traditionist code of practice: "The traditionist celebrates the holy days, lays *tefilin*, keeps kosher – things which connect us backwards" (Koren).

Belief

A fundamental reason evoked by participants in order to convey their traditionist behavior is faith, or belief. With only a few exceptions, the whole body of interviewees repeatedly stressed the strength of their belief in God, saying they see their traditionism as exhibiting that faith. The belief in God, along with the belief in the principle of reward and punishment, receives here a unique, fascinating manifestation, a kind of traditionist version of these principles. It can be summed up with the statement that God does indeed expect a certain behavior, and for it He rewards (or punishes); and yet it must be emphasized – as interviewees did – that this desired behavior is far from the practice dictated by the orthodox rabbinical interpretation of Jewish Law: "God desires gratitude, loyalty" (Limor), and strict observance of orthodox practice does not necessarily express that. Moreover, as is evident in the criticism handed out by some of the participants on orthodox acquaintances of theirs, it seems that there are cases in which such a strict religious observance replaced such loyalty, effectively expressing ingratitude to God.

Interviewees explained that belief in God must express itself in the preservation of the original, "pure" intention for which the *mitzvot* came into existence. As such, belief is not necessarily tied in with the world of ceremony, observance, and practice currently prevalent in the orthodox Jewish world. God does indeed "expect and observe from above" but His expectations aren't with regard to the observance of *mitzvot*, but rather the deeper, more sublime level of morality: "He expects us to be good people to the people surrounding us. To appreciate people and things. I don't think He expects prayers . . . He expects people to treat each other well" (Bina).

Interviewees depicted God as a fatherly figure, observing, guarding, protecting – rather than punishing, strict, and threatening. "The traditionist God" is "a figure which protects the whole world, watching us from above, guiding us, showing us the way" (Ronit), leaving people a substantial measure of choice:

> If one deserves to be punished, he will be . . . I believe there is a guiding hand from above which provides man with the possibility to choose something else. He himself can decide what to do with it. He has been given the option, he has been awarded the help, but he must choose what to do with it.
>
> (Ronit)

This guardian figure is characterized by broad, profound judgment and does not deal with daily calculations of the observance and adherence to the details of Jewish Halacha. Belief is here realized as a close connection with the Lord which compels one to a certain principled, moral code of behavior. "I ask myself all the time, with every day that passes . . . what God expects from me," said one of the participants, emphasizing that this is a very significant question, requiring a clear-cut answer:

> There better be an answer, since I always ask myself what God expects from me. Many daily actions I take, and decisions I reach are tied in with that, and it is desirable to have an answer to such basic things.
>
> (Tahel)

The interviews create a strong impression that there are two major, fundamental imperatives deriving from belief and reflecting God's will: being moral (which is, as has been repeatedly underlined, not necessarily tied in with Jewish religious practice), and an obligation towards Jewish identity and the continuity of Jewish heritage. In this vein, the idea of reward and punishment takes on a more metaphorical nature: "God doesn't want anything from me . . . I don't want it to sound manipulative, but he who walks in His path, will be content. Because it is the right path" (Bina). Divine reward and punishment don't have to do with a particular religious practice, but rather with the moral level of a person. The simplistic understanding of reward and punishment is therefore seen as a gross misapprehension:

> A lot has to do with a person's character . . . Those worthy of reward, will receive it. There are the orthodox which sin all year round and then, on the Day of Atonement, go to synagogue to atone for it. That is hypocrisy.
>
> (Bina)

One expression of the centrality of belief within the traditionist identity structure is the fact that many interviewees did not hesitate to compare themselves and their belief to the orthodox and the measure of their belief, presenting themselves as just as good – and pious – as the orthodox, "even though" the later observe *mitzvot* more strictly. God, interviewees explained, simply does not expect the Jew to observe all the *mitzvot* which the orthodox insist on upholding. In this it is made clear that traditionists execute a measure of independent judgment and discernment towards religious observance: "There are many cases in which the orthodox . . . say [that certain *mitzvot* have to be upheld] and do, which does not appeal to me at all. It seems superfluous, exaggerated. It has no explanation, and, to me, is unjustified" (Limor). In this spirit, interviewees felt confident in judging some of their orthodox acquaintances as suffering from a lack of faith. This attitude was demonstrated by Liat. She reiterated how strong and authentic a believer she

takes herself to be, explaining that such belief leads naturally to a traditionist lifestyle. Traditionist behavior, she explained, stems "from great belief":

> I may not observe all of the *mitzvot*, but I suppose my faith is akin to that of any orthodox. The certainty that there is one God and He is the creator and cause of all that is happening in the world – I know it as much as the most ultra-orthodox believer knows it.

Liat, who also demonstrated the distinction between belief – which receives an elevated position of exceeding importance – and the observance of *mitzvot*, which are in part less important, requiring lesser fidelity, did not hesitate to compare herself to her orthodox friends. Unlike them, she explained, to her, personal faith and the private feeling of belief in God and the need to obey Him are more important than her concern about "what would people say". Whereas her friends have no qualms about doubting their faith, but do all that is in their power in order to please the (orthodox) public opinion around them.

In these and other statements she echoes the traditionist criticism of the orthodox, seen as more occupied with their social image than they are with answering the true wishes of the Lord. According to this traditionist view, the belief in God alongside the understanding that we must do what He expects is the true essence of religion, and the fact that many in the orthodox community deal more with the question of their social image than with essential religious questions is perceived to be a distortion of the true meaning of being Jewish:

> Religion is all about you knowing that someone is watching you, and I know someone is watching me. So maybe for an ultra-orthodox person using electricity on Shabbat is "Wow, what will they say about me." I don't think about that when I use electricity [on Shabbat]. Well, what I do isn't really [observing] the *mitzvot* . . . I know someone is watching me . . . It is also a moral thing. I try to be a moral person.
>
> (Liat)

The (orthodox) focus on appearances, on the trivial, takes the place of what is truly important: that is, morality. Most participants would agree with the cautious conclusion reached by Tahel in his search for the right way in which to please the Lord:

> I think I know what He expects from me . . . I was wondering which is better: A religious man who is bad at inter-human relationships, i.e., a corrupt religious person, or a good atheist? Up until now I have been certain that a good atheist was preferable, and it is clear that [orthodox] Judaism sees the corrupt religious as preferable. That, for instance, is one of the differences [between orthodox and traditionists].

Belief is thus distinct from religious observance. As we have seen, traditionists

do not hesitate to doubt the relevance of observing all *mitzvot* according to the orthodox interpretation. In this way Tzipora could state that she "very much believes in Him; but not in the need to worship Him." This is because, as was made clear by another interviewee:

> He looks on from above . . . [but] for example if I were to switch on the light on Shabbat . . . I don't think He looks at that . . . You only get punished for a really bad deed . . . an extreme one . . . such as murder. Meat and milk – if you eat them together [not kosher according to the Jewish Halacha; most traditionists, including the speaker, do observe this separation] . . . it is first of all not healthy. The punishment you get is indigestion; the punishment is not from God.
>
> (Ronit)

However, as can be seen in traditionists' complex attitude toward orthodox Jews, as well as in the issue of the traditionists' persistent sense of guilt,[5] the above stance does not present the full picture. Even where traditionists consciously choose not to observe all *mitzvot*, demonstrating great confidence in the ability of their lifestyle to preserve the essential, if not original, intent of the divine directive, they never completely dispense with self-criticism in this matter. Gidi illustrated this self-criticism, which stems from the allegedly inherent connection between belief and being expected to completely adhere to all *mitzvot*. He did so while presenting traditionism as loyal to the divine directive, as it is expressed in the Torah, and only loosely committed to rabbinical restrictions:

> As a traditionist . . . the base is obviously the belief in one God, the God we believe in, and He is truth, and His teachings [Torah] are truth. And if His teachings are truth, then that must include both the written Torah as well as the spoken one [i.e., the rabbinical directives], and the logic and truth which underlie this are so clear to me, so obvious, and suit me and are correct for me, that I am left with no choice other than to do what is said there – both from the scriptures and the [rabbinical] verdicts and answers. Of course what is from the rabbis, I am very far from doing.

The religious conscience, it would seem, is ever present, even in the context of great confidence in traditionist belief. Thus Tom could relate that, though questions of belief hold no great interest for him (he finds more meaning in the practical traditionist way of life, connecting him to his Jewish roots), he deals quite extensively with issues of reward and punishment. As his position shows, these questions are tightly bound to the world of religious practice and the question of the "gap" between belief and (lack of) adherence to *mitzvot*:

> For example, sometimes I shave with a blade, and when I think about it, it is actually forbidden to shave with a blade, but I still do it. The punishment is not so deterring. You see that you don't observe Shabbat and still you are alive. On the other hand I don't work on Saturday, because I believe that no good can come from money earned on Shabbat. In this regard I do put an emphasis on reward and punishment.

If it seems that Tom expresses here the "simple" religious stance, intimately connecting religious observance and immediate reward or punishment, he immediately applies the traditionist criteria by which individual Jewish behavior is to be judged – a criteria describing belief as true to the "essential" or "substantial" intention of God – as the fundamental standard:

> I believe that what God wants is that everyone tries their hardest. This means that if someone has the potential to be a very great saint, and he is a bit less than that, so that isn't so good. And if a person is just a simple person, like me, and he tries his hardest, so it is great.

It should be noted that not all interviewees were comfortable with describing themselves as fulfilling God's will. Man, some of them said, can never know with absolute certainty the will of his creator; presuming to please Him is baseless. The choice of a traditionist way of life is here presented as a basic expression of faith, vague on the details. Keren's reasoning of her choice serves as a good example of this; even though this choice is "a matter of faith", and even though she is positive that this faith compels her towards a certain form of behavior, such as would please God, she is still unable to elaborate on exactly what that means. All that is left, therefore, is the positive feeling associated with observing *mitzvot*:

> I believe that because I was born Jewish what suits me is . . . a certain behavior which does me well. Much like I love riding roller coasters, and it is good for my soul, I know that eating pork will harm the mechanism of my body-soul.

Like other elements comprising the world of traditionist meaning and identity, belief too (as well as the practice it dictates) carries the promise of positive feelings and pleasant emotions. In this spirit, Vered and Baruch, a couple, twined pleasing the Lord and acting according to faith in Him in with the pleasant feelings associated with observance of *mitzvot*:

Baruch: I observe *mitzvot* because it is good for me. I feel good with God.
Vered: It feels good for me to rest on Shabbat . . . It is what He asked for, on the seventh day He rested, so I rest too. That is what He ordered unto us.

Baruch: It is all in the name of Heaven. . . . Everyone is content with the life he lives, as we are with our lives.

Doing heaven's work, applying practical content to faith, assures that positive sensation, that elusive feeling of "comfort" which repeatedly surfaces when dealing with the choice of a traditionist way of life.

3 "Method", "consistency", and guilt

One of the main difficulties in understanding the traditionist way of life lies with its perceived incoherence or lack of orderly method. That which seems to many to be selective observance is also commonly seen as symptomatic of the lack of a guiding, uniting, underlying logic. It is most definitely seen as being without a "method", a systematic code to clearly explain which (religious) practices are observed and which are neglected.

The issue of the method behind traditionist custom has indeed captured the attention of researchers wishing to study traditionism, and yet it would seem that they have been mostly satisfied with merely stating the fact that traditionism follows none of the "obvious", "coherent" codes commonly acceptable – that is to say: strict observance of all *mitzvot* under the orthodox interpretation of Halacha, or complete and utter avoidance of any of them. Only rarely did students of traditionism attempt to present an in-depth description and explanation of traditionism as an independent lifestyle, guided by its own logic. These researchers usually presented traditionism and traditionist "method" as a partial, "light" version of orthodoxy, whose logic depends on the existence of an originally "external", well-defined orthodox method, which is then "twisted" by traditionist selectiveness (for example: Shokeid 1995; Buzaglo 2005).

This vagueness with regard to the traditionist "method" was far from absent within the interviews themselves. Many preferred to avoid trying to articulate a systematic description of their way of life – and that of other traditionists – and were content with portraying traditionism as partial observance of common (orthodox-oriented) customs. Some went so far as to describe traditionism critically as an incomplete version of orthodoxy, unable to live up to its strict requirements, as a thing stemming from ignorance and even as an expression of "hypocrisy" in those wishing to adorn themselves with authentic (i.e., "religious") Jewish identity while at the same time unwilling to sacrifice life's (secular) comforts in order to achieve that goal.

And yet, despite this impression of vagueness and lack of guiding logic, the interviews, while dealing with a wide array of issues, present us with quite a distinct image of the core guiding principles of the traditionist lifestyle. By way of introduction to the coming discussion, and as an attempted encapsulation

of it, traditionist practice can be described as guided by the desire to conserve authentic Jewish identity in a contemporary setting. The traditionist body of practices and beliefs answers to a behavioral code based upon ethno-national and communal identification. The distinction made between *mitzvot* which are observed and those which are ignored, and the strictness with which they are observed, is not based on the "ease" of those observed versus the "discomfort" or "difficulty" incurred by those ignored (as is sometimes held against the traditionists). Rather, it is based on the recognition of some *mitzvot* as central to the definition of individual and collective identity (that is: one's identity as a Jew), as well as its preservation; traditionists observe *mitzvot* they see as essential to one's self-definition as a Jew. They strive to observe the "essential base" of Jewish practice – a minimum without which one is not "really Jewish", they argue – within a contemporary, modern context, which is seen to be challenging the preservation of authentic Jewish identity. On the other hand, traditionists tend to be far less strict in adhering to the *mitzvot* they see as "additions", "embellishments" or "severities" (all adjectives recurring throughout the interviews), which orthodox Judaism constructed round that "essential base". Traditionists do not, however, deny the validity of these "additional" practices. They do not celebrate or take special pride in their avoidance of these practices. Most importantly, traditionists do not think that the authenticity of one's identity as a Jew is compromised in any way by not adhering to these *mitzvot*.

The first part of this chapter will therefore be dedicated to the issue of the "traditionist method", in an attempt to study the meanings associated with it. I shall examine the tendency to portray traditionism as devoid of a guiding logic, paying special attention to what is most commonly referred to as the preference of comfort over authentic observance. This discussion will revolve around the ways in which the traditionist method is construed in order to conserve Jewish meaning. The second part of the chapter will attempt to delve into the question of guilt which may rise (and is said by some to inevitably rise) around what seems at times to be the "inconsistency" of the traditionist lifestyle. I shall inquire into how present this sense of guilt actually is, what its possible sources are, and the way in which traditionists deal with it.

Between no method and comfort as a guiding principle

As has already been mentioned, our interviewees are well aware of the assertion that traditionism, and most especially traditionist Jewish observance, is devoid of coherent logic and method. Moreover, many of them consider traditionism not to have any overarching logic applicable to *all* traditionists. They reiterated that they are unable to outline the "traditionist rule", and cannot define what traditionism is, as within its bounds "everyone does what they want". Even though participants were quite comfortable in meticulously describing their own Jewish lifestyle, often also articulating a rather coherent logic guiding their own personal practical choices, they were, almost

without exception, unable or unwilling to articulate a general rule applicable to all traditionists.

Interviewees also mentioned the argument that traditionism is nothing more than a "Judaism of comfort"; that is, an insincere attempt to preserve Jewish religion without one's comfortable daily routine. Traditionism is here presented as some sort of "pleasure-oriented" interpretation of Judaism, taking only that which is easy and undemanding while avoiding all that is difficult to observe. As it was explained: "The traditionist does that which is comfortable within the religion. It is a matter of comfort . . . I am more comfortable as a traditionist" (Liav):

> It could be that this choice [of which *mitzvot* to observe, and which to ignore] is one of comfort. Explicitly so, out of comfort . . . It is important to preserve values and tradition. I wish I could be more observant . . . God forgive me, but out of comfort . . .
>
> (Dalia)

It is quite obvious that this explanation is, at the very least, lacking and partial. One could ask, for example – if it is indeed comfort which dictates traditionist practical choices – why not abandon observance altogether, living a life free of *halachic* regulation. Alternatively, this argument does not, in fact, explain why some *mitzvot*, which are undoubtedly easy to observe, are ignored, where other, clearly far more demanding practices (the strict adherence to fasting and other prohibitions on Yom Kippur, and to the taxing Passover rules, are but two such examples) are observed meticulously. The interviewees are not blind to this inherent contradiction within the "comfort theory", even those instinctively describing themselves as "doing only what is comfortable". Thus, after making such a statement ("traditionism is a matter of comfort") and discussing the list of *mitzvot* she observes, Batya decisively declared: "Being a traditionist is not about doing what is comfortable." Another interviewee explained that many Jews do not observe a traditionist lifestyle – similar to her own – due to the difficulties and discomfort embodied by it (the same lifestyle just minutes earlier described by her as guided by a pursuit of comfort):

> There are things which are not easy. Fasting on Yom Kippur, or on the ninth of Av, the prohibition on tattoos, on drinking alcohol at certain times, getting married through the Rabbinate only, circumcising male children. These things are neither easy, nor to be taken for granted, and they require a great deal of explanation [as to why one observes them].
>
> (Revital)

All agreed with Dalia's remark ("It is important to observe values and tradition . . . something Jewish, something to, after all, distinguish between us

and the Gentiles"), from which they all concluded that "comfort" must suffer for this goal; there exists a higher principle than the "pleasure principle".

One of the most prominent ways of diffusing this tension is the limiting of the validity of the comfort explanation: It is seen to be true only within the realm which exists outside the "red lines" of Jewish practice, where comfort considerations are no longer relevant. Fasting and other abstentions of Yom Kippur, for example, are to be found well within the essential field delineated by these red lines, and their distinction from other days of fasting clearly demonstrates this:

> I say that a person does what is comfortable for him, but there are things which are a red line – never to be crossed. I will never eat on Yom Kippur. Also on the ninth of Av – I always fast. But I say that if something were to happen, that I would have this overwhelming desire [to eat], it is possible that on the ninth of Av I won't fast. But I know that on Yom Kippur that would never happen; it is a sacred day.
>
> (Tomer)

It is important to emphasize that the tension raised here, though often recognized and known by the participants, does not always manifest itself on a conscious level. The clash between what I termed here the "comfort theory" and the reality of strict observance, which clearly hinges upon that comfort, is often vague and implicit. Quite frequently, our conversations brought the subject onto the surface, forcing interviewees to deal with it and explain the gap between the comfort argument and the stricter dimensions of their Jewish life. This was exemplified in an interview with Meir:

> I had never thought about it. I'm probably contradicting myself here: I say that I only observe *mitzvot* which are easy to observe; [on the other hand] it may be a bit difficult to keep kosher everywhere [as Meir does]. But it's not such a big deal. So you eat vegetarian, you eat milk and not meat [when kosher food is hard to find].

Furthermore, many of those who raised this "comfort theory" also stressed its problematic nature and its failure to explain their own and other traditionists' behavior. And yet this constant reference to pleasure and comfort as lying at the base of the traditionist "method" is in itself both interesting and significant, as it reveals the problematic nature of the common social perception of traditionism, as well as traditionist personal and collective self-esteem. Interviewees who presented this argument seemed to have internalized the critical, negative gaze common among both orthodox and secular Jews, portraying traditionist practice, both their own and that of others, as a partial religiosity of those who are afraid of committing themselves to observe Judaism "properly".

Those who mentioned the "comfort theory" have therefore explained

that the decision whether to observe certain practices based on their level of strenuousness is made while striving towards the ideal of observing *mitzvot* in accordance with the orthodox interpretation of Jewish Law. This ideal is very demanding, necessarily encroaching upon comfort and thus never fully upheld. Nevertheless, it remains the most authentic expression of a Jewish lifestyle. See for example the way Tomer described the method guiding him, as a traditionist, in observing *mitzvot*:

> I do what is comfortable, but would like to do the maximum as far as the 613 *mitzvot* are concerned. If it doesn't interfere with my life then I will do the maximum Dos and Don'ts.
> *Q:* As soon as it encroaches upon your comfort, a problem is created?
> *A:* Yes, but I think everyone is like that, the orthodox too. You see, I claim it is typical not only of traditionists, but the traditionist stretches the rope a bit more in that direction, because he is less fearful of God.

Another participant qualified this argument by saying that it applies only to the differences between the traditionist lifestyle and the orthodox one, expounding upon the "relative" nature of the notion of comfort:

> I thought about it, that I do what is comfortable for me; it is currently comfortable for me to watch TV on Shabbat . . . As soon as it no longer is comfortable for me, I will stop. . . . [However,] it isn't that the traditionist does only what is comfortable. It is all relative . . . Comfort is expressed in the difference between the orthodox and the traditionist. The orthodox is more self-restrictive than the traditionist. The world of the orthodox is more limited.
>
> (Keren)

Interviewees' explanations reveal "comfort" to mean, at least in part, independence from orthodox *halachic* dictates, seen as oppressive and encroaching upon freedom. Comfort in this context is consequently not the "ease" of observance, but rather the feeling of preservation of personal liberty, which orthodoxy is seen to limit. Most interviewees stressed their liberation from the oppressive injunctions of tradition. This self-image is especially important when faced with the image of the orthodox as individuals whose freedom is extensively and fundamentally clipped (see Chapter 7).

Most interviewees agreed that in order for a person to be able to claim a complete, true Jewish identity, s/he must observe (at least) that minimal Jewish principle and duty – as traditionists do. They are, of course, aware of the *halachic* rule stating that a Jew is anyone born to a Jewish mother, or has converted according to the Halacha, yet to them, both individually and collectively, such a "formal" Jewish identity lacks essence and meaning when it does not include the observance of that "necessary minimum". It is this

conception which leads to the identification of that fundamental, indispensible core of Judaism/Jewishness. And it is also this conception that frames the strict observance of certain practices as a matter of "comfort", since it allows one to feel whole, to feel "comfortable" with one's claim of Jewish identification. Obviously this traditionist position is inherently critical of Israeli secularity. For many interviewees the secular "prototype" of a person of Jewish origin who has nothing whatsoever to do with Jewish tradition, religious holy days and *mitzvot* in general is the perfect example of one devoid of the Jewish essence and content.

That pursuit of comfort is, therefore, a far more complex notion, dealing not only with the reduction of obligations forced upon the individual, but also with the active expression of his or her Jewish identity. The individual wishes to express her identity clearly, thus reaffirming it, and the realization of this need also carries with it the positive feelings of "comfort" and "pleasure".

Comfortableness of identity

If we insist on using the term "comfort" then we must understand it as referring not to the physical comfort of avoiding any corporeal obligations, but rather to the comfortableness of identity. For many interviewees the observance of certain *mitzvot* – even where it involves some hardships and the concession of some form of physical comfort – answers a need for contentment tied in with their identity; this observance allows them to be at ease with their identity as Jews. In this vein, the sentence repeated in one form or another throughout all the interviews spoke of observing certain *mitzvot* as something "very important to me". This importance clearly rises above mere physical comfort. This can be seen in the words of Linor, who described herself as "traditionist, in the sense of a . . . strongly believing person who observes tradition in her own way". Comfort, she said, is not a satisfying explanation; the *mitzvot* she observes are

> not necessarily those which are easy for me. I feel that I do many things which are not things that come easily to me, and yet are very important for me to do. I define myself as someone who tries to walk in the rain without getting wet, that is to say that part of the things [*mitzvot*] I do, and part I don't. What I do decide to observe is very important to me . . . things which are much more important to me than [*mitzvot*] which I do not follow. Sometimes the things I do not observe are things which are, in practice, very difficult to observe. But it depends. It is not a general rule.
>
> (Linor)

The relationship between the duty or principle and comfort are even more complex in view of the fact that not adhering to the principle is, in itself, seen as an offence to "comfort". This is clear in several of the above quotes, in

which traditionists portray the secular lifestyle as uncomfortable: it is uncomfortable because it demands conceding some essential (Jewish-traditional) principles, undermining the very core of Jewish identity; secular lifestyle is the cause of the discomfort associated the concession of principles, as well as the guilt that comes with the neglect and transgression of duties and obligations. Hence it would be wrong, from a traditionist point of view, to view the pursuit of comfort as necessitating or even justifying secularity:

> . . . because I feel that I am connected to tradition. I don't want to completely lose hold of it. It is important for me to observe Shabbat; it is important to me to observe the holy days' rituals. It is very important to me.
>
> (Tamar)

In a somewhat radicalized version of this stance, by which observing the principle is, in itself, a matter of comfort – even where it forces a deviation from a completely free lifestyle – one of the participants presented the fear of God, or, more precisely, the observance of *mitzvot* as a result of fear from His wrath, as a matter of comfort:

> This thing about the fear of God is a thing of comfort . . . You are afraid, so that means you are doing what makes you feel comfortable. I say that an ultra-orthodox extremist, too, . . . does what is comfortable for him, because he operates in accordance with his fear of God or his love of Him, so it works for him. The main thing is: internally, self-wholeness.
>
> (Tomer)

Comfort and enjoyment thus distinguish traditionists from both orthodox and secular Jews – as traditionists observe only those practices which are "comfortable", whereas the orthodox are obliged to observe all *mitzvot*, including those which are overtly and unnecessarily inconvenient to observe, while secular Jews are devoid of the pleasure inherent in a Jewish identity. Traditionist identity emerges here as "comfortable" because it embodies a space of identity which "enjoys both worlds" – both the "thick" Jewish identity (exemplified by the orthodox identity) and the liberation from the bonds of the restrictive Jewish Law (a liberty whose paragon is the secular identity). Liron, who said comfort is the ultimate yardstick for his religious practice, demonstrated this rather clearly. He started with a definition of comfort as criteria for observance: "There are certain things which are not comfortable for a man to do, so he does not do them, as a traditionist. It is not comfortable for me, say, to fast three or four times a year." When I asked the rather self-evident question – one day of fasting is also taxing, so why observe even that? – Liron clarified the other side of the pleasure principle, which distinguishes the traditionist from the secular:

> I have no problem fasting for one day. I feel good with it, I enjoy it . . . I enjoy observing the holy days. I see traditionism as a pleasure. On the other hand, secular people do not have the same pleasures I do. They are the ones losing.

Between comfort and obligation

As a matter of identity, the traditionist "pursuit of comfort" is always limited by obligation and duty to observe that same "essential minimum" (see below) seen as crucial for the preservation of authentic Jewish identity. In contrast to what traditionists view as the absence of Jewish duties in the secular lifestyle, traditionists present their identity as a comfortable yet constrained – indeed, constrained even in its comfortableness – by this obligation to preserve the essential core of Jewish identity. Thus, interviewees repeatedly made statements which intertwine comfort and duty as two sides of the same coin. This is evident, for example, in what Koren said:

> I observe what is comfortable and easy for me to observe, and I feel good about it. I feel obliged to observe Shabbat. I don't know if I will be able to observe [Shabbat] my whole life, but the laying of *tefilin* – I know that I will be able to do that my whole life. I do that because of faith.
>
> (Koren)

Notably, Koren is also aware of the dynamic nature of this balance between comfort and obligation, pointing out that it may change in the future.

Another participant, also stressing the importance of the identity space between comfort and duty, described a rather elaborate list of such obligatory pactices; the gender aspect stuck out as crucial in the compilation of this "thick" list of essential *mitzvot*:

> I observe *mitzvot* I know I can do. It's also a matter of comfort – what is good for me, what isn't good for me, what is difficult for me, what I know that I can't do – I don't do. But things which I can, and are obligatory – those I do . . . The sifting through the flour, the setting aside a part of the *hala*, the lighting of candles on Shabbat, the welcoming of Shabbat, the *kiddush* . . . [separating] meat from milk, *niddah* [customs pertaining to menstruation], all those things, I think there is a duty to do them and I do them. I don't pray three times a day, but I read the book of Psalms everyday . . . I won't lie . . . I am not dressed like a religious woman . . . I can't not switch on the light on Shabbat, so I do . . . I don't bless before everything I eat.
>
> (Liora)

The realm in which duty or principle outweighs considerations of comfort is the domain of the essence of Jewish identity. Interviewees agreed that the list

of *mitzvot* they have identified as comprising this domain is not identical to what is commonly held to comprise the essence of the Jewish religion or religiosity, but this is of less relevance to them than what they recognize to be the essence of Jewish identity. One interviewee preferred to classify this aspect as "Jewishness", which is more important than "Judaism":

> What guides me is a sort of motto: I adhere out of Jewishness and not because of Judaism . . . a Jewish character or nature, and not Judaism . . . I am less concerned about what some rabbi in his pajamas said, and more with what my family has been doing.
>
> (Meir)

The observation of an essential minimum of Jewish custom (= "Jewishness") carries with it a promise of a better, more comfortable personal existence. This is then contrasted with total observance (= "Judaism"), seen as posing a threat to personal comfort:

> I would like to conserve certain things which are ours in Judaism. In the Torah there appear 613 *mitzvot*. 613 is a very big number . . . [and the method is] to do some of them. In a certain place that does a man a lot of good.
>
> (Tamir)

Comfort is therefore to be understood according to its "wider" interpretation, as conserving the essential components of a complete, meaningful identity. In this vein, many of the interviewees spoke of duty as a matter of personal choice rather than an obligation enforced from without. This perception is central to the identity of those who identify orthodoxy with coercion, distancing themselves from it. In this way traditionists are able to see themselves as fulfilling their Jewish-religious obligations without having to be orthodox; the fact that they freely elect to meet certain obligations transforms these obligations into a central part of their identity. One woman, repeatedly emphasizing her dislike of what she described as the oppression which rules the life of the orthodox individual, turned to the issue of duties and obligations when asked to describe the guidelines behind the *mitzvot* she chooses to observe: "I do what is right for me. And not only that, it is also what I supposedly have to do, but I flow with it, I feel good with it . . . it is very right for me to do that" (Tikva). This choice to meet an obligation ensures that it is not coercion, thus distinguishing her from the oppressed orthodox: "We [traditionists] are not coerced; that is why it is different."

For many of those interviewed the Jewish essence they observe is "the real [Jewish] thing". This – the way in which they live Judaism – is what Judaism should be. Often, this feeling is accompanied by obvious disappointment in the way orthodox Judaism betrays its role as the true avatar of "Judaism as Judaism should really be". One woman described, in this vein, the common

denominator of the *mitzvot* she observes as being defined by the orthodox "betrayal" of Jewish authenticity:

> I'm sorry to say that as far as the Rabbinate and certificates of kosher kitchens given to restaurants, we have been misled, because the inspectors are bribed. Many certificates are bought with money. The common denominator of all the *mitzvot* I observe is that that is how religion should really be.
>
> (Batya)

Batya further pointed out that this is not her personal invention or interpretation, but rather observing the essence of traditional Judaism. She therefore asked to amend my remark suggesting that to her traditionism represents true Judaism: "Not 'to me'. I have partaken from what has been done over the years. I did not invent these rules. I did not invent the rules of the *mikveh* [the purification baths]."

The traditionist treatment of those practices they choose to neglect or ignore is in itself quite complex. Despite what is commonly claimed against traditionists, they do not look down upon those *mitzvot*, nor consider them inconsequential. In fact, many participants stressed their acceptance of these practices – in their orthodox, strict interpretation – as an important part of the "full" and "complete" Jewish tradition. And yet, in accordance with traditionist thinking, their Jewish identity is not reduced by not observing them. As explained by one man, it would be wrong to describe the *mitzvot* he does not observe as "unessential"; they are merely "less essential" (Shlomo).

Traditionism as observing the "necessary minimum"

Many interviewees chose the notion of a "necessary minimum" as a description of their Jewish lifestyle. According to this position the traditionist observes the "acutely important" *mitzvot*, which comprise the "red lines", the crossing of which is akin to hurting the essential core of Jewish identity: "Jews must observe this minimum, if only to have something which distinguishes them from the Gentiles" (Dalia). The content of this minimum is not absolute or set in stone, but is easily recognizable as a "thick" minimum. "The traditionist minimum is preserving some sort of connection with tradition" (Tamar), perceived to be a particularly broad body of practical tenets: "The traditionist must do the religious minimum. That means celebrating Rosh-Hashanah, Sukkot and Passover correctly, and doing the *kiddush* on Shabbat" (Ronen):

> There is a basic code in Judaism . . . Shabbat is important to Judaism; the mere fact of marking it, the *kiddush*, the lighting of the candles, a certain measure of keeping kosher, the celebration of certain holy days, the Brit,

> Bar Mitzvah – these phases of our lives. That is traditionism. You can do more: . . . Modest clothing [for example] is not fundamental.
>
> (Tehila)

As part of the "essential core" of Judaism these minimal *mitzvot* become "acute", that is to say: absolutely necessary for the conservation of the individual's Jewish identity. See Tahel's statement, which places these "crucial" *mitzvot* within a wider set of considerations which guide his Jewish lifestyle:

> First there are the *mitzvot* which are related to our treatment of each other: these are moral *mitzvot*, which I think you do not need to be a traditionist in order to observe, and I think are of the utmost importance. Beyond that there are *mitzvot* which I think are acute, fundamental, and are an inseparable part of being Jewish, such as observing Shabbat, a basic level of kosher observance – not an orthodox level; not eating pork and not mixing milk and meat in the same meal. And there are also things to do with the continuing existence of the [Jewish] people, such as a non-secular system of marriage and divorce.

The "necessary minimum" is that domain in which compromise and the preference of "comfort" are not relevant, held at bay by the strict observance of that which is crucial. Moreover, at times it seems as if the traditionist "flexibility" disappears within this domain: "All the holy days, done properly – it is either you do it, or you don't" (Beni). Revital, when asked if there is such a thing as a traditionist method, explained that it would be better to talk of a necessary minimum which a traditionist would never compromise upon, rather than a "method":

> As in anything else there are minimal things everyone agrees upon. Keeping kosher, family life, Yom Kippur, the Jewish Holy days . . . I do not compromise when it comes to the necessary minimum. I do not compromise over things I do not understand, because they are impossible to be without.

Revital, who did not hesitate to elaborate upon the exact nature of that minimum, was equally secure in describing the practices which lay beyond the minimal list, which she does not observe:

> For example: dress. I do not feel I need to wear long sleeves [which are deemed "modest" by the orthodox dress code], because I am sufficiently self-secure and strong. I also do not feel the need to say a blessing before I eat, because I have enough appreciation of the food. I have my own, personal way of expressing myself.

The term "minimum" can be misleading since, as can be seen above, it is

aimed at a rather elaborate set of practices which serve as a "thick" basis for identity. Therefore, a slightly more complex articulation of the same idea would describe the traditionist norm as preserving the "minimal maximum". Thus when it was suggested to one of the participants that she was observing the "necessary minimum", she immediately corrected: "We do the utmost in these things – we do what is necessary, but do it punctiliously to the maximum. Very committed. There is no compromise with what's kosher" (Vered).

Describing traditionism as the observance of a "necessary minimum" thus sheds new light upon that obscure codeword "comfort" as a guideline for traditionist choice. It can be inferred that those considerations of comfort as criteria for observance – or, put more accurately: ignoring certain *mitzvot* which require more effort than traditionists are willing to invest – are valid only outside that list of "minimal" *mitzvot*. When dealing with the "necessary minimum", touching upon all that is the essence of being Jewish, there can be no compromise, and strict observance is the goal; "Judaism is traditionist by nature, but there are rules that cannot be deviated from . . .: keeping kosher, observing Shabbat, belief in God, morals, marrying a Jew, the holy days" (Haim). Beyond this minimum there enter considerations of comfort. Here they are legitimate, and present a valid reason for choosing to neglect a certain practice. For this reason one of the interviewees asked to qualify his statement by which he "observes what is comfortable to do", declaring that it would be more precise to say that he observes *mitzvot* "*also* by taking comfort into consideration . . . There is the minimum, which supersedes matters of comfort. Beyond that it is already considerations of comfort" (Liron).

Traditionists are thus able to see themselves as keeping hold of both their Jewish identity and their liberty. The common Jewish-Israeli map of identities, which presents the orthodox and the secular as two clear categories of identity, again fulfills an important role; the orthodox represents the (sometimes exaggerated) "maximum" in contrast with the traditionist (practical) minimum, whereas the secular represents the failure to live up to that necessary minimum. It is therefore misguiding, explained one interviewee, to search for a "method" or "rule" which dictates traditionist behavior; there are rules for correct Jewish behavior, he stated, but these are aimed at the orthodox rather than the traditionist:

> A traditionist should do what he thinks; let us call it the minimum. You have kids? They should know what Shabbat is, that there is a *kiddush*. After the *kiddush* do what you want [that is, you don't have to obey the orthodox rules regarding the observance of Shabbat] . . . It's not like with the orthodox who have the Halacha where everything is written and the order has to be followed.
>
> (Ronen)

On the other hand, the image of the secular represents too great a rift from Jewish essence. There is an accord amongst traditionists, be it implicit or

explicit, that one's identification as a Jew must be realized through some form of practice – through action and not just sentiment and emotion. Here behavior – and not ethical or principles of belief – is what defines traditionism: "To be a traditionist for me is to be connected to tradition in some way. . . . Practicing, doing is very central to the matter. Judaism is doing, unlike Christianity where everything is [taking place] in the heart and soul" (Tamar).

Traditionism as a compromise of "the middle path"

The secular and the orthodox, set up as symbolic archetypes used by traditionists as reference points for the definition of traditionism as a necessary minimum, also play that role in another, similar definition of traditionism, this time as a "middle path". This path is the delicate balance between two extremities populated by, naturally, the secular on the one side and the orthodox on the other: "[A compromise] between utter decadence and what is correct . . . from a religious point of view" (Tehila).

Within the context of these "absolute" images of secularity and orthodoxy, traditionism presents itself as a worthy compromise (yet another recurring term in many interviewees' description of their Jewish choice) between the strict requirements of Jewish Law and the ability to live a normal life in a modern, secularized world; between comfort and duty; between dictate and ability, and more. Traditionism here shows itself to be a constant, continuing dialectic process of balancing between conflicting demands dealt with by the individual in a modern Jewish world.

The main "clash", as can be seen in the interviews, is between Jewish "religiosity" and the practice of a "normal" lifestyle – a free and modern one. Traditionists feel compelled to balance important fundamental, constitutive, yet ultimately conflicting – at times even mutually exclusive – principles. This choice and balancing is seen as quintessentially traditionist by nature, as both sides – the orthodox and the secular – are perceived to have foregone the choice between conflicting options, chaining themselves to one or the other: the orthodox who, having set up unequivocal prohibitions, have attached themselves to the religious extreme and denied themselves the freedom of choice; and the secular, whose estrangement from Jewish tradition (in the name of that same freedom of choice) has left them bereft of the possibility to choose. One of the interviewees tried to demonstrate the complexity and delicacy of the traditionist balancing act – as well as the irrational rigidity of the orthodox solution – by recounting a story dealing with the clash between two conflicting fundamental values, in this case society and Shabbat:

> I'll give you another good example for a way to deal with this challenge. Many of my daughter's friends attend "Bnei Akiva" [a religious-Zionist youth movement] meetings, as does she. Their activity is on Saturdays. As we know, these are not simple times [in terms of security], and she has to

> walk for about half an hour, sometimes through construction sites . . . I told her . . . "Take a cellphone, switched off and disconnected, put it in your bag, should, heaven forbid, you need something, switch it on and call." She took it once, and then felt uncomfortable [as her orthodox friends saw it as defiling Shabbat, since it is forbidden to use a cellphone on Shabbat]. I said to her, "I'll look into it." I know the *halachic* logic [prohibiting even the carrying of the cellphone on Shabbat], but there is a conflict here. I spoke to some orthodox guys. . . . They said: "God Forbid! It is forbidden . . ." I said: "What stands on the balance? My ten-year-old daughter walking with another four or five girls through a construction site? Her cellphone is an object, a tool, and it is switched off. If, God forbid, something were to happen, even if one of them slips and breaks a leg, she has the means to reach us." On the other hand [for his orthodox friends] it is *muktze* [forbidden from being carried during Shabbat]. She is touching a *muktze* object. It is so clear-cut, nobody questions it . . . The orthodox have no dilemma, no contemplation.
>
> (Gil)

In contrast to this rigid orthodox approach, traditionism represents the ultimate Jewish compromise. So, for example, one interviewee, when attempting to explain her behavior during Shabbat, described it as a "Moroccan Shabbat":

> That is to say, lighting the candles, doing the *kiddush* and driving [in a car, on Shabbat] . . .; a "Moroccan Shabbat" is compromise and traditionism incarnate; outside you go to synagogue, but you return home and switch on the electric light. The compromise is both between man and God and man and society.
>
> (Tehila)

This distinction between what goes on within the home and what goes on outside it, between the public and the private – and most especially the stricter observance within the home as opposed to a relatively loose attitude towards religious observance outside it – appears to be a central element in the traditionist practical interpretation of the above "minimum" and "mean path". Traditionists can thus be described as identifying an essential core of Judaism whose interpretation – or practical application – differs within the house and without. In this spirit, almost all interviewees said they keep kosher, while making clear that the content of this statement changes depending on whether they are at home or not (they are invariably stricter at home). This fluctuating interpretation highlights the personal, familial nature of traditionism, underlining the difficulty to express it in public. Traditionists strive not to broadcast their traditionist identity; they wear no social markings which would identify them as such, nor do they advertise their Jewish behavior. The practice of Jewish rituals is mostly confined to the familial or individual spheres.

Practice, essence, and emotion

The main point of interest in the current context is the way in which the distinction is made between that which is considered essential and crucial to the conservation of Jewish identity, and that which is "less important" and "nonessential". All interviewees had a clear *sense* of the distinction between what is essential and nonessential in Judaism. It should be noted, though, that none presented these distinctions as a coherent set of rules and regulations. Moreover, as I have already noted, many were clearly and poignantly averse to any attempted overly clear-cut articulation of the traditionist "rule". Nevertheless, the identification of the "essential" and its distinction from the "nonessential" emerged throughout all interviews, mostly through the interviewees' descriptions of their Jewish lifestyle.

Interviewees suggested a number of sources in which the above distinction could have originated. One of the most prominent sources was described by many as the individual's feeling of obligation towards the Jewish people and its historical continuity. The *mitzvot* observed are those which express the traditionist individual's obedience to this historical duty. This is reflected in Tehila's statement concerning her Jewish conduct:

> I observe Shabbat, I keep kosher, I fast on Yom Kippur. Marking tradition, searching for roots and origins, educating children on tradition, values such as "love thy neighbor", the conservation of tradition for generations to come. I don't observe Shabbat as in the strictest Halacha, but am committed to continuity – that my great-grandchildren will observe Shabbat. Commitment towards the family . . . towards God . . . I am committed to conserve and create continuity. A commitment towards the Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

Another interviewee described himself as bound by the historical imperative: "The people of Israel have a tradition which goes back three to four thousand years . . . I can't just erase that and say: 'I'm Israeli and I couldn't care less about that' " (Reuven). The same speaker then went on to describe his choice as guided also by considerations of comfort; he explained that he chooses to observe those parts of the binding tradition which are "comfortable" to practice. It would seem that this conflicted, dialectical relation which exists between the feeling of obligation to history and the concept of choice guided by comfort within that same historical dictate epitomizes the complexity of traditionist practice.

Several interviewees did not hesitate to present their "list of *mitzvot*" as an expression of personal interpretation, aimed at reaching the true essence of Judaism. They described the aforementioned "minimum" as originating within the individual, as a personal response to the need for self-definition – rather than the result of any external dictate. Thus, for example, when asked if the *mitzvot* he observes are the minimum expected by God, Koren

answered: "I don't know; they are the minimum I expect from myself." Liron's response was similar, as he opened with a description of the ideology underlying his traditionism as the preservation of the original intent of divine edicts:

> I look at what God, as far as I am concerned, wanted to say. And what the religious [rabbinical] establishment interpreted – as far as I am concerned they do not represent Jewish religion. No one gave them the authority to be the sole representatives of the religion . . . I listen, and decide whether or not it is right for me.
>
> (Liron)

When I insisted on clarifying just how much this personal interpretation of Liron represents the traditionist lifestyle he inherited from his parents, the complexity of that personal choice as well as the complexity of the independent examination of the Jewish essence was further revealed; his interpretation of tradition was not, he claimed, a reflection of lessons learned at home:

> The interpretation I was taught at home said I should not eat meat and dairy [together], and, after reading [the original edict], to me "though shalt not eat a lamb in its mother's milk" means not to be cruel. Despite that I still cannot eat meat and dairy [together], no matter what.

We are dealing therefore with a combination of these motivations/domains, which some may choose to see as conflicting: "It is ideology . . . and it is habits and education, and it is easy for me to observe, so I don't have a problem" (Liron).

We thus find ourselves back in the domain of the element of choice, as interviewees describe themselves as having chosen the most comfortable and pleasant individual lifestyle. Nevertheless, interviewees took great care not to represent themselves as completely independent in these choices. Many made a point of stressing the important role of the education they were given at home, describing it as playing a large part in the construction of their identity and the shaping of the traditionist code they choose to follow. As put by Linor:

> These things are on several levels. There is the level of values, which you can infer from religion or social values. But these are things I don't even define as tradition. These are things that have been burned into me by the nature of my education . . . Honoring one's parents, being moral towards others, these are things that don't have anything special to do with the fact that I am traditionist . . . On the other hand, there are things that are really tied in with tradition. Keeping kosher, for example: it is something I am very strict about . . . I also try very hard to give Shabbat some sort of a religious nature.

It seems to me that the correct way to settle this tension – the minimum as externally dictated versus its more private and personal aspect – is to distinguish between two separate levels of behavior expressed here. In a somewhat Weberian spirit, one might distinguish between two levels of action-motivation taking place here: On a "rational" or cognitive, self-aware level, traditionist behavior presents itself clearly as a product of conscious, confrontational even, choice – vis-à-vis both the secular and orthodox extremes – which is accompanied by self-reflection and introspection; and on a traditional-emotional level, traditionism seems to be nourished mainly on the practical, "mimetic" education received as part of a cultural heritage.

The first, cognitive and self-reflective level brings into sharper relief the fact that the traditionist system is based on personal choice. The variety of statements discussed within the current chapter all testify to an unusually high level of self-awareness typical of the traditionist choice. Traditionists themselves are well aware of the complex nature of the Jewish practice which characterizes them. They are in fact part of a Jewish structure of behavior which seems (to them, at least) "natural", but forces them into a condition of constant choice: not only the choice of identifying as traditionists, but also the choice of those practices which comprise and sustain traditionist identity.

A clear and coherent expression of this self-aware dimension of choice was given by a few participants, who described themselves as ideologically committed to the traditionist cause. One such participant – describing himself as an "ideological traditionist" in order to clarify his approach to traditionism – showed how the continuous choice of the elements comprising the traditionist lifestyle depends on the existence of a value-based hierarchy, requiring a gentle balance between clashing principles. His statement provides us with an untrammeled view of the complexity of the choice, which he described as an ongoing series of "Jewish symbolic decisions" aimed at conserving a meaningful Jewish identity. He responded to the argument according to which the traditionist lifestyle lacks "coherence":

> Coherence, to me, is to decide . . . what are the issues I should insist upon in order to feel there is some sort of uniqueness here, which is not what is comfortable to me . . . I determine my own way of living. Much like I determine my own way of living on the moral level, much like I determine my own way of living family life, I determine my own way of living on the Jewish level. Especially where children are being educated . . . I have a way of living, and I am consistent with it, because these are the essential, the important matters which distinguish me as a Jew.
>
> (Gil)

Answering a query regarding how large a role is played in these decisions by a guiding rationale, and how much they are merely a reflection of old ingrained habits, Gil chose to demonstrate the way in which he executes his symbolic-traditionist decisions:

> To a certain extent I choose in an independent manner, with my rationale. On Shabbat, for example: I drive the car, but I won't drive just to have a barbecue with friends. As far as I am concerned, driving on Shabbat is a means by which to distinguish Shabbat, that is, to meet the family . . . driving on Shabbat is meant for the family to meet up. For me, a walk through nature could equally be a way to single out Shabbat. Nature is, to me, very Jewish and very significant to my belief in this wonder that has been created. A walk through nature is not, to me, a barbecue, but a walk. It is something I would call a "Shabbat pleasure." I will watch TV on Shabbat, but it will have a very specific place. I will not switch on my computer on Shabbat, because that is work, studies, something which is part of everyday, ordinary life, though television could be seen as such as well. But TV could, to me, be part of Shabbat rest, and the computer could not. Also, as far as the workplace is concerned, I will not write on Shabbat. Again, people looking from the outside may say: "Is writing more work than driving?" So I say: "That is not the criteria. Writing is something very significant: it represents work, it represents studying as well as a number of other things.
>
> (Gil)

Lack of "method" and self-criticism

The question of methodic coherence, or "consistency", emerges here in full force.[1] A strong sense of self-criticism, focused on the "gaps of logic" and the "inconsistency" in traditionist practice, can be discerned throughout the interviews. For the most part this criticism was expressed using tools provided by a view of Judaism based largely upon the orthodox Halacha. In other words, this self-criticism echoes the criticism leveled against traditionists by orthodox Jews, who present traditionism as an incomplete religious Jewish lifestyle. The traditionist method is here revealed through an action of introspection, where orthodox interpretation of Jewish Law (i.e., "religiosity") serves as an external yardstick used for self-judgment. Roni gave voice to this self-criticism when pointing to the (*halachicly*) "completely arbitrary" nature of traditionist observance:

> I think keeping kosher is an important thing; [and also] the observing of Shabbat, not in its absolute form, but the aspect of not working on Shabbat . . . I do not light fire on Shabbat. To barbecue on Shabbat would make me feel greatly uncomfortable. I light the [cooking] gas on Shabbat, but grilling outside, in public, with an exposed fire, this I don't do, even though, as far as the Halacha is concerned, there is no difference between the two.
>
> (Roni)

According to many interviewees, the consistency in their conduct must be

seen as the preservation of Jewish identity and meaning. It is not surprising that the most direct, overt confrontation with these issues takes place in the context of children's education, or, more accurately, when parents attempt to teach their children the traditionist method. Many participants revealed how the need to deal with explaining a certain facet to a child and answer his or her questions – regarding what is considered to be the traditionist "inconsistency" – forced them to undergo some sort of private and familial inquiry into the meaning of traditionism to them. Gil's words on the subject demonstrate just that:

> We must always explain to the children about our method, what we do at home. It is something we deal with all the time, and it is important to me that the children are a part of it. When my eldest daughter was around four years old, she loved to paint, and one Saturday she asked me: "Daddy, when is 'Motzei Shabbat' [the time when Shabbat, and its accompanying restrictions, end]?" I told her: "There are still another two hours." She told me: "I really feel like drawing." I answered: "You know that on Shabbat you don't draw." And she said: "Daddy, you told me once that you drive on Shabbat and Mummy doesn't, you do this and she does different, so I want to do that I draw on Shabbat." Of course this turned out to be a very big discussion about how in certain things you can behave differently, but we have certain rules in the house that we are very strict about, and that, to us, is a lifestyle at which you can look in many possible ways. But this is dealing with it. It could have been an interesting conversation with her. I think traditionism, in this regard, is harder than orthodoxy and secularity because it requires you to continuously deal with this dilemma. The question is: are you prepared to deal with it?

Consistency, ideal, practice, and guilt

As a complex identity without a written code and lacking social, ideological, institutional, and cultural support, it is no wonder that there are those who see traditionism as inherently bringing about a sense of guilt. The fact that traditionists do not behave according to those supposedly "consistent", logical, and methodic codes offered by the dominant identity structure – secularity or orthodoxy – plays an important role here. When faced with these seemingly consistent and coherent codes of practice, traditionism appears to be an incoherent amalgamation of practices, which is bound to cause self-reflective feelings of guilt.

Indeed, an initial inspection appears to confirm that guilt is an important, central component of traditionist identity. It stems mostly from an intimate knowledge of the orthodox alternative and its acceptance as representing authentic Judaism – even if only from the religious aspect of this identity. When compared with the orthodox model traditionists are painted as weak-spirited,

not willing to sacrifice what it takes in order to sustain a full, authentic Jewish identity. Meir Buzaglo, having taken upon himself the challenging task of articulating the philosophical articulation of the traditionist alternative, proposes a compelling account of the role of the guilt component within traditionist identity. According to Buzaglo (2002, 632), the traditionist does in fact have these feelings identified by the secular as "sense of guilt", "but he [the secular] channels them into 'guilty feelings' ", whereas the traditionist "has no guilty feelings, but rather actual guilt". Buzaglo presents us with a version of traditionism indebted to orthodoxy, which serves as a sort of religious compass, or yardstick, always revealing traditionism's digression from the "authentic" Jewish *halachic* code. As such, traditionism is doomed to be ever inferior. Traditionists will always look up to the orthodox as representing true Judaism, always aware of the "fault" in their deficient Judaism.

And yet it would seem that such an articulation of the element of guilt, even though it does capture an important component of the traditionist identity, is lacking. This articulation ignores the central fact by which traditionists actively, continuously and repeatedly choose their identity. Put differently, traditionists choose to observe the set of beliefs and practices which may generate this guilt. In light of this, the limits of the feeling of guilt, and of guilt itself, as a component in traditionist identity, are further delineated.

In this respect, when traditionists choose not to live as orthodox Jews, even where they see the orthodox way of life as closer to the ideal of Jewish-religious authenticity, they take a clear stand with regard to that identity, as well as the guilt which may come as a consequence of comparing oneself to it. Later I will deal extensively with the image traditionists have of the orthodox (see Chapter 7); here I shall content myself with mentioning one fundamental component of this image. It can be simply put as saying: the orthodox identity and lifestyle are the right thing to do "in principle" and "according to the Halacha", while the traditionist way of life and resulting identity are the right (Jewish) thing to do "in practice" and "de facto". Within this realm, the domain of the viable and the practical, traditionists see their practice as authentically Jewish, more right, possible, and preferable to other options – including the orthodox one. This position naturally limits the place awarded to guilt amongst the elements comprising traditionist identity.

In other words, I wish to argue that the new perspective adopted by this book with regard to traditionist identity clarifies the unique role of the element of guilt within this identity construct. The argument that traditionism must be studied as a positive, full, and modern Jewish identity within the context of a dominant secularized culture – shaped also by its position vis-à-vis the orthodox ideal, which presents itself as the absolute expression of authentic Judaism – sheds new light on the element of guilt. Traditionists choose not to be orthodox, and are aware of the element of guilt which may arise from such a choice (there are those who would say that one is even expected to feel such guilt). At the same time they see themselves as "no less Jewish" (as many of the participants put it) than anyone else, thus curbing

and limiting the role of guilt in their identity. In short, the relation between the traditionist lifestyle and the rabbinical-orthodox Halacha takes on a far more complex character than that somewhat simplified image of guilt assumed by those who accept rabbinical-orthodox authority while not actually living true to its edicts.

Seemingly, this guilt is the result of not fitting in to the binary categories: It stems from the inconsistency which characterizes the behavior of anyone living within a binary scheme and refusing to fully associate with one of the two opposites. Or, if we choose to adopt yet another binary division, guilt can be seen as a component of a "popular religion" which deems itself to be inferior and incomplete when compared with the lofty, pure "elite religion". As I repeatedly claim herein, the case at hand is far more complex than such binary perspectives; it demands sensitivity to the complex, multiple dimensions of identity that play a role here. Nonetheless, a comparison between traditionism and these ideal images (most especially the comparison, in this case, between traditionism and orthodoxy) may illuminate the facet which I wish to further investigate here.

The orthodox ideal can be described (following Max Weber (1993)) as a constant striving towards religious virtuosity or, in the Jewish instance, *halachic* virtuosity. This ideal sees itself as committed to absolute *halachic* codes, in a manner that Clifford Geertz (1968) has termed "scripturalism" (see also Soloveitchik 1994). The orthodox "religious virtuosity" (or at least the virtuosity expected from orthodox Jews within Israeli society) marks them as attempting to sustain a sort of religious (Jewish) equivalent of Susan Wolf's (1982) "Moral Saint". As Wolf put it, such an ideal "saint", that is, one who is true to and applies in every single minutia of his quotidian life the superior moral codes and consistent and coherent ideals, not once "digressing" or "slipping up", is inconceivable and impossible in the real world. Moreover, says Wolf, he would also be intolerable to "regular" people. But he fulfills an important role on an ideal plane. He presents and represents an exemplary model of perfect human behavior – both consistent and methodical.

In light of that Jewish-religious equivalent of a "moral saint" – a kind of shining example of the "perfect Jew" – we would be hard pressed to identify an equivalent "traditionist ideal", which serves traditionists as a pure, exemplary role model. Instead, it would be more correct to speak of, in the spirit of Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) writings, the traditionist "logic of practice".

This gap between the philosophical/moral/religious ideal and practical, everyday life can be described as guiding the traditionist choice. This gap "resolves" the issue of traditionist guilt: traditionists are reluctant to pronounce *ideologically* that a Jewish lifestyle that is allegedly inconsistent and unmethodical, especially when confronted with the *halachic*-orthodox exemplary model, should be labeled as the correct, prescribed practice. At the same time, traditionists are not willing to live life as the sort of moralistic, uncompromising, impossible saint that Wolf discusses. Traditionists choose to live a life which feels – and is lived and felt – right: a life which answers

one's emotional and identity-oriented need to live as a complete Jewish person in this contemporary world.

Amongst other things, this position also explains the traditionist aversion-resistance to articulating the rule which dictates traditionist lifestyle. Such a formulation of it would transform traditionist life into an ideological-religious body of law in its own right, to a matter of "principle" and "*halachic* rule" – and to this traditionists would not agree. This ideological, theoretical realm is reserved for the orthodox. The traditionist code of conduct is a code of practical, daily, modern living.

This distinction may help us better understand the issue of guilt. The central elements of this sense of guilt revolve around the principal aspiration towards a "perfect" ideal of "true" Jewish identity and lifestyle, ever accompanied by a realization of their improbability. This aspiration leans on the recognition of the rabbinical-orthodox total authority to interpret that Jewish-religious ideal, even where it falls under criticism and engenders both resentment and disappointment. This recognition leads traditionists to choose to forego the (collective) "theoretical" ideal, focusing instead on those more practical parts (which have more to do with the personal, private level). At the same time traditionists will neither institutionalize this concession nor sweepingly justify it. This position leads to a continuous and constant awareness by traditionists of the element of guilt, which may rise from the fact that they do not practice that Jewish-*halachic*, "theoretical" ideal. However, traditionists also make a point of presenting their Jewish behavior (on the "practical" level) as legitimate. The practical logic of the traditionist lifestyle is, to traditionists, an authentic expression of Jewish identity.[2]

One interviewee considers this complexity – the one involving the tension between (a religious, orthodox) ideal and (traditionist) practice, as well as the element of guilt it may engender, as defining the concept of traditionism as a whole. In this vein, when he offered his definition for traditionism he included both the element of guilt and a clear distinction from other – to him, misguided – notions of digression from the *halachic* ideal:

> The best way for me to describe to myself what a traditionist is, is a person that doesn't observe all of the *mitzvot*, but knows that that is wrong. That is, wrong on the religious level. I don't try and find a religious justification for not observing Shabbat. I don't claim to not observe Shabbat because in the modern world observing Shabbat is no longer necessary. I am not trying to change either religion or Halacha, and I know that in certain places I am deviating from it and have no intention of having it changed to suit me. I think that is more or less the definition of traditionism.
>
> (Roni)

In other words, the traditionist choice is "wrong" on a religious level (= the level of "Judaism"), but – as Roni repeatedly emphasized throughout the

interview – is "just fine" on the Jewish level, and correct from a Jewish identity point of view (= the level of "Jewishness"). It is interesting to note that Roni, in whose definition of traditionism guilt plays a central role, is also one of the most thoroughly self-assured traditionists I have spoken with. He constantly presented traditionism as a virtue in its own right: throughout the whole interview, it was rather obvious that Roni sees his choice as the right thing to do. At the same time, he clearly noted that he is aware of the gap between his traditionist lifestyle and the religious ideal. This acknowledgment, rather than guilt itself, is, as I have said, central to the traditionist Jewish identity.

This complex picture underlines the fact that traditionism exists also in the realm of emotion and practice, while refusing to be categorized as a coherent ideational corpus. One must pay attention to the question of cause and effect here: Is it a feeling of guilt stemming from the fact that traditionism is an "inferior" kind of idea which exists on the practical and emotional levels only, not being able to elevate itself to the level of a coherent, systematic and logical ideal? Or is the traditionist (conscious) choice to limit one's behavior to this practical level a result of one's other choice, the choice not to put in writing (thus "sanctifying") the corpus of his "reformist" ideology to guide one's behavior, leaving it supposedly full of contradictions? In other words: on the practical level, in the realm of "practical sense", the traditionist choice is a fully logical, "consistent" and "systematic" solution. Like many others (who have suggested their own myriad solutions), traditionists, too, recognize the clash between a contemporary, modern, and secularized lifestyle and the religious, orthodox ideal, which is seen as frozen and impractical. The traditionists' strategic choice is to allow traditionism to remain on the level of practice and emotion, avoiding its articulation as a set, explicit ideal. If this is so, we can describe the "cause" as the perceived impracticality of the orthodox ideal in an active, modern, participatory world. The "effect" or "result" is the limiting of traditionism to a practical and emotional level, foregoing the ideal aspect. It is within this context that the issue of inconsistency and the guilt it entails should be studied.

Guilt and acceptance

The issue of guilt surfaced in all of the interviews in a rather open and explicit manner. It was often the subject of elaborate discussions, revealing the issue's immense intricacy. Almost all interviewees – including those whose immediate answer was that they feel no guilt – acknowledged the existence of this element as part of traditionist identity, and addressed it. And yet it was very rare for any to simply admit guilt without qualifying, explaining, and positioning it in a wider context, thus removing much of its sting. The vast majority of the interviewees stressed that they are content with the traditionist lifestyle they chose, and therefore limited the element of guilt and sequestered it. I shall begin the following discussion with some of the sharper and

more poignant expressions of guilt, continuing with an in-depth investigation of the whole, complex picture by presenting the interviewees' reservations about that sense of guilt.

The interviews made it very apparent that an especially poignant sense of guilt is characteristic of the "formerly orthodox"; these interviewees, who had arrived at the traditionist option and its accompanying Jewish practices through a gradual process of leaving the orthodox community and abandoning the religious ideal, usually conveyed a strong, obvious sense of guilt. Their decision to become traditionists is ever present, its implications reverberating. For many of them it is a choice which goes out against the core of their upbringing as far as habits and education are concerned. It is only natural that the fact that, as orthodox children, they were taught to consider traditionism to be lacking, partial, and unsatisfactory as far as Judaism is concerned, plays a central role here.

In this context traditionism becomes a "concession". As put by one woman who made the transition from orthodoxy to traditionism, this identity conversion means "allowing yourself to get away with it . . . By not defining myself as orthodox I am making my life more comfortable, conceding something" (Tamar). It is such a recognition that leads to what one interviewee called "all the guilty conscience" that she has for not observing Shabbat. When asked if she believes she is guilty, she answered unequivocally, revealing the central role played by choice in the generation of this feeling of guilt:

Q: Do you have guilt feelings?

A: Surely I do. This whole transition of becoming traditionist, it's a matter of character. You don't live by society, but by what you think. I'm happy I do only what I want to. But you have to be content with yourself. My mother, she could be defined as a traditionist, but she isn't [identifying as such], because no one should hear that she is speaking on the phone on Shabbat, so she speaks quietly. I don't. We are content with our choice, because we constantly wrestle with what to do and what not to do. For example, we have officially decided to try driving on Shabbat. It is a very, very hard decision, one with which I am not fully content. It is something I might very well stop. Already I feel not content with it.

(Sigal)

For another interviewee, who had also made the transition from orthodoxy to traditionist lifestyle and identity, it is not about guilt, but rather the scruples and misgivings of "the orthodox conscience", as she put it: "I don't know if it is guilt, but definitely a feeling that things should be done differently. That things are not followed through like they should be" (Revital).

In the most extreme form of projection of the orthodox (even if only formerly orthodox) viewpoint on the traditionist way of life, traditionism becomes a conscious transgression, for which one should be punished. This

approach was best expressed by Tehila, who was brought up in a secular household, became increasingly religious as an adult, found the orthodox life to be impossible, and eventually chose traditionism as the practical option. It seems that this journey left her with a clear sense of guilt. This was her explanation as to why a Jew should observe any *mitzvot* at all:

> Because it is the right thing to do. It is right to live like that. It is a recipe of how to live – the 613 *mitzvot*. You should live by it. If I were religious [orthodox] I would do all 613. I am half religious. I am aware of the fact that I am not doing everything I should have done. You choose the middle knowing you may suffer for it sometime.
> *Q:* So you live constantly with feelings of guilt?
> *A:* Yes.
> *Q:* So what do you do that for?
> *A:* Because I have a problem of willpower.

The traditionist alternative appears here to somewhat alleviate guilt, perhaps sweetening whatever punishment is due a person for not being fully observant. In Tehila's words, the choice of traditionism is "a denial of awe. It is clear to me that there is a punishment awaiting me somewhere."

It would often seem that the object of these guilt feelings is God. He is the one demanding observance of the *mitzvot*, and He is the one with regard to whom the traditionist transgresses. Rarely if ever did the interviewees express unease or guilt with regard to the community. It became rather apparent that they do not deal with any substantial demands on the part of their intimate community for stricter observance, if for any sort of observance at all. Guilt thus remains for the greater part a matter between a person and her/his God. In this vein one of the interviewees described God as expecting him, beyond ethical behavior, "to observe as many *mitzvot* of the 613 as possible", immediately clarifying that "I have a personal problem with Shabbat, but this is what God expects" (Gideon). He further explained that this gap between divine expectations and human behavior creates "a certain feeling of unease, within the limitations with which I live". For Ronen the possible object at which his guilt is directed is his father:

> It is a dissonance with which I live. I say it for the first time, but it could be that I feel I am betraying my father's heritage, so I come up with excuses . . . I seek my concessions [regarding "complete" observance] from within the text. I feel I am lying to myself; I am aware of it.

"Pangs of conscience" is a term commonly appearing in this context. As testified by Liat when asked about the alleged consistency in her practice, traditionists "have many pangs of conscience". She emphasized that this is especially true when compared with secular Israelis who, she believes, do not

deal with such dilemmas. In the same vein, Roni described himself as being in a situation where "sometimes there are things I do, and say in my heart 'Sorry, God.' " He said he has no interest in becoming more observant, while immediately adding: ". . . but I feel bad with myself for doing that. I know it is wrong." Why, therefore, does he choose to act the way he does? "First of all, putting everything in a staunchly ideological light is definitely not right. Comfort and habit. That is how your surroundings behave, and yet you adopt certain things from the surroundings. I think that is the main reason" (Roni). Another participant chose to describe it as "hypocrisy" (Shlomo) – both his and other traditionists', who choose to surrender to their urge for comfort, sacrificing proper observance.

There is one very prominent context in which the traditionist sense of guilt expresses itself rather as a social matter: within the synagogue, which is seen as an orthodox domain. Religious, or orthodox Jews – whose realm it is – enjoy within this province a privileged position, and their demands (or critical perspective) receive special attention. Inside the orthodox sphere the traditionist way of life positions traditionists in the inferior position of those whose Judaism is incomplete. Traditionists accept the orthodox ideal in this realm of institutionalized sanctity, putting themselves in an inferior, problematic position. Interviewees testified to being well aware of the critical orthodox view of them, as well as their inferior position within the realm of institutionalized religiosity and sanctity. Many of them made clear that they accept this position as "natural". Some even went as far as pointing out that they consider this critical perspective to be both true and appropriate within the field of Jewish religiosity. And yet they stressed that they are content with their traditionism and do not intend to alter it; they respect the orthodox lifestyle, and accept their proffered status within the synagogue while being confident about their identity and choice, without qualifying them in any way. The following example demonstrates just that: one of the interviewees said that, from time to time, he acts as a cantor, and leads the service in the synagogue where he prays. He immediately made it clear that as a non-orthodox Jew, his role in leading the service is limited: he could not take certain public roles in the synagogue: "I could not be a public emissary. It is impossible" (Gideon). When asked to explain why he thinks it is impossible, he chose to demonstrate it through what he perceived to be an incompatibility between his preferred sport – jogging – and the orthodox way of life:

> I run also on Shabbat. I try not to run while they go to synagogue in order not to offend their modesty. I try not to run in *haredi* areas when they all go out in order not to offend them.
> *Q:* Does it disturb them to see a man running?
> *A:* No one ever told me, but I feel it is uncomfortable; why cause them to sin?
> *Q:* You feel you are coercing them into something?

A: Yes, and that is why I try to run at certain hours in the secular areas and through different tracks.
Q: And this all comes from a personal sentiment?
A: Definitely, completely my choice.
Q: Could it be that you have some sense of guilt, that perhaps you don't do enough?
A: I don't know if it is some feeling of guilt. I wouldn't call it guilt, just not being content with everything I do. Not that I am not content with everything I do, but that what I do is maybe not so . . . how do I define it? Not the most right thing to do.

Self-criticism is, therefore, clearly evident and seems to accompany traditionists throughout their day-to-day life. If a person were to conclude that her traditionist way of life signifies that "I have taken upon myself a bit of sin, really" (Dalia), then this criticism would seem "inherent":

> It goes like this: there are *mitzvot* I observe, and I am happy to be observing, and there are *mitzvot* I want to observe and don't, out of laziness, and I am not happy with that. For example: getting up every morning, praying and laying the *tefilin*. But I don't do it because of simply laziness. And things which I used to do in the past for ideological reasons, so now I don't do them, because I am old. And later, when I get older, so on the way to heaven I'll have to reorganize myself for it.
>
> (Tomer)

The obvious tone here is one of none-too-seriously-taken self-criticism. Indeed, this could be understood as just another expression of inconsistency; and yet it would seem to me more appropriate to see this as an expression of the complexity characteristic of every identity-structure, a complexity which accompanies a person in various contexts, in which one becomes aware of a behavioral ideal which s/he, "in principle", strives to realize, while at the same time choosing behavioral and value-oriented options inconsistent with this ideal, for a variety of reasons.

While accepting the orthodox ideal as expressing authentic religious-Judaism, many interviewees see their traditionism as enabling, or allowing, them to deviate from that ideal. They, as traditionists, are permitted to do that which "the religious", observing the orthodox interpretation of Halacha, is forbidden to do. At the same time this "self-issued license" inherently raises a sense of self-criticism. See for example Gideon's statement, describing his weekly trip (by car) for a Shabbat dinner at his parents' house: "We do the *kiddush*, and Shabbat dinner. We drive [on Shabbat] to my parents to eat. That could never be if I were religious. We drive on Shabbat. As a traditionist that seems natural and OK, with some heartache."

Thus, many interviewees made a point of simultaneously conveying both their feelings of guilt and the "excuse" for not upholding the ideal. In

this way Yair stated decisively that he does not suffer from any feelings of guilt:

> I have no feelings of guilt. I know I am not doing enough, but I don't feel guilty. I admit it: I'm not doing enough. I feel bad that I drive on Shabbat. But I have arguments justifying it: I am going to visit my parents, and I don't want to sleep at their house.

A similar note can be detected within Batya's statement: She testified to a "certain extent" of guilt feelings stemming, she claimed, from her intimate knowledge of Jewish Law and the demands it makes. Batya also stressed that she knows how easy observing this Law could be. She make it clear that she does not fully observe the *halachic* ideal because she finds that many times the rabbinical interpretation demonstrably deviates from God's original intent. In her opinion Shabbat prohibitions are a clear example of this. And yet this rationalization does not prevent her feelings of guilt:

> Because I haven't done enough, and I know I should. The thing with electricity [on Shabbat] poses a problem, because our whole life is based upon it [electricity], and I am sure that is not what the Creator meant when he said not to light a fire on Shabbat. But he did mean that a woman must go to the *mikveh* [purifying baths, to which a woman must go in order to purify herself after menstruation], and before that she must observe the days of *niddah* [days of menstruation in which certain, more limiting, rules of interaction apply]. It is . . . written in the Torah.

Choice, guilt, and self-criticism

The other side of self-criticism is, then, self-justification, which is based on the recognition of personal choice and the acceptance of it as correct, viable and merited. This point of view finds traditionists to be self-assured, content in their identity, and accepting, in a nearly defiant way, their deviation from the orthodox-*halachic* "standard" as correct. In other words it is here that we find the limits of guilt. Liat gave a rather sharp articulation of such a recognition of the traditionist "inconsistency", the cross-pressures they engender, and most especially the "insistence" to conserve this "inconsistency":

> I light candles on Shabbat and half an hour later I drive the car. It's a bit ridiculous, but it's what happens. Some people say: you are either religious or secular. I don't agree with that. I'm allowed to do what I see fit, even knowing I should do more.

What we are dealing with here, therefore, is the realm of self-affirmation, and the acceptance of one's individual identity – the traditionist "self" – as

both correct and worthy, while rejecting the critical, negating, demanding of correction, point of view of the orthodox or secular "others". It is worthy of note that the awareness of this point of view and what is reflected from within it – that is to say: the supposed inconsistency and incoherence, the "semi-blasphemy" (from an orthodox viewpoint) or the "quasi religiosity" (from a secular point of view) – stands out in this context. See, for example, how Gidi put it, as he was relating his experience of spending a Shabbat hosted by an ultra-orthodox family; I asked him whether staying with that family and experiencing the strict observance of Shabbat stirred within him any feelings of guilt for not conducting himself similarly:

> Really not: thank God I have no feelings of guilt over what I am not. If I'm not, I'm not [that observant]. I see the beauty in what there is. Not visibly, because if we consider only what is visible [i.e., judge traditionists according to their discernible religious practice], we could be frustrated, regretful, living with guilt; but it is not good [to do so].

Another interviewee referred directly to the orthodox view of her, and rejected it outright. Her statement was juxtaposed to a description of herself as one who is completely at ease with the traditionist way of life she had chosen:

> But sometimes I feel it is not right that I do certain things. There is a slight feeling of guilt . . . [Her orthodox friends] have said of me that I am "a captured infant" and so on [meaning that she is not guilty for her transgression, since she hadn't received the adequate education], but I do know what is needed. It's a bit hard, but I get along because it is my life.
>
> (Liat)

This trend is further enhanced by the dynamic nature of traditionist lifestyle. The traditionist tendency to add to or detract from the list of *mitzvot* to be observed testifies both to the presence of guilt and to its solution (albeit merely a local one). As Tomer noted, the decisive factor in this context is a person's need to feel at one with oneself and the choices one has made:

> Were I not at one with myself, I would throw myself off the ninth floor. A human being has to be at one with himself. That is the main motto of my life.
>
> *Q:* At the same time you say you would be glad to get up in the morning and lay the *tefilin*, whereas. . . .
>
> *A:* True, but I also tell myself I would like to run 20 kilometers every day, and I don't run even the one-kilometer, nor even one hundred meters. I really do say that, but I don't bother myself over it – "Wow, I haven't laid *tefilin*". But if I haven't laid *tefilin* for two weeks, and I

> have a chronic headache, I tell my wife "That's it, I have to lay *tefilin*", I do it, and the next day, no more headaches. Got it? All in all I am at peace with myself.

It must be emphasized that it is the interviewees themselves who mentioned choice as a component which explains the limits of that possible guilt. Their statements show that choice leads to a continuing process of self-examination and reflection and dealing with its consequences. This process stretches well beyond the feelings of guilt and self-criticism with regard to observance (or lack thereof) of Halacha. Gil, who preferred to discuss his traditionism within the wider context of choosing personal and collective identity, articulated this sentiment eloquently:

> It is a struggle . . . I am coping with my way of life in any direction. I ask myself whether I live the way I would like to. Do I take the correct actions? Did I behave in a sufficiently correct way? This is true for every principle I try and apply to my life, not only the religious side . . . Sometimes also in the other direction – the fact that I go to a Sephardic synagogue which manifests a degrading attitude toward women – am I doing the right thing? Perhaps, despite a deeply rooted sympathy for the Sephardic synagogue, I should hope for a Conservative [more egalitarian] synagogue in my city? We make such compromises all the time throughout life. That is why I don't see it so much connected to being a traditionist but because of what I am. But I don't live with feelings of guilt as a traditionist, quite the opposite; I am doing something I very much believe in. I am convinced your research will prove that traditionists don't do what is comfortable for them, but rather deal with things in depth. I see that in the conversations I have with other people.

To reiterate, the picture emerging here is one of a sense of guilt existing within and limited by the context of choice, which also encourages a comparatively high level of self-reflection and criticism. Moreover, this tension is mostly left unresolved, and continues to exist as a daily fact of life:

> *Q:* Do you have feelings of guilt?
> *A:* For letting myself get away with it? A bit, maybe. When I think about it I don't feel guilty, but I find something here to be a little ridiculous. I am aware of the fact that as soon as a little bit more is required of me I say, "That's it, this doesn't suit me." What sort of a thing is that?! I have more self-criticism than guilt. Sometimes I tell myself: "You are a bit funny – you won't light a fire [on Shabbat], you light Shabbat candles, but heaven forbid that should ruin your trip on Saturday [driving the car] . . . why should I forego my Saturday trip and sit at home all day, not driving; it makes my life harder." So the self-criticism exists.

Q: Is there an appropriate response to this self-criticism?
A: No, you just live with it. But it is not guilt.

(Ziva)

It might therefore be more correct to talk about self-criticism and self-reflection, and not guilt, as relevant to understanding traditionist identity in this context of *halachic*-religious "inconsistency". This self-criticism is shown as part of a continuing process of self-improvement, centered also round the desire to maintain a moral lifestyle:

> I don't feel guilty and never have. Generally speaking we would like to be better people, and as a part of that we would like to be more observant. It is not only the *mitzvot* between man and God, but also many things between people . . . Not guilty feelings, but rather a constant process of self-improvement.
>
> (Tahel)

This self-criticism is not left unanswered either. The most commonplace answer touches upon, as can be learned from the statements above, the issues of the practicality and viability of the orthodox way of life (or, more accurately put, their impossibility and impracticality). The fact that the "Jewishly-religiously correct" way of life is impractical quite naturally takes the sting out of such criticism. This is revealed, for example, in Liora's statement, that she is angry with herself for not being more observant:

> Small things I would like to do. They are small, they are simple. They can be done. But I skip them. I put something in my mouth – two seconds to say the prayer – is it that hard? It's not hard, but I don't do it.

And yet these words were immediately followed by her very own counter argument explaining why, when it comes right down to it, she does not observe these "small" *mitzvot*. Such explanations usually deal with the level of practicality involved with observing *mitzvot*. Lack of time, for example, makes some practices impractical:

> Time wise I am constantly stressed. I'm constantly active. I have no moment of rest. That is why I go mad [wondering] how do orthodox people have time for every little thing? And they don't skip a thing. It drives me a little crazy.

Participants constantly emphasized that, as a matter of conscious choice, traditionism is the right thing *for them*, even if it is judged to be religiously lacking. An apt expression of just such a solution for self-criticism was offered by Tamar, who started off with a similar tone of self-criticism with

regard to the supposed "weakness of character" which prevents her from being more observant:

> Sometimes I have it [sense of guilt] . . . For example, a woman is obligated to say one prayer a day, but I don't make the effort of getting up an hour early, to say the Morning Prayer. Because it is not hours of praying, it's all of about twenty minutes . . . Sometimes I have these thoughts. And it is something that I said I may take upon myself to do in the near future. But I do it very slowly, doing one thing at a time, not forcing myself to do anything. You can say I am quite content with how I live my life today. I'm OK with myself . . . I feel good about myself, about how I live.

The solution of becoming more observant

The criticism against traditionism also gives birth to an aspiration, "in principle", to become more observant. Many interviewees reported varying levels of hope and aspiration for religious "strengthening" in the future. Mostly this desire appeared as tightly tied in with their perception of orthodoxy as embodying Jewish-religious authenticity.

This matter is relevant to us here, within the discussion of guilt and self-criticism, as it forms a sort of solution, or a way to deal with that tension between an ideal principle and its improbability and impracticality in the context of a modern lifestyle. Here traditionists "absolve" themselves of their guilt and self-criticism with a promise "in principle" to "strengthen" – that is, to go closer to the orthodox ideal – in the future.

It should be noted that even where participants show such hope to become more observant, it is carefully expressed as an ideal aspiration rather than a binding plan to be followed. The clear impression is that what is discussed here is not an actual commitment to change, but rather a careful expression of an abstract desire to be more observant of Jewish tradition.

One of the prominent motives for such a desire for personal "strengthening" is the striving for consistency between ideal and practice. Such consistency is seen to be a privilege enjoyed by both the orthodox and the secular. Many testified to feeling its absence, saying that traditionism compels them to live within what is perceived as inconsistency, if not hypocrisy. Their desire to "be at one with oneself" becomes, therefore, a motivation for stricter observance. It is interesting to note that not one of the interviewees described her/himself as gradually becoming *less* observant. The secular consistency, it appears, is not perceived as a desired alternative. Gideon, who described himself as wishing to be more observant, offered an interesting expression of this hope to "strengthen", as well as a careful articulation of it as an unbinding aspiration:

> *Q:* Would you have liked to be more observant?

A: To a certain extent, if I could – to be more at peace with myself. I feel that every year there are more things I gradually enforce upon myself.
Q: So the general direction in which you are going is one of strengthening?
A: Yes, very slowly.

The interviewees' statements give rise to a complex picture of self-testifying to the need to be more observant, accompanied by the acknowledgement of the value of one's independent choice of traditionism and a conscious preference of it above any of the other alternatives. This acknowledgement limits the actual effect of any desire to "strengthen". This is evident, for example, in Shlomo's statement that he "need[s] to get closer" to the world of religious observance. When asked in response if he would like to be more observant, he replied in the negative: "I feel at peace with myself, with what I do." He explained that he has no feelings of guilt, but "you always want to aspire for more". The solution is the traditionist "middle": "I feel like I would like to be in a middle state. Not to be extreme in this direction nor in the other."

It seems that the guilt coming from the gap between ideal and practice is further enhanced when the traditionist's children are discussed. The upbringing of the children as Jews whose Jewish identity has real meaning and content is perceived as a personal mission which is also an ethno-national obligation towards continuity, dealing with the conservation and continuity of the Jewish people. As such it is seen as requiring further, enhanced devoutness on the part of the parents as well. The impression we are left with is that the participants feel a stronger sense of duty to fashion a Jewish identity for their children, rather than the identity-based duty they feel towards themselves. A greater sense of obligation seems to give rise to a sharper self-criticism. This is evident in Tom's statement, given before he had had any children:

> I make allowances for myself, and I am OK with that. The only thing I feel guilty about is that if I have children and I don't give them the option. A year ago, on Yom Kippur, I had an argument with a friend who had asked me, "How do you do this and how do you do that?" . . . So I told him that I, for myself, can make certain concessions, but when I have children needing an example, it will be much harder for me to make those concessions, because I would be closing that option for them.

The hope to become more observant is often projected onto the children. Many interviewees said that they would like their children to be more observant than they themselves are. At times there is the hope that the "strengthening" of these children will resolve the tension, and with it the parents' guilt and self-criticism. Hence, even when traditionist parents express hope for their children to grow up as traditionists, many view the option of their children choosing to become orthodox as a very positive one. So in Liora's statement:

> My daughters . . . should they choose to be stronger, I'll be very happy. [If the daughter were to come and say] "Mother, I have decided to be ultra-orthodox, I don't want to watch television," I'll be very happy . . . I would prefer them to be traditionists. If they want to strengthen – gladly. I'll even support them. Because I, too, would like to grow a little stronger. That someone would give me a little push. To be a bit more than what I am. Let's not say with covering my head [that is, accepting the orthodox code of "modest" dress] or anything like that, but . . .

4 Traditionism and observance

Surveys examining Israeli Jews' religious observance show that a basic system of Jewish practices common to the vast majority of traditionists can be discerned. This can be summed up as centered round Shabbat, the Jewish holy days (especially Passover and Yom Kippur), *kashrut* (= dietary laws) and the Jewish life-cycle rituals – all perceived by traditionists as crucial and essential to Jewish identity.

Discussions of traditionist observance tend to focus on its supposed "inconsistency", often focusing on what seems to be a mixture between the "religious" dimension of the practices observed and the "non-religious" context within which they are observed. Indeed, the distinct image of the traditionist phenomenology – an image which within the context of Israeli culture also succeeds in communicating the discomfort stemming from the combination of the religious and secular worlds – is that of Jews "who go on Shabbat to synagogue, while driving to the beach on that very same day" (Shokeid 1984, 88). Our interviews, as well as other ethnographic studies (see especially Shokeid 1984; Shokeid 1995; Deshen 1994) offer numerous testimonies of similar behavior (and this is surely not an exhaustive list): attending synagogue on Shabbat and celebrating *kiddush* and a family Shabbat dinner, while being lenient when it comes to the restrictions of Shabbat; attending synagogue on the holy days, especially on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, fasting during Yom Kippur, and observing *kashrut* rules in a rather strict manner within the home, while being lenient when out of the home; wearing the *kippa* (a traditional Jewish headgear) only during prayer at the synagogue or while doing the *kiddush* on Shabbat, while making a point of taking it off after. Many interviewees also avoid the actual lighting of fire on Shabbat, while not avoiding any of the actions considered (by dint of the orthodox interpretation of Halacha) to be directly stemming from – and the same as – lighting of fire, such as turning on the electric light or driving the car on Shabbat. And the list goes on.

And yet, as I explained earlier, I wish to avoid this tendency of identifying traditionism as essentially constructed round the abovementioned, supposedly inconsistent, amalgam of religious practical dictates. To the best of my understanding, a sensitive interpretation of the world of meanings associated

with traditionist identity and practice is the important matter at hand, and it is that which would afford us a more intimate and genuine understanding of traditionist identity itself. This point of view would naturally undermine and challenge the focus on the (partial) religious practices as the alleged "essence" of traditionism.

I would like to once more point out the complexity – as well as the limitations – of the position I wish to adopt in this context: My reservations about the emphasis put on the traditionists' "inconsistent" observance in no way comes to lessen the importance of (religious) observance to traditionist lifestyle. There is no doubt that observance of *mitzvot* is an important expression of traditionist identity. But I would also argue that traditionism (as well as Israeli secularity, for that matter) should not be interpreted primarily against a measure the orthodox code of Jewish practice. Setting the orthodox standard as a sort of neutral yardstick with which to measure Jewish practice ignores the historical, social, and political context of this practice, as well as the reciprocal relations among Jewish identities in Israel; orthodoxy, secularity, and traditionism are defined not only in and for themselves, but also – and perhaps firstly – in relation to each other. Needless to say, this dimension of mutuality stresses the need to position traditionism – including traditionist practice – within the wider context of observance amongst Israeli Jews. This clarifies the important role of observance in the construction and affirmation of traditionist identity: it is this practice which distinguishes them from those whom they see as not doing enough in order to mark and affirm their Jewish identity (i.e., the secular); and it is also this observance which distinguishes them from those who "do too much" (i.e., the orthodox).

It is not my intention, therefore, to completely ignore the traditionist treatment of the observance of *mitzvot*. To begin with, one should not ignore the fundamental role of practices and customs – lifestyle, in its practical meaning – within Jewish tradition. Moreover, one of the recurring themes appearing in the interviews is the explanation of the meaning of traditionism as the practicing of Judaism as "a way of life", that is to say: the real, everyday observance of Jewish practice. Traditionists are well aware of the tendency to identify them by their "selective" approach to *mitzvot*, and are intimately acquainted with the harsh judgment of them for not "going all the way" with their observance and for not being "consistent" in this area. Many of them even agree with this criticism, which feeds much of the traditionist sense of guilt.

In the following pages I shall, therefore, present some of the key points with regards to traditionist Jewish practice, while not transforming it – and especially the supposed hybridity typical of it – into the essence of traditionist identity. I would like to study, within this chapter, the way in which the discourse dealing with observance paints traditionist identity. I do not wish here to follow that elusive list of *mitzvot* observed by traditionists, and which distinguishes them from other Jewish identities, but rather examine the world of meanings assigned by interviewees to their observnace. The way in which

traditionists understand traditionist practice and construct it as a part of their identity is, therefore, the subject of this chapter.

Traditionism as practice?

Many interviewees described traditionism as the observance of a certain minimum of *mitzvot*. Moreover, the almost instinctive tendency of many to describe, and even define, their traditionism in terms of their Jewish practice suggests that they are attempting to convey a certain crude version of an existential philosophical principle: to them it is not ideals and abstract ideas which identify traditionism, but the practice – Jewish observance – whose details are so confusing, which fulfills this role.

At the same time, interviewees emphasized the dynamic, relative nature of traditionist practice – thus implicitly underlining its limited contribution to the understanding of traditionism. The immediate response given by most to the request that they explain what traditionism is held that traditionism cannot be defined, as, as far as they could tell, people identifying themselves as traditionists differ greatly from each other in observance of *mitzvot*. They explained that traditionism is a sort of "super category" encompassing a wide variety of attitudes towards Jewish practice in its orthodox interpretation, and that the absence of a sharply defined directive on the subject renders traditionism very, if not overly, diverse. Even those who did offer an essential, minimal list of traditionist practices stressed its flexible character. Thus, for example, Roni described his Jewish practice as centered round prayer, the holy days and the Jewish life-cycle rites, while at the same time explaining that his brothers, traditionists as well, tend to add to the list: "I fast on Yom Kippur. I do not fast on other fasts. My brothers do, but I don't, nor do I lay the *tefilin* every morning." Others presented a sort of "scale" or "hierarchy" of traditionism, which distinguishes between "more" or "heavy" traditionists and "less" or "light" traditionists. This scale remains vague, however, as it offers no clear demarcation, if such exists, between the various levels of traditionism.

Orthodoxy, secularity, and traditionist observance

As I have mentioned earlier, the orthodox measure – or at least the image of the orthodox way of life as fulfilling the *halachic* dictate in full – emerged as a common yardstick with which to judge any Jewish behavior. When asked to talk of the *mitzvot* and customs they observe, participants tended to describe these in light of the orthodox standard, as either fulfilling it "as it should be fulfilled" or observing just a "part" of it. Interviewees often used the phrase "*kehilchatam*" – meaning "as ordained by Halacha" – in order to describe the practices they observe. This usage of the orthodox measure was especially evident when, in reply to the general question regarding their observance, interviewees answered in the negative, and described the *mitzvot* they do not

observe. In almost all cases the answer was composed of two (often intertwined) parts: one dealing with the religious practices they do observe, and the other with those they do not.

In this vein, Sigal described how in her family they "do the *kiddush* and Shabbat dinner *kehilchatam*", and went on to clarify that by this she means that her family performs the same *kiddush* as is performed by orthodox families. Yet at the same time she said that her family does not observe all of Shabbat's "orthodox" prohibitions. Keren described her observance of Shabbat as "very much on the border: I do not drive the car or light a fire, but I do watch television and speak on the phone [on Shabbat]." For Liora, the practical meaning of traditionism is observing *kashrut*, Shabbat and the holy days – which she tries to do in an orthodox fashion. Or, as she put it: "I try to observe the *mitzvot* of the holy days as they should be." Ronit described herself as "observing what should be observed, more or less as closely as possible," also clarifying that the yardstick for "what should be" is the orthodox directive. Gidi described this practice as the conservation of Jewish identity throughout the generations. When attempting to describe and explain the elements of the Jewish practice distinguishing him as traditionist, he described them as dictated by the will to preserve the identity handed down to him by his parents. The significance of this to the point at hand is that the meaning of this conservation of identity is drawn almost completely from the religious domain:

> What does it mean to be traditionist? It is first of all doing what you were taught to do at home . . . to preserve the atmosphere of the house of your father and mother . . . This means that the familial behavior, mainly on Shabbat and the holy days, was centered round religious values . . . It means synagogue on Friday and Saturday and *kiddush*, related blessings . . . observing certain issues such as on Shabbat – not to write or light a fire . . . and generally: not eating pork. In mother's house you only eat kosher and observe the separation of meat and dairy.
>
> (Gidi)

The expression "as it should be", which interviewees repeatedly used in describing their Jewish practice, is important here: this phrase suggests the existence of an absolute, correct, and uncompromising standard of Jewish practice, which traditionists observe only to a certain extent (the implicit assumption being that orthodox Jews uphold, or are supposed to uphold, this standard completely). And as mentioned above, the interviews reveal that the orthodox interpretation of Jewish Law is what embodies this absolute standard. Traditionist practice can therefore be described as an attempt, or striving, to observe the orthodox Jewish Halacha in places seen as essential to Jewish identity.

Those rituals thought to be "the most essential" are therefore seen as holding traditionists to an exceptional code of behavior, to observing *mitzvot* "as

they should be observed", so as to express the deep commitment to what these rituals are meant to symbolize. Gidi's statement about his strict observance of the Yom Kippur prohibitions is a somewhat intense articulation of this perception. He described his great commitment to observe Yom Kippur "as it should be", telling of his attempts to measure up to such demanding criteria:

> It may surprise you to hear but, as, from a certain stage, this matter of the fast as in "And yea shall afflict your souls" [Leviticus 23:27], was, and I hope always will be, easy for me; I understood that I am not afflicting myself enough. And so, for many years now, in addition to fasting I also impose upon myself a "standing affliction". I stand throughout the prayer, during the eve of Yom Kippur, as well as the whole day itself. Until the day ends I stand at the same point, not moving . . . because the fasting is too easy . . . But even this isn't really "And yea shall afflict your souls", so in order to concentrate more, I also inflict upon myself a talking affliction, for some years now . . . Obviously, throughout Yom Kippur I am in the synagogue.

Others similarly described a strict observance of varying prohibitions during Yom Kippur. They stressed that such practice is reserved for Yom Kippur, which they observe "*kehilchato*" and "as it should be". As Karin put it, Yom Kippur is a unique experience of being "orthodox for a day", which means that the "normal", daily routine of one's life is suspended. This is how she summed up the way in which her family observes the Yom Kippur restrictions: "The house comes to a complete standstill; we stop breathing. The holy day is over, we breathe."

In this context, mourning customs and rituals also emerge as holding a special status and importance in traditionist practice. Interviewees who discussed the way in which they observed the mourning customs inevitably emphasized the complete commitment and strict rigidity with which these practices were observed. This strict observance, it would seem, positioned them well within the realm of religiosity, or orthodoxy. Ze'ev, talking of the mourning of his father's death, described himself simply as someone turned orthodox for the period of thirty days of mourning. He observed with absolute severity everything he thought to be typical of the orthodox way of life – from three prayers a day, down to outward physical signs such as the wearing of the *kippa*. Ze'ev described this experience as intensely meaningful, yet incredibly hard; it made it clear to him beyond a doubt that he could not truly live his life as an orthodox Jew.

Such strict adherence to the *halachic* requisites in their orthodox interpretation seems, therefore, to be perceived as an invasion into the separate realm of the orthodox, or the religious. Religiosity is seen as a distinguished state into which traditionists can enter and exit at will, and whose rules can be followed fully or partially, as desired. Shabbat emerged as one such

unmistakable domain around which there exists a constant process of identity inquiry. Several interviewees reported that their behavior on Shabbat changes in accordance with their (weekly) decision whether to "enter" into it (thus taking upon themselves some of its prohibitions as a precondition to enjoying its sanctity) or electing to remain "outside" of it (thus enjoying a greater measure of liberty, which is also more "secular" by nature, lacking the aura of sanctity). Yair, for example, related that he decides before Shabbat whether he is to drive and visit his parents – in which case he will not go to synagogue – or, should he choose not to drive on Shabbat, to enjoy the prayer at his synagogue, away from his parents. Benny presented us with a similar logical process when he explained why he was convinced by his friend to stop smoking on Shabbat:

> I stopped smoking on Shabbat so that I could do the *havdala* [the ceremony marking the end of Shabbat] . . . Until then [while he used to smoke on Shabbat], I was unable to make the *havdala*, because I would be lighting fire [on Shabbat] . . . Now I do *havdala* every Saturday night.

Benny emphasized that he makes a point of doing the *havdala* also on Saturdays on which he has driven the car, as the prohibition against the lighting of fire is to be distinguished – in a way which is difficult to articulate – from driving on Shabbat.

Entering into this domain of religiosity and fulfilling its requirements completely can be revealed as a temporary conversion of identity. Liora described her custom of observing all of the Shabbat prohibitions common among Israeli orthodox Jews as becoming an orthodox for a day: "Shabbat – in full – no light, no nothing. A completely 'dos' [a rather derogatory nickname in Israel for the orthodox] Shabbat." Liora made it clear that she does not observe other practices – such as her dress code or *kashrut* – as devoutly: "I try to wear a skirt, but not always. *Kashrut*: At home completely, outside – depends on the circumstances."

Interviewees' statements thus bring to life an image of the "perfect" Judaism, "as it should – *halachicly* – be", which is embodied within the orthodox dictate of practices, based upon which traditionists fashion their traditionism. The "perfect" orthodox standard is omnipresent, even when not upheld, since it is used as a sort of yardstick with which to judge traditionist practices. A summary of this approach can be found in Tamar's statement of the Jewish lifestyle she has chosen. Self-criticism was also evident in her words:

> I fast the three fasts: seventeenth of Tamuz, ninth of Av, and Yom Kippur. Not all of the fasts. Again: I am not perfect . . . When the TV was on during Shabbat I wouldn't sit aside and read the papers. I wouldn't mess with the remote control . . . but I would watch television. I am not a saint, I am not perfect. I have my faults. And there are the

> things I did take upon myself to observe. But by and large it is the major things: Shabbat, *kashrut* and the holy days.

On the other hand, interviewees also positioned themselves vis-à-vis the practices of secular Jews. Their statements also communicate obvious ambiguity regarding the positive content of the (Jewish) secular practice. Liav, for example, explained that his observance of the Yom Kippur customs is of greater significance than the practice of secular Israelis "who fast on Yom Kippur, but go beforehand to Blockbuster and rent five DVDs" to watch during the fast, instead of doing "what should be done"; that is, as far as Liav and many other traditionists are concerned, spend the day of fasting in prayer at the synagogue. Liav also commented that his familial experience taught him that a similar observance by all the Israelis of all these basic customs could serve as a strong unifying base with which Jews could identify: "It connects us together," he explained. Sigal, it would seem, thinks that such an Israeli-Jewish unity is already in existence. She said that even though she and her family do not observe the holy days with the same exact orthodox loyalty to Halacha, they nevertheless observe "all the ceremonial stuff seculars do . . .: build a *sukka*, light the candles on Hanukah, go to synagogue on Yom Kippur, and fast". Tom described his observance of tradition as a sort of rigid, set series of practices, which create some sort of a Jewish frame, unique in its ability to be sufficiently Jewish without "overly disrupting life's routine". This routine is characteristically secular, and the Jewish framework is a sort of interruption of the secular routine by the insertion of (religious) sanctity:

> In my day-to-day [life] it is important for me to keep kosher in general terms, not bringing non-kosher meat into the house, not mixing [dairy and meat], not eating meat and milk together, keeping the major fasts of Yom Kippur and ninth of Av, and I sometimes go to synagogue on a Friday evening. I do things which don't disrupt my routine too much. I don't go [to synagogue] on a Saturday morning because that means getting up early, and that is too much.

Tzipora was able to grasp both sides of this binary standard, moving between orthodox Halacha and Israeli ("secular") practice, as she described her traditionism as expressed in the practice of moving between the observance of Jewish tradition according to orthodox interpretation on the one hand, and celebrating Jewish identity as is acceptable within the secularized public sphere in Israel, on the other:

> [Traditionism] is when you go to synagogue on the holy days, especially Yom Kippur; celebrating the holy days as they should be celebrated, with all the prayers and foodstuffs, and doing the *kiddush* every Friday; it comes with religiosity . . . And also the fact that you drive on Saturday and watch TV, but behave like all Israelis.

I shall now further elaborate the discussion of the traditionist attitude towards a number of categories of Jewish practice. As has already been mentioned, the emphasis will be put upon the attempt to understand the meaning of these practical choices and priorities, rather than their Halacha-like cataloging.

Shabbat

As has been mentioned, Shabbat holds an important status as an essential pillar of Jewish identity, which traditionists take care to celebrate. Thus, when asked what is the practical meaning of her traditionist identity, Hila answered simply: "First of all, observing Shabbat.". The immediate "clarification" she added is no less important in understanding the concept of the traditionist Shabbat: "I don't light a fire, don't use scissors, and don't do chores which are considered mundane on Shabbat. But I do turn on the [electric] light, and I do drive the car on Shabbat. We do the *kiddush* on Shabbat." Other participants were just as fast to mention, in the same breath, both the commitment they felt towards marking Shabbat as well as the fact that they do not bow to all the Shabbat prohibitions common among orthodox Jews in Israel. Gideon's description of his family's celebration of Shabbat captures some of the main themes in this regard: Shabbat's unique status, the distinction between different proscriptions, those which are respected and those which do not achieve the same status, the prominent familial character of the day, and even the feeling of guilt rising from a comparison to orthodox practice:

> As Shabbat approaches there are those hours in which you feel the calm and quiet before it enters . . . The traffic slows, the house is clean and the food is ready – on a hot plate or in the oven – that is the difference between a religious and a non-religious person. We do not light a fire on Shabbat. But we do turn on the lights; we have been trying recently not to turn on the lights. We do switch on the TV and the radio. I try not to work on certain things on my computer on Shabbat. Writing and different chores – I avoid doing on Shabbat. We do the *kiddush* and a Saturday meal, we go to the parents to eat; that couldn't happen if I were orthodox. We drive on Shabbat – as a traditionist that seems natural and OK, accompanied by heartache.

The distinction between the various prohibitions of Shabbat was the focus of much of the interviewees' attention. Especially prominent was the unique emphasis put on the ban against lighting a fire on Shabbat. Interviewees repeatedly said that they are aware of the *halachic* interpretation by which many of the actions which they take lightly – such as switching on the electric light, using an electric heater and driving a car – are derivatives of lighting a fire, and are to all rabbinical-*halachic* intents and purposes identical to it. And yet they all explained that lighting a fire was somehow different from the

other actions. Tomer attempted to describe the practical implications of this distinction between actions seen by the orthodox interpretation as identical to lighting a fire, and the actual lighting of fire:

> I will never light a fire [on Shabbat], yes, because it is explicitly written in the Torah [laughs]. I will play on the computer [on Shabbat]. TV I will not watch, but if it is on, so it is on . . . I used to be stricter once. The oven would be on the whole of Shabbat [so as not to turn it on and off during Shabbat] . . . I would take care to turn it off only after Shabbat had ended, even if it had been empty the whole night before . . . Now I save on electricity [and turn the oven on and off during Shabbat].

The lighting of a fire is portrayed, then, as a distinct transgression against a basic, fundamental taboo:

> I do not light a fire on Shabbat. I don't know – it's not something I can ever think I would do. We turn on the light on Shabbat, the microwave oven as well, but I do not light a fire . . . I sometimes struggle with myself . . . laugh at myself. But there is no changing it. As far as I am concerned, it is the taboo that I do not light a fire, and nothing will change that.
>
> (Tikva)

An echo of this special status of the prohibition against lighting a fire on Shabbat can be found also in Liora's statement: although she has "no problem at all" turning on the electric light on Shabbat, she would never light a fire on Shabbat. "Fire, no. It sounds too extreme to me. Lighting a fire on Shabbat . . . it's a sort of 'rather die than do it'." Liora made a point of saying she has no explanation for the unique importance she attributes to the lighting of a fire. She even said that there is no rational difference between the prohibition against lighting a fire and the willingness to switch on an electrical light on Shabbat: "Either way – that is how it is. It is hard for me to explain." Limor, who declared that she has "no problem with driving on Shabbat", described the lighting of a fire as "an absolute ban".

Shlomo, who, like many others, underlined the supposed contradiction which exists between his switching on and off electrical light while avoiding the lighting of a fire on Shabbat, described this behavior as a sort of ingrained habit received at home, which is at one and the same time also an important, self-aware custom aimed at distinguishing Shabbat from any other day. He also stated that this distinction has been pressing more heavily upon him in recent times, and he has been trying to observe more of the Shabbat prohibitions. So, for example, where his family members do not hesitate in using electrical appliances in order to heat the food and boil the water, he prefers to try and use the "Shabbat hotplate", which he bought for himself and put in the family kitchen. Still, he said, he is the only family member to use it.

The centrality of the familial character of Shabbat was also a recurring

theme in the interviews. Many described Shabbat as a day dedicated to family visits, family outings, and reaffirmations of familial connections. Tzipora, for example, stated that the opportunity for a family meeting is what drives her parents' meticulous marking of Shabbat:

> They really wanted the *kiddush* on the eves of Shabbat to take place, since it is important to them because of all the instability, that people come and go: one goes to study, the other goes to the army; it is important for them that the family be for one evening together, talk to each other and tell . . . how the week was. Even though it is one hour a week, still to have everyone together. For my parents the eve of Shabbat is sacred, not necessarily because of the *kiddush* itself, but for the family to be together.

Moreover, the familial character of Shabbat does not necessarily compel observance of its religious practices, and may indeed come in their stead. In this spirit, several interviewees presented the family outing and the trip to the beach as part of the traditionist observance of Shabbat.

The familial character of Shabbat is also an educational tool by which traditionist identity is conveyed to the next generation. See, for example, Bina's description of the meaning Shabbat holds for her. She started off by stressing the day's familial image:

> The feelings of being together with the children, teaching them that we are Jewish. A day of rest to be only with the children, playing, talking. Emphasizing the distinction between Shabbat and the other days of the week. We don't watch TV on Shabbat; we do use appliances, but we don't light fire . . . We greet Shabbat on time. My two-year-old daughter participates in the lighting of the candles. She is very enthusiastic, and has learned the whole ceremony. I do not labor, don't do laundry or chores. We go out on Saturdays. Maybe in the future we will also stop driving on Shabbat.

The ban on driving, seen as holding lesser significance, could, therefore, be overlooked in the name of the more significant aspects of Shabbat, such as preserving its familial character. Tomer thus explained that although he does not want to drive on Shabbat, the principle and *mitzvah* of parental respect compels him to drive on Shabbat in order to visit them:

> It [driving on Shabbat] is a sensitive issue. I am against driving on Shabbat. I'm not some chronic driver. If I feel like seeing my parents, I'll drive. It happens to me a lot, that I want to go and sing Shabbat hymns with my father, and I don't go. But if he doesn't feel well, or if my mother was ill, than it is *pikuach nefesh* [i.e., a state of emergency in which almost all other rules are suspended] . . . so I would go . . . Or when I really feel that my parents are sort of lonely, and it is winter and cold, so I will enjoy

> taking the car and going to them. But in principle I would not drive. You won't catch me going traveling on Shabbat. I prefer the home.

Vered described Shabbat in a similar way, as a sort of ring in which the orthodox bans wrestle with needs, constraints and norms. She said that she prefers not to drive the car on Shabbat,

> . . . but if there is a need to drive on Shabbat – I'll drive. I respect Shabbat: I light candles, we do the *kiddush*, my husband prays, my son prays, every day they lay the *tefilin*. I don't light a fire [on Shabbat]; even though I smoke cigarettes like a chimney [during the week], on Shabbat I don't smoke; but I will drive on Shabbat if it needs to be done.

Her husband also explained that observing all the constraints and prohibitions associated with Shabbat would mean that they were orthodox: "If we do not drive on Shabbat, so it is as if we were orthodox . . . [but] we are not orthodox. We are traditionists" (Baruch).

Shabbat's unique atmosphere emerges as one of the day's most prominent aspects, focusing much of the interviewees' attention. They demonstrated in various ways how they make a point of marking its distinction and symbolically underlining the differentiation between Shabbat and other weekdays. Many stressed that the marking of Shabbat's symbolism and the celebration of its unique atmosphere do not necessarily compel complete observance of all religious prohibitions. So, for instance, in Tamir's statement describing this unique feeling – which, he said, is also typical of the holy days, also distinguishing traditionists from those seculars who have no connection to religion – as essential to Shabbat, even when he himself feels no obligation to observe Shabbat prohibitions:

> Shabbat eve – food and mood of Shabbat eve . . . I smoke at home on Shabbat, we watch TV, and the electric light is on and everything . . . but on Shabbat you don't cook, there is a hotplate . . . Recently we have also stopped with the *kiddush*, because nobody has the patience for the *kiddush* anymore.

Tamir also emphasized the dynamic, changing character of his family's traditionist practice, which expresses in an ever-varying and diverse way the constant principle of the sanctity of Shabbat and celebrating the unique ambiance typical of it, concluding that this is, in fact, the defining trait of traditionism: "That is actually the definition of traditionism – everyone navigates religion where he wants to."

For Batya, observance of Shabbat's atmosphere is embodied in the traditionist attempt, or striving, to observe the prohibitions customary on the day. She described this attempt as a necessarily limited attempt to preserve the day's uniqueness (the orthodox yardstick, it must be noted, is

here too seen to be the authentic, full expression of observing the day's uniqueness):

> In practice I make an effort to observe Shabbat. The limits are awfully vague when it comes to Shabbat observance. Orthodox Jews also observe what is comfortable for them. I turn on the lights and drive. I use appliances. I watch TV I don't like going out on a Friday evening. Consciously, it disturbs me to drive on Shabbat. On Friday night that is different, but it is quite rare. I almost never go out, only during the week.

Many stated that they also try not to work on Shabbat. The practical content of that statement is variable and subjective, but avoidance of labor on Shabbat is clearly of special importance to all interviewees, including those amongst them who are forced, due to the special nature of their job, to work on Shabbat.

Kashrut

All interviewees declared themselves to be keeping kosher, and all also clarified that they do not mean full observance of orthodox *kashrut* rules. The traditionist observance of *kashrut* centers round a number of basic distinctions between different realms, which, in turn, require a varying set of practices. In other words: observance of *kashrut* changes according to the realm where it is practiced. It oscillates between strict observance and a basic effort to uphold "the basic conditions". See, for example, Liat's statement:

> *Kashrut*: I observe six hours between meat and dairy. At home I divide the cutlery into meat and dairy. No non-kosher food is to enter my house. Also in restaurants – I try not to sit in restaurants which serve both meat and milk, though that can happen . . . If it is a dairy restaurant, I do not insist on a certificate from the Rabbinate indicating it is kosher. If it is a restaurant serving meat, I usually do insist [upon eating only in places with such a certificate]. Abroad I have a problem. I don't feel like traveling abroad because of that.

These distinctions recurred in all interviews: the distinction between within and without the home (the rather strict observance of *kashrut* within the home, and the relative leniency when outside); between the personal (observing six hours between the eating of meat and milk, for example) and the public (such as agreeing to eat in a restaurant without a certificate proving it to be kosher); between meat and other foods (many said they do not eat meat in a restaurant without a certificate, while they would eat other, non meat, dishes in those same restaurants); and between keeping kosher in Israel (that is: during the daily routine), and keeping kosher when abroad (during a supposed disruption of the routine, in a foreign environment where kosher food is hard to come by).

Observance of *kashrut* thus also moves between the upholding of a principle, leaving a relatively large space for flexibility, and strict observance of taboo prohibitions. Interviewees repeatedly alluded to those "red lines" that comprise the "essence" of keeping kosher. These are observed in every context and domain of the abovementioned distinctions. On the other hand, there are those areas that are characterized by relative flexibility, where one can modulate one's observance in accordance with a complex set of considerations. See the way in which Ziva described her kosher practices as moving along the range between the red lines and that grey, "inconsistent" zone:

> *Kashrut* in the sense of not eating pork is truly a red line. There really is no chance . . . [As for separating meat and dairy:] I can say I observe three to four hours [of separation], but if suddenly after five hours I am really hungry, then – let's go [that is, she will not wait for the full six hours of separation, required by Halacha, to end].

Ziva also said she eats in restaurants that do not have a *kashrut* certificate, "but not non-kosher food". (As she and practically all other interviewees explained, they will not order the overtly non-kosher items in the menu.) Gideon demonstrated that same principle of "red lines" when responding to a question regarding his kosher habits when traveling abroad: "I try very much [to keep kosher abroad]. Pork is out of the question. I can walk into a non-kosher restaurant and order a vegetable course." In contrast to this, the home is a distinct locus in which a rigid regime of keeping kosher is observed: "[Home] is absolutely kosher. I will not buy, will not bring into the house anything that is not kosher . . . At home, in the sink, I won't mix meat and dairy, for example" (Tikva).

Such statements also point again to the relevance of the orthodox measure to traditionist self-perception. It is that yardstick which charts the behavior within those absolute areas and compared to which the "compromises" are made within the more flexible areas. Notice the presence of the orthodox standard in Sigal's statement, directing much of her self-criticism:

> *Kashrut* – at this point in time the house is, in theory, kosher, and there is a separation [between meat and dairy products and dishes], except for small things. But, I can't believe that I do it: I order in from non-kosher pizza places, but I don't order pizza with meat and dairy. I don't eat meat and dairy. We go with the children to restaurants which serve meat and dairy, but we will not order a meat course there. That is just making a joke out of serious things . . . if you go into technicalities, because they cook in the same oven. I make a kind of distinction.

Yet it would be wrong to conclude that traditionists accept the orthodox dictate as necessarily correct. Many of them have described the excessive observance of *kashrut* rules, which is characteristic of ultra-orthodox circles,

as exaggerated and unnecessary. In this spirit, some described the traditionist *kashrut* as being the worthy choice of observing the (Jewish) essence instead of pointless insistence upon this or that Rabbinate-issued certificates.

Interviewees describing this complex practice (at least supposedly complex, from the secular/orthodox dichotomous point of view) of *kashrut* did not hesitate in identifying it as fulfilling the essential requirement of *kashrut*. In this way they could answer simply that they "keep kosher", and down along the line, when they came to describe their practice, they could point out that they do not observe all the orthodox rules of *kashrut*. Their statements also showed that they are well acquainted with the orthodox practices.

Here too "striving", or "making an effort", emerges as characterizing traditionist practice: interviewees related how, in that area beyond the red lines, they "strive" or "try" to keep kosher. See for example the way in which Reuven described *kashrut* observance in his home:

> We make an effort not to go to non-kosher restaurants. These days it is very hard. There are restaurants which we just get up and leave [because they are "too non-kosher"] . . . I can eat in a restaurant with a non-kosher menu, but if there is too much, it is impossible . . . We sit in restaurants which serve meat and dairy, but we do not take the courses which combine the two. If it is abroad we order the kosher things. It is obviously not kosher because they don't do [= separate] meat and dairy. It is a compromise. We won't carry around bags with food, the way orthodox people do.

This differentiation between Israel and abroad forcibly underlines the importance of context to traditionist observance, further highlighting the flexible nature of *kashrut* observance outside those red lines. Liron, who elaborated upon the relative elasticity of the *kashrut* constraints he adopts, demonstrated this by describing his behavior on his last visit abroad; he stated that he had attempted not to eat types of meat he was not familiar with, and had, in fact, eaten only chicken, which is the most recognizable, "clear" type: "So I don't keep kosher *lemahadrin* ['Meticulously', a term often designating higher standards of *kashrut*], kosher butchering and all that, but at least I know that it is familiar meat."

Synagogue and prayer

Attending synagogue is a clear example of that group of rules and customs which do not distinctly belong to the realm of that which is "essential" and "very important" to the Jewish identity of traditionists. As such, the attitude towards synagogue demonstrates the general attitude of traditionists towards *mitzvot* they respect "in principle", and yet see themselves as exempt from, or at least exempt from a methodical observance of them in a practical way.

Many participants described the synagogue as one of those areas of

sanctity in which they would like, in principle, to play a more meaningful role, yet all of them also declared that they were unable to do so. Proximity to the synagogue presents itself as proximity to the orthodox, to the realm of the sacred and, therefore, to "full" Judaism. Yet the advantage and benefit derived from this proximity are to be measured against a long line of other considerations. In this way traditionists express a fascinating stance of striving "in principle" to grow closer to that which is identified as "sacred" and "religious", while keeping a protective and practical distance from it. This approach was clearly evident in Tomer's statement. When asked if he attends synagogue, he responded: "In principle, yes." He does indeed attend synagogue on Shabbat; but, realistically, there is a whole set of considerations which get in the way of the principle, such as tiredness and the difficulty of getting up early on a Saturday morning, so therefore he does not always uphold the principle. Baruch summed up the general traditionist approach to attending synagogue as seeing prayer in synagogue as an "important and pleasant" *mitzvah*, but not "chasing after it".

As a practice which is not essential to Jewish identity, therefore, the synagogue can often "fall victim" to other, practical preferences. Interviewees explained that they are simply too tired to attend synagogue every Saturday, at an early hour as is customary in Israeli synagogues. Others demonstrated again the differentiation which exists between the realm of the sacred and religious and the secular realm, explaining that they cannot go to synagogue as they drive the car on Shabbat: as described earlier, the sense is that the desecration of Shabbat (in the form of driving) negates the possibility of joining in with the day's sanctity; thus the traditionist removes himself from the realm of the synagogue, the realm of the sacred.

In that same spirit of positioning the synagogue as an important, but not neccesarily essential part of Jewish practice, the arguments for attending synagogue aren't always concerned with the observance of a *halachic* tenet, and tend to deal also with the emotional experience of the praying individual. Thus interviewees recounted how they like going to synagogue because of the liturgical poetry and the cantor's singing, or the feeling of tranquility and calm typical of being there, and not necessarily due to any feeling of obligation to observe some dictate.

Interviewees also highlighted the need to distinguish between the issue of attending synagogue and that of their positive attitude towards prayer in general. They repeatedly described prayer as a personal experience which they (mostly women) tend to partake of privately; women mostly related their practice of conversing with God – be it through personal prayer or through reading the book of Psalms – while men said that they preferred to lay *tefilin* and say *shema* alone. Such statements underscore the personal dimension of prayer, as opposed to the public image of attending synagogue. Here again the distinction between home and public, and the personal and the public, arises as essential to traditionist identity. The image of traditionist practice thus shows itself to be a more personal matter than a public display of Jewish

identity. Ziva described her personal experience of prayer as a private appeal to God:

> Sometimes I pray. I feel the need to talk to God; sometimes it is a need to recite. Once I used to read Psalms every day. Today a bit less. Sometimes I find myself conversing with God . . . It exists also in the lighting of the candles [on Shabbat] – after I light the candles, there are a few minutes in which I am supposedly talking to God.

Ziva also mentioned that such personal prayer carries a clear gender-specific marking, as men tend to pray in the synagogue, while many women pray as she does, personally and spontaneously.

Many women interviewed revealed their custom of turning to God in prayer or while sporadically reading Psalms: "During times of distress, hard times, when I feel the need," explained Hila. Like her, Limor described the reading of Psalms as an opportunity for spiritual relaxation. She recounted how she has "always" prayed a personal, private prayer, mostly using the prayer book, during which she also communicates herself personally to God. For Tikva, the reading of Psalms is an opportunity to reaffirm her familial identity. She discussed her practice of reciting Psalms with her grandmother, in what had become a ceremony of intergenerational bonding and reconfirmation:

> She [Tikva's grandmother] knows all the prayers off by heart, all of Psalms memorized. Nowadays, when I visit her twice a week, that is my connection with her. I read Psalms to her. It really gives me pleasure. She even gave me her copy about a month ago, and it is simply fun . . . It is maybe a good opportunity to please her a little, and a bit to be with her. It has become something we share, and it is really fun for me. But will I sit and read in the future? . . . I don't know . . . could be. Because it exists in me . . . the faith is always there . . . I connect to it.

Men interviewed also told of their practice of praying privately. So, for example, Baruch stated that he tries to pray three times a day, but not always in a quorum of ten men (*minyan*), which is required for public prayer service. In fact, most of his prayers are said privately. He also said he used to pray every morning. His wife, present during the interview, said critically that he didn't pray the full morning prayer, rather "Only ten minutes, laying the *tefilin*, and that's it." Baruch wished to correct her: he tried to recite the full morning prayer, but it all depended on time constraints. He also testified to the self-criticism which motivates his efforts to pray every day:

> I go on [with the morning prayer] for as long as time permits . . . almost three quarters [of a prayer] every morning. Every time I add on. Every time I am hard on myself that I have more time, I add on. If I have no time, I cut it short.

The absolute minimum, observed without regard to time every morning, is the laying of *tefilin* and reciting *shema*; "and if I find time at work, I recite some Psalms".

Belief and the Jewish way of life

Belief in God emerges as one of the central components of traditionist identity. Interviewees repeatedly gave their strong faith in God as part of their answer to questions inquiring into what are the practices and customs which characterize them as traditionists. This point is discussed more elaborately within my discussions of the reasoning and meaning associated with traditionist observance, in Chapter 2. I wish to focus here solely upon the way in which traditionists describe belief and faith as part of the practice defining traditionism. The way in which Ruth intertwined her belief into the traditionist practice which characterizes her is typical in this context:

> As far as I am concerned, traditionist is: observing Shabbat *kehilchata* – no turning on the light on Shabbat, going to synagogue on Shabbat; fasting twice a year – on the ninth of Av and Yom Kippur; saying a prayer before eating; believing very strongly; keeping kosher on Passover; keeping strictly kosher. I will not eat in a restaurant or café in which they serve meat and milk, or non-kosher food.

Belief is also expressed in the use of phrases which confirm man's place as subordinate to God. Many interviewees said they use "religious" turns of phrase such as "God willing" and "Thank God". The way in which Liat presented the practical meaning of her traditionist identity showed clearly how the use of these phrases is an integral part of her traditionist identity: "I light the candles on Friday night . . . I recite Psalms every day. Everything I say, I will add 'God willing'." Interviewees also told of the confusion this evokes in those who hear them, who would otherwise attribute to the traditionists – who have no exterior "orthodox" markings – a secular identity, and thus do not expect to hear such expressions.

Kippa

The traditionist attitude towards wearing the *kippa* is a fascinating subject, as it illuminates several facets of traditionist practice and symbolically represents traditionists' attitudes toward the world of religion in general. The donning of the *kippa* comes as a symbolic act, signifying for traditionists the distinction between the religious world, or the world of sanctity and religion, and the secular, or "profane" world (see also Shokeid 1984). Through the donning of the *kippa* traditionist men identify themselves as entering (temporarily) into the realm of the religious and sacred. In the same way the removal of the *kippa* symbolizes the traditionist's "return" to the daily,

secular routine. Through the donning (or lack) of the *kippa* traditionist men mark for themselves the boundaries of the sacred and, accordingly, the changes of behavior required of them. This symbolic significance of the *kippa* is, therefore, a major component of the traditionist tendency to compartmentalize Jewish religion, to put limits on the sacred and differentiate it from the mundane.

This symbolism gains unique importance within the context of Israeli society, in which the donning of the *kippa* is a mark of distinct cultural and communal belonging (a mark that he who dons it is "religious", while secularS are expected *not* to wear it). In this context, not wearing the *kippa* holds great significance for the traditionist men, because it distinguishes them from the orthodox. There was a general accord amongst those interviewed that he who constantly dons a *kippa* without observing a fully orthodox lifestyle (while emphasizing that they themselves do not live such a life) is being deceptive, giving false testimony about himself.

In this context, one of the recurring images in the interviews was that of recognizing traditionists by the "*kippa* in the pocket": they do not don it regularly, but when they arrive at those locations and contexts of sanctity which require a *kippa*, it will be easily available to them, and they will wear it comfortably. Saying a prayer or a blessing, meeting a rabbi, reciting *kiddush*, reading the holy scriptures, visiting a cemetery, and consoling grievers were all suggested as such places, times, and contexts in which traditionist men feel compelled to don a *kippa*, and do so in an absolutely committed fashion – much as they make a point of taking it off when leaving these contexts. In this fashion, Gil described himself as one who – as opposed to those who identify themselves according to the style, color and size of the *kippa* – identifies himself by the "*kippa* in the pocket":

> There is a saying: "There is the colorful *kippa*, the large *kippa*, the Druze *kippa*, and there is the *kippa* in the pocket." I am with the *kippa* in the pocket . . . I use it when I enter into places which symbolize religion and sanctity . . . When I enter a synagogue I will wear it; when I go to console the grieving I will wear it; when I attend a wedding I wear a *kippa*; on the *kiddush* I don it; . . . When I am reading the scriptures I put it on. It relates to things of holiness in Judaism.

The *kippa*, therefore, is a symbol of – and a kind of tool for – entering into the realm of the sacred, distinguished by "religious" rituals and symbols. It symbolizes the traditionist's entry into the religious-ceremonial world of Judaism, and marks one's obligation to behave differently, in a way which shows respect for sanctity. In Gil's words, the donning of the *kippa* stands for the distinction of the ritualistic actions:

> [The donning of the *kippa* comes] to single out certain things connected with the rituals . . . [and] ceremonialism of Judaism. As far as I am

> concerned, it is a way to set apart these things . . . It is a way to single out things relating to the ritual of Judaism which it is important to me to distinguish from the rest of my daily life.

Interviewees repeatedly described the *kippa* as a symbol of religiosity – that is to say: of an obligation towards religious behavior – explaining that, as such, it evokes rather clear social expectations: "[The *kippa*] is a religious indicator, a sort of stigma. It creates images and expectations associated with a religious person" (Ruth); "after all, a person does not wear a *kippa* for no reason. When I see someone wearing a *kippa* I tell myself: 'he does [observes] more than me, he is more religious than I am' " (Ziva). The wearing of the *kippa* carries a social responsibility. As explained by David:

> I have no problem eating in a restaurant which serves non-kosher food. I eat kosher, and my partner can eat pork. I do not want to be seen with a *kippa* in such a restaurant . . . The donning of the *kippa* compels the observance of all 613 *mitzvot*.

Hence, traditionists make a point of not wearing a *kippa* in contexts which do not necessitate it. The line drawn by the wearing of the *kippa* is a fairly clear one, and touches directly upon the observance of *mitzvot*:

> The day I attain the state in which I – as a matter of a taboo – don't drive on Shabbat, don't switch on the light [on Shabbat], set a Shabbat clock [to avoid turning electric power on and off during Shabbat], pray three times a day and so on, only then will I don a *kippa*.
>
> (Yair)

Moreover, inspired by the principle identification between religiosity and morality,[1] the expectations evoked by the *kippa* touch upon both religious and moral behavior. The *kippa* is, at one and the same time, both a symbol of social identification, a message about the religious observance of its wearer, and an obligation to sublime moral behavior.

The social dimension of the obligation required by the *kippa* was clearly articulated by Liav, who compared the wearing of the *kippa* with the attachment of military ranks, for all of their behavioral and social ramifications:

> I think that if you walk around with a *kippa* on your head, you have to set an example. You have a certain duty; it is a sort of sign, much like an officer has his ranks. You can't, as an officer, sit down with your charges and drink with them during your service.
>
> Someone who walks around with a *kippa* has to take stock of his character and serve as an example. If someone with a *kippa* steals, you hear it all the time . . .: "He is with a *kippa* and he stole, so who are we . . ."

Q: Is it worse when someone wearing a *kippa* commits such an offence?
A: It isn't worse; it gives people the legitimacy, if he is supposed to set the example.

Ruth explained that someone who labels himself an orthodox – by donning the *kippa* – is obligated to observe the *mitzvot* more than a traditionist, "at least outwardly". Hence the transgression by someone with a *kippa* against the orthodox interpretation of Halacha is deemed to be more grave than the transgression of someone who didn't position himself within orthodox markers to begin with. Ruth explained that, "as far as Halacha is concerned, it is a graver offense than for a secular person, because he [the orthodox] is sinning by deception". She stressed that she does not judge orthodox people who do so (sin despite wearing the *kippa*), because they did not have the privilege of choosing their identity: "They were born to an orthodox house – they did not choose [the orthodox identity]."

Whereas Ruth emphasized the social-public aspect (the lie of he who wears a *kippa* to his surroundings), Ziva underlined the personal aspect of "living a lie", characteristic (she claims) of anyone who wears a *kippa* without leading an orthodox lifestyle:

> If you want to outwardly show that "I am a religious person, but inside me I am not really religious", then that is more living a lie than deceiving others. It is more lying to yourself than to your surroundings. It is empty.

We can therefore talk of those who are "authentic" wearers of the *kippa*, as opposed to those who lie by putting it on: "You always know that there are people who may have a *kippa* on their head, but are, sorry, shits. Behave badly, talk badly" (Hila). Hila demonstrated this reality through a tale about a working mate, who "wore the *kippa* just to be liked by the others". She said she didn't know if he was observant, but his behavior clearly showed that he isn't an "authentic" wearer of the *kippa*, because of his immoral behavior.

The *kippa* – or the act of donning it – is thus found to symbolize an ideal religious identity. It represents a rigorous code of conduct, whose clash with the traditionist self-image (that is, the traditionist self-perception by which the traditionist is not worthy of being named religious) is what gives birth to traditionist men's reluctance to wear the *kippa* outside of situations which clearly demand it. An illuminating expression of this stance was given by Gideon, attempting to elaborate upon his statement: "I do not wear a *kippa* – I am not religious":

> A *kippa* is a duty . . . A *kippa* is binding. A *kippa* is representative. I don't think that with my behavior I embody someone who wears a *kippa*. This clash between day-to-day behavior – that I can hug my secretary in a friendly, spontaneous way, kiss her, and have all sorts of laughs and things like that – doesn't sit well with someone wearing a *kippa*. The

> behavior of such a person [who wears a *kippa*] should be more modest, take more care of the rules that a person . . . should live by.

This social fact explains, according to Gideon, the problems raised by him wearing a *kippa*, evoking expectations for religious and moral behavior different from the ones typical of him. The donning of the *kippa* will compel him to "behave differently with myself" (that is, to be more observant also in the personal, non-public, sphere), but that is not the main point, he said. The first and foremost significance of donning the *kippa* is the signal it sends to one's surroundings about the behavioral code one takes, or is meant to take, upon oneself. Gideon explained that he is unwilling to take upon himself the severe, moralistic, less uninhibited behavior which is to be expected from one who wears a *kippa*. Indeed, if he were to wear the *kippa* and not observe all the *mitzvot*, it would be a personal problem of not being true to oneself. But that is a secondary problem: "The problem would be more that I am emptying the *kippa* of meaning by [publicly] hugging, kissing, going to the beach, swimming in the pool; things which don't sit very well with religious Jewish values." He said that, at his current stage of life, he is yet unwilling to forego those behaviors. Should he decide in the future to give them up, that is when he will be able to begin wearing the *kippa*.

The donning of the *kippa* evokes, therefore, expectations for a behavior by the wearer which measures up to a more rigid, higher morality. This is a clear echo of the identification between religiosity and morality. See Meir's explanation:

> I expect from someone who defines himself as a bit more traditionist than me – that is, someone who wears a *kippa* and observes Shabbat – I expect standards which are beyond religion . . . I have many friends at the university who wear a *kippa* and cheat on tests, and it really disturbs me. I think it is hypocrisy.

In Tzipora's words, ths issue at hand is one of social responsibility. This is how she concluded her answer to a common complaint by wearers of the *kippa* that they do not understand why they are expected to stand up to a higher moral and ethical code: "When you put the *kippa* on, what are you thinking? Don't you feel a greater responsibility?" Keren clarified that this responsibility is personal as well as public; that is, the person wearing the *kippa* commits himself – in a personal manner – to live up to a higher religious and moral standard.

At the very least, such moral conduct is a sign of respect for the symbol worn, even if it is no testimony as to the ethical essence of the wearer of the *kippa*:

> I would expect [one wearing a *kippa*] to have respect for the symbol he puts on his head. Wearing the *kippa* means you have to behave and do

> exactly what that *kippa* on your head signifies. It does not signify that you are just another one who happens to be Jewish. [It symbolizes] that you are religious. A religious person has to respect what is written . . . One who dons a *kippa* declares: "I am religious, I observe" – let's not say the full 613 *mitzvot*, but more than a secular person. In my opinion a person wearing a *kippa* has to behave appropriately.
> *Q:* That is, to be a better person?
> *A:* Obviously, obviously.
>
> (Liora)

Similarly, interviewees clarified that, as people who self-identify as traditionists, they don't wear a *kippa*. In view of the great symbolic importance attributed to the donning of a *kippa*, not donning one becomes a sort of active, meaningful statement:

> The *kippa* [is] a symbol. A thing that if you put it on, you identify yourself with a certain group . . . There are things I don't do like the orthodox, that are written that you should do, and that is why I don't define myself [as a religious/orthodox person], through the donning of the *kippa*, because I feel I am besmirching the orthodox by defining myself as such. A *kippa* is one of those things; that is why I don't walk around with a *kippa*.
>
> (Kfir)

Only if the traditionist chooses to follow an orthodox way of life, identifying himself as such, will he wear a *kippa*. As Koren pointed out: "If I observe Shabbat and wear a *kippa*, I will define myself as orthodox."

And yet not donning the *kippa* creates the problem of mistakenly identifying the traditionist as secular. This is because, in Israel's common symbolic context, as long as one does not wear a *kippa*, he does not identify as orthodox; thus it would be "correct" to identify him as secular. Liora told of a conversation she had with a traditionist on the subject:

> I told him: "If you hadn't told me you were traditionist, I would have thought you to be secular. I don't have anything against that – I am telling you that also amongst secular people there are good people. But, just as an example, I wouldn't have known that you observe *mitzvot*. Because you don't have a *kippa* on your head, so I wouldn't know if you were traditionist or secular."

Traditionist men occupy, therefore, that sort of symbolic "hybrid" position when they are not displaying any markings of religious behavior, despite the fact that their lifestyle includes some major "religious" customs. Baruch's tale demonstrated how the social expectations associated with the donning of the *kippa* bring to the fore yet again the tension surrounding the "middle

position" supposedly occupied by traditionists, as well as the contradicting forces which must be dealt with. He related how he wears the *kippa* on occasions which demand it – "when I take out a prayer book or go to synagogue," for example – but does not see himself as under any obligation to don it at all times. This is disputed by his workmates:

> People at work tell me: "You say grace before eating, you pray and much more – why don't you put on a *kippa* all the time?" I told them: "Because I don't want to be a liar. I drive on Shabbat. I am not orthodox. I am traditionist." So they asked: "Then why do you pray?" I said: "Tell me, if I do you a favor, what do you say? Thank you. So I am saying thank you to God. In order to thank him one needs to put on a *kippa* and pray to him, to thank him. But to put on a *kippa* and show you that I am orthodox, when I'm not really – that I won't do. It's a lie. Only when you are completely, you know, you are orthodox, then I will put on a *kippa*. But I'm not orthodox, so why should I put one on?"

Within the Israeli context the style and design of the *kippa* can communicate messages at to the wearer's identity, which are of a sociopolitical nature. Hence it would be interesting to ask whether traditionists' choices of *kippa* signify some sort of identification. As far as I am able to judge, in principle the answer is no. Visiting a synagogue attended mostly by traditionists, one is struck by the wide variety of styles of *kippot*. This impression was reinforced in the interviews, as interviewees testified to choosing a *kippa* according to personal taste and availability, rather than "political" criteria.

Dynamism and flexibility

Relative flexibility has shown itself to be a prominent characteristic of traditionist practice. As mentioned, interviews show that traditionists don't consider observance of *mitzvot* or following a Jewish way of life to be bound by rigid dictations, but are rather aimed at an "essential" adherence, amenable to changing conditions, and able to remold accordingly. This flexibility is especially typical of those areas which are outside the "essential" components of Jewish identity. I wish to focus here upon two dimensions of the dynamism or flexibility of traditionist practice. The first touches upon what interviewees described as the gap between observance "in principle" and observance "de facto" of the *mitzvot*; the other deals with the changes over time to Jewish practice, repeatedly reported by interviewees.

The first dimension deals, then, with the clash between interviewees' intent, "in principle", to follow a certain set of behaviors and reality, seen as compelling them to compromise and transgress against those principles. So, for instance, when describing how Shabbat is observed at her home, Sigal immediately distinguished between these two levels:

> Shabbat – It's hard for me to define. . . . You turn on the electric light. If you have to warm things up in the microwave, you do, but there is a hotplate and samovar. No television or computer. Phone – only during emergencies.
> *Q:* You don't light a fire on Shabbat?
> *A:* In principle, no.

If for Sigal the "need" is what compels/justifies that which orthodoxy sees as sacrilege of Shabbat, for Gideon external constraints – the demands of his job – serve the same purpose: "I have no choice: I work on Shabbat. In the past I used to write things down [on Shabbat]. Today, if I don't have to, I won't write, also at work."

A visit abroad also constitutes a situation justifying similar flexibility when observing Jewish custom. According to Keren, who declared that in her soul and strong faith she feels like an orthodox woman, such flexibility is testimony of (traditionist) practicality winning over (orthodox) extremism:

> When I am abroad I will not light a fire on Shabbat, but I'll take the train on Shabbat, or the bike . . . I try not to be a fanatic. I go out on trips mostly over the weekend, so I try to do my best. I won't smoke on Shabbat. All the rest – bicycle, tram, metro – that's OK.

The stay abroad therefore prompts the creation of a temporarily adjusted system which accommodates the conscious striving to observe tradition with the reality and competing needs typical of the distinctive period of a visit abroad. The "red lines" are brought into sharper relief, and the "essence" of Jewish custom is better clarified. Meir explained this using a story which demonstrates the differentiation between the various rules of *kashrut*:

> For instance: I was traveling for four months abroad. I will not tell you that I ate using kosher utensils, or things that had been made kosher and so on. I ate in all sorts of restaurants, and all kinds of places, but I paid attention not to eat seafood nor meat mixed with dairy, and if we were at McDonald's or something like that, I would always order without cheese or the like; I continued on observing . . . Passover is very representative of the matter at hand: we were there during Passover, and the whole week I ate potatoes because there was nothing else [kosher for Passover]. So I keep kosher abroad, as well.

The second dimension relates to the fact that many participants have described their Jewish practice as existing on a temporal axis, adjusting as they advanced on it. Central to these changes are changing life circumstances as well as a shift in one's attitude towards issues of Jewish identity. For Gideon (as well as for many other interviewees, it should be noted), this shift

is a sense of getting closer to religion. He testified also to the limits of this shift towards the way of life he sees as religious:

> I have always defined myself as a traditionist, though recently I find myself growing closer to religion . . . It is a decision I have made, to take upon myself more and more things . . . I can assume, it is hard to say, that it will be hard for me to be a perfect orthodox, because it is hard for me to observe Shabbat with all its rules. That is the main problem for me.

These changes in practices are often presented as a response to a newly awakened "need". This need relates mostly to the reaffirmation of one's identity as a Jew. This is manifested, for example, in Koren's explanation of his decision, reached at the age of eighteen, to start laying *tefilin* and saying the morning prayers every morning: "I felt the need to lay *tefilin* regularly. It ties me in to tradition." The idea of "trying" or "striving" also seems to form a part of the dynamic molding process of traditionist Jewish practice. There were some interviewees who hesitated in specifying the *mitzvot* they observe, as the process of deciding and choosing was still underway. For Revital, for example, it is a process of drawing closer to Jewish tradition, after having abandoned it when she left the orthodox community in which she was raised. Revital explained how traditionism was the solution she found in order to preserve her Jewish identity without giving in to the dictations of orthodox society. Thus she described her fiancée's and her observance as moving on an axis aimed at greater adherence than either of them currently practices: "We try to eat kosher; we are on our way to a kosher kitchen."

As was discussed in Chapter 3, many stated in the interviews that they hope to get "stronger", more observant, in the future. They did not hesitate to paint a future picture of changed practices, and even while demonstrating and reiterating the confidence and conviction they have in their current Jewish practice, they kept on expressing hope that they would be able to "do more" – even though they have reservations about the orthodox way of life.

Gidi said that the interview caught him in the heart of a process of growing "stronger", "before turning orthodox". His overview of his growing observance throws into sharp relief both the dynamic aspect of traditionist practice and the element of choice typical to it. Gidi stressed that all these changes are a result of his personal choice:

> I grew up . . . traditionist, like all Moroccans . . . I continued on my father's path, my family's, until I left home. Then I grew a bit distanced, I went to work abroad . . . I came back in the last two years, and the path [to observance] is getting stronger.

Gidi, who said that at every point he was completely content with his choice, emphasized that he always observed what he saw as essential:

> There was always traditionism. There was Shabbat . . . meaning *kiddush* and so forth, holy days and so on. They did not clash. When I was in India, for example, I wouldn't light a fire [on Shabbat]. I didn't write there [on Shabbat]. Didn't eat pork . . . That is how I was brought up.

While stressing that he is happy with his traditionist identity, Gidi described the possibility of "strengthening" and stricter observance as a sort of journey towards orthodoxy, without ever reaching its end. He explained that, for him, coming from a traditionist Moroccan home, this is a natural development: "To me it is mostly a matter of going back to the roots, to my parents' home." Contrary to that, as far as his wife, who grew up in a secular, Ashkenazi home, is concerned, he believes it to be a substantial identity transformation: "To her this is estranging herself to her father's hearth."

As mentioned earler, shifts in life circumstances – such as leaving home, marriage, childbirth, and so on – are some of the most widespread contexts to encourage a shift in traditionist practice. The interviewees explained that there are periods in one's life in which it is harder to observe some of the *mitzvot*, and it is understandable if they are then more lenient. Interviewees who are single, for instance, often described themselves as being relatively more lenient, making it clear that they plan on becoming more observant once they are married and have children. These statements stress that the role of traditionist practice as a basis for Jewish identity is more relevant to the raising of children than to the definition of the identity of a bachelor living on his own. Baruch expounded upon this issue when talking of his young son's traditionism. There are areas in which his son makes no allowances – *kashrut*, to name one – while in other areas he makes temporary concessions: "Like all youngsters, it is hard for him to get up on Saturday morning for synagogue. I understand him, I don't force him . . . I believe he will be more observant once he grows up a bit and marries." Baruch explained that becoming a parent forces one to become more observant. He said that he himself, when a child, used to attend synagogue regularly, "until after the Bar Mitzvah". Then, as a young adult, he frequented it more sporadically; "You know, when youngsters start going out, having fun, so you forget a little, deviate." But when he got married and had his son, he did "what needed to be done so that he [the son] will get to know the religion" and returned to the synagogue on Saturdays.

Batya, talking about the shift in her Jewish practices, also placed them within the context of changes in her life circumstances:

> When I was married we used to do *kiddush* in our house . . . I would invite people and we would do *kiddush*, and on the eve of Shabbat we would make a feast . . . Now [in her parents' home, where she was living at the time of the interview] there is no feast, but I make a point of having a full meal with meat and fish etc. . . . As I am currently living with my parents, I do not try and turn their world order upside down, because it is

> not my house. God willing, it will be very important for me to do it [the *kiddush*, in the future]. It is important to me that my children see me do it.

Interviewees also told of the impact of personal and family events – from disasters to joyous occasions – upon their observance. Limor, for example, described her move from orthodoxy to traditionism as a context-derived dynamic. She stressed the amount of change, variety, "strengthening" and "loosening" of the way in which she herself, as well as her family, have observed *mitzvot*. "There were periods in my life when I was closer to religion, because they were rough periods. My mother's health, for example – it is an attempt to hold on to something."

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, these changes highlight the dimension of choice characteristic of traditionism. The dynamism and changes in lifestyle encourage traditionists to be intimately acquainted with several alternatives for the practical definition of their Jewish identity. As such, the dynamism – which is the focus of much criticism by those who see it is a mark of "inconsistency" – becomes an advantage. Gil stressed this point, while also addressing the orthodox criticism:

> I had chapters in my life where I went more in one direction, and other chapters where I went more in the other direction. Much like any other area in your life. I think today I am more consolidated. But I have looked into other directions. There was a time in my life where I sort of ran away from religion; there were times when I grew closer. That is to say, it is a game which orthodox people would like to say is exactly our [traditionists'] problem.

Gil stressed that the orthodox criticism does not seem credible to him, because everyone – including orthodox Jews – introduces changes into their lives on a regular basis. The difference, he explained, is that orthodox people hide and deny the dynamic nature of the Jewish way of life. The traditionist advantage stems from the fact that traditionists acknowledge the dynamic, not-always consistent nature of Jewish practice; they do not presume to be "consistent":

> But it is exactly the same for them [the orthodox]. I can tell you many stories. I meet people and see what happens to the colors of their *kippot* [i.e. marking changes in the level and style of their religiosity] and what happened to their way of life. I speak to them and I see how their way of life changes, and not everything is so clear to them . . . Secular people like to imagine orthodox people as very strong, as people who know what they want; their path is very clear, the Jewish identity is very clear . . . That is rubbish . . . I don't believe that. They deal with exactly the same questions we deal with.
>
> (Gil)

Focusing on the dynamic aspect of traditionist identity further illuminates traditionists' complex attitudes towards the Israeli field of identities. The choice of a traditionist identity is made vis-à-vis the images of the dominant alternative identities – the secular and the orthodox. The continuous reshaping of the traditionist practice is an expression of the process of self-creation of meaning: Traditionists mold their choice while facing parallel systems of identity and practice which are neither necessarily compatible, nor consistent. These junctions of conflict arouse the set of argumentations which strive to recognize the Jewish "essence" and adhere to it. See for example the way Liav described his Jewish way of life as "temporally dependent":

> It depends on the time; these are things which, if you want to reach perfection immediately, you must fail. You cannot decide in one day to become orthodox . . . Maybe in another 20 years I will get stronger. Could be. Right now I am in this place [identifying himself as traditionist].
> *Q:* Do you see yourself becoming more secular?
> *A:* Going back . . . I've been there. I was as secular as one can be. I didn't like it. Seafood tastes like chicken, so you might as well eat chicken. Lamb or veal tastes as good as any other food, and it's kosher.

5 Cross-pressures and traditionist solitude

One of traditionism's defining experiences is the coping with a set of cross-pressures, demanding that traditionists identify with one of the two dominant poles of Jewish identity in Israel. This issue was one of the major topics appearing in practically all interviews. Even those few interviewees who dismissed these cross-pressures as "insignificant" to them were well acquainted with this experience. Interviewees described a constant, continuous dealing with questions, qualms and responses that challenge the traditionist choice, posed to them by non-traditionists. The lack of understanding – as well as the rejection of traditionism as a legitimate alternative of Jewish identity, from which this lack of understanding probably stems – builds up into a constant set of pressures which requires traditionists to stop holding on to this allegedly hybrid "middle position", and choose one of the two supposedly clear options – secularity or orthodoxy. This chapter will be dedicated to an examination of these pressures.

The main source of pressures is the call for coherence and consistency – or, in other words, the demand that traditionists conform to a binary system of Jewish identities. To the non-traditionist eye, traditionist behavior can seem inconsistent or even hypocritical and false: "The traditionist is always stuck in the middle – the orthodox tell him 'You are not religious enough', and both the orthodox and the secular say 'You play what you feel like' " (Gil). Dealing with this demand tends to require many resources as well as taking a toll personally. This was echoed in my conversation with Haim, who arrived upset. A bachelor in his early thirties, Haim started the conversation with a statement that he has decided to "show it to those traditionists" because the traditionist definition of identity has turned out to be injurious to him, in a very personal way. He explained:

> I'll give you an example: I met an orthodox girl. She tells me: "For me, you aren't religious enough. I want someone with an orthodox way of life." If you go out with a secular girl, you are too religious. You live in two worlds . . . You reach a certain stage in your life where you are trapped by both worlds. Here in Israel, they don't like compromise. They prefer black or white. No place for traditionists. In Israel the middle does

> not exist – they like either right or left . . . My brother . . . tells me: "The secular don't accept me, and orthodox society does not accept me. If I were to live elsewhere maybe it would be easier."

The call for "consistency" and adherence to one of the two poles of the dichotomous setting of "orthodox vs. secular" comes not only from the orthodox side, examining traditionist behavior in light of the severe requirements of the *halachic* code, but also from the secular side, demanding – be it implicitly or explicitly – that traditionists pick a side and act accordingly. As was testified to, for example, by Koren's description of his friends' reaction to his fasting on Yom Kippur (they themselves do not fast): "I've been told: 'Either you fast and do everything [i.e., follow the orthodox dictate in full], or don't do anything . . . if you observe a certain *mitzvah*, do it all the way.' " Others told how their surroundings solve the difficulty they pose by forcing them into one of the two recognized categories. "My secular friends say I am orthodox, and my orthodox friends perceive me as secular. Being a traditionist is really being stuck somewhere in the middle," explained Halit; "Because it [traditionism] really is in the middle. Everyone disposes of you . . . everyone distances you; that is, distances you in how they define you," concurred Tamar.

The Israeli cultural context plays a central role here. The abovementioned pressure is a call to conform, coming from two competing directions, each perceiving its counterpart to be the "other" within the binary construction of their own identity. Both sides demand that traditionists cease occupying that incomprehensible borderline area of "neither here nor there" or "both this and that":

> That is the brainwash we undergo in this country: that there is secular and there is religious. There is no middle. There is nothing else. There is no definition of anything else. There are secular [political] parties and there are orthodox parties; so the traditionist is left to live with his guilt – I am neither here nor there . . . This is one of the most terrible things done to traditionists.
>
> (Gil)

Interviewees also emphasized that identifying oneself with one of the two sides forces traditionists into marking the side not chosen as the "other", fashioning one's identity by contrast to that "other". Some stated that such an absolute insistence upon definitions is an Israeli craze, not accepted within other Jewish communities, such as the one in the United States: "Here [in Israel] people love definitions. You go to synagogue, so people immediately assume you have become orthodox. There [in the US] you are accepted as you are, because to them, your being a Jew is an asset in itself" (Batya). This Israeli attitude, Batya clarified, does not breed tolerance:

> And even if they [Israelis] are tolerant, they immediately need a definition. "OK, so what are you now? You've become orthodox? You keep kosher – so you are orthodox" . . . That is an Israeli, detestable thing. It comes from digging into other people's lives. There [in the US] they don't have that. Privacy is supreme, sacrosanct. You don't go into other people's lives. And that is a cultural matter.

The "inconsistency" of the traditionist lifestyle is seen by non-traditionists as a fault, around which is lurking the danger of an unconsolidated identity, "confusion" and lack of authenticity. Sigal, relating the reactions to her choice of traditionism, described the criticism given by her non-traditionist friends over what they see as a certain recipe for "complications":

> There are those who say I am trying to have it all, that this is something which is not good. Some look at it not in a nice way. They say, "Why are you trying to enjoy both worlds, taking from this and from that; you will end up with nothing, confusing your children, and they will end up convoluted."

As Sigal made clear, this criticism is not reserved to just one part of the Israeli range of identities. To her reference group she is, at one and the same time, "not religious enough" (mostly to the orthodox) and too observant (to the secular): "My secular friends are pleased with every step I take towards secularity, but we will always be their 'religious friends', no matter if we switch on the light on Shabbat."

As has been mentioned, the result is both a lack of understanding and intolerance shown by non-traditionists towards the traditionist way of life. "There are always sarcastic, stinging remarks," said Keren; "It comes from not understanding. When you don't understand it turns many times into sarcastic humor . . . For the orthodox I am secular and for the secular I am orthodox." This lack of understanding is a sure path to social estrangement and loneliness, since

> . . . the traditionist thing is to be like that, stuck in the middle. It's much easier when you know: I am religious [or] I am secular. On the other hand, traditionist – you are not well accepted on both [sides] . . . you are the odd one out, an aberration.
>
> (Limor)

Of course, there were several interviewees who said they are happy with their unique position, standing upon the "seam" between two mutually exclusive identities. Yet even they took traditionist loneliness to be a simple fact, a given. Liav, who takes pride in the fact that "both sides" (both orthodox and secular friends) know him and respect him for his unique position as a traditionist, explained what the necessary condition for such positive recognition is:

> If your social status is such that you are accepted no matter what. It depends on your social status. If you are on the margins, it is easier for people to point fingers . . . If you are stronger . . . then neither orthodox nor secular will bother you.

Liav, it appears, assumes the existence of such a set of cross-pressures – ever embodying the potential to "bother" traditionists – to be an obvious fact.

The traditionist "middle position" encourages traditionists to be especially attuned to the identity and expectations of those who are not traditionists. Traditionists are well aware of the common outlooks amongst both their secular and orthodox friends, and are often forced, or perhaps choose, to adjust themselves to these perceptions. Such adjustments are born from the identification of traditionism as a minority position (as far as social influence and significance, though not demography, are concerned). In other words, traditionist identity often finds itself in various contexts in which it is a minority, an exception, not responding to common behavioral codes. As such, traditionists also become acutely aware of the sensitivities of the other, dominant, identities. See for example Limor's statement regarding the major social environments in which she grew up. In her religious elementary school most students and teachers were orthodox, considering her not-devout-enough lifestyle to be lacking, faulty. In a secular high school, service in the military and studies in university, the majority of her friends were secular, perceiving her social behavior to be overly conservative. "So I find myself in the middle, in between," she explained, in a position which is always adjacent to and not the leader of.

Being such a dominant experience, the set of cross-pressures surrounds traditionists from every direction, rendering its "deconstruction" into its varying components somewhat artificial. Yet, for the sake of clarity of discussion, I shall differentiate between these pressures according to their sources. I will open my discussion with an investigation into the demands and pressures coming from the orthodox side.

The orthodox view: Traditionism as a "semi-heresy"

Often, orthodox critics dismiss traditionist practice as a selfish preference for comfortableness over ideological consistency. Spokesmen of the orthodox elite have accused traditionists of failing to observe the demanding orthodox code, while nevertheless hoping to be seen as loyal to the Jewish identity built upon it. They see traditionist behavior as flawed, reflecting a weakness of character if not a choice of sin rather than religious compliance. Orthodox rabbis often play a word game with the etymology of the term *masorti* in order to deny its legitimacy. *Masorti*, they say, comes from the words *masor* (saw) and *nisur* (sawing) and not from the words *masoret* (tradition) and *mesira* (handing over). Traditionists saw off a piece of Judaism for themselves, choosing what is easy for them and throwing away that which denies

them the pleasures which secular culture offers.[1] Other word games abound, and they all point the same accusing finger.[2] Moreover, this critical stance toward traditionists can also be found in the modern orthodox camp, which is seen as relatively more open to competing cultures.[3]

It is important to note that, contrary to this attitude, Sephardic rabbis' attitude towards traditionism has been usually characterized in the past by relative tolerance. This tolerance is mostly set around the use of different halachic and interpretative principles aimed at preventing the exclusion of traditionists from within the Jewish community.[4] And yet, as Buzaglo (2005), discussing similar rabbinical attitudes, points out, these *halachic* solutions do not resolve the traditionist dilemma.

This last point must be emphasized: Generally it can be said that the positive attitude of the older generation of Sephardic rabbis is based on the uncompromising demand that, "in the end", traditionists will adopt the orthodox way of life. The rabbis' compromising verdicts and relatively open attitude are a means to achieve that end. In other words it is a conditional acceptance, requiring traditionists to acknowledge the fault in their inconsistent behavior, and recant.

Interviewees demonstrated how well acquainted they are with this position, a large part of which is the expectation that the traditionist will "grow stronger" and "do more". For Gil, the fact that traditionists internalize this negative gaze is what prevents the possibility of self-expression and development of a traditionist community:

> It is one of the most terrible things done by the orthodox . . . Instead of just saying: we [traditionists] have our approach and our way, our Judaism, which to me is the real, authentic Judaism which looks to the general way of life, which wants to integrate into the world as it advances, which looks at society in general, which looks at social terms and not just at some pedantry or other; instead of all that they come . . . to the traditionists and say: "You just haven't grown strong; you still need to grow strong."

Gil also dwelled upon the "embracing", non-litigious attitude of the Sephardic rabbis:

> *Q:* Do the rabbis portray traditionists as faulty Jews?
> *A:* That is something I wouldn't say about the Sephardic rabbis. They wouldn't use the term "faulty". That is what is nice about the Sephardim: they say, "You haven't yet grown strong enough", so it legitimizes them.

And still, inasmuch as this approach is expressed in a friendly, moderate manner, it immediately portrays traditionist behavior as lacking. See for example Gideon's description:

> I have neighbors who tell me, in a gentle and friendly manner, "Why don't you come on Saturday? Come to synagogue" . . . So I say: "Guys, all in good time. You know I come mostly during the high holidays" . . . You feel a bit uncomfortable [when faced with those questions].

Roni summed up the stance at the base of this orthodox approach in simple terms: "For the orthodox there exists orthodox or non-orthodox, which is secular." In such a binary setting, if you do not inhabit one of these extremes, you are inherently "pathetic", or, at least, a lost soul in need of guidance.

> I feel in every run-in I have with those people [i.e. the orthodox] their negative attitude towards me. I feel they treat me like they treat the worst secularist . . . In general their attitude, . . . the way they look at you, and define and treat you, is often insulting. They don't accept me.
>
> (Roni)

Sigal, who was raised in an orthodox home, tried to illuminate the origins of this mindset:

> It is precisely the orthodox who really criticize [the traditionist lifestyle], because they were always brought up on the distinction between allowed and forbidden, and now I am a hypocrite [to them]. How dare I come to synagogue and then they see me with shorts and a sleeveless shirt? There are people who treat us like that; they don't know how to "read" us.

Such an explanation was common amongst the interviewees. They see the orthodox, raised on unequivocal, all-inclusive *halachic* precepts telling them what is permitted and what is forbidden, as more likely to fall into binary thinking, perceiving orthodoxy and secularity as two exclusive components in a binary reality of Jewish identities: "The orthodox, they see only black and white. There is no gray. There is only Halacha" (Liav); "It's like all or nothing; either black or white" (Tamar). In this reality, if you are not orthodox you are necessarily secular. Baruch explained that the orthodox don't know "what traditionists are", and thus classify them as secular. His wife, present during the conversation, corrected him: "The orthodox know very well what traditionists are. They simply do not acknowledge them, or the secular" (Vered). Baruch wanted to explain why the orthodox do not acknowledge traditionists: "Because of the desecration of Shabbat – as far as the orthodox are concerned, anyone desecrating Shabbat amounts to the same thing."

Halit's following statement regarding this binary approach is especially instructive, as it was given following her participation in one of the programs meant to foster dialog between secular and orthodox Israeli-Jews:

> When I did the dialog program, . . . in the first lesson they attempted to define each person. And of course the definition is based upon outward appearance, resulting in me being immediately categorized as completely secular . . . Someone even told me that it is obvious that in my house we don't eat kosher. It was very obvious, because I was wearing a sleeveless t-shirt.

Halit also admitted that she is caving in to this binary perception: "As far as the religious perception of the people I encountered there, I had become secular. That is, I understood I was more on the secular side than the traditionist one. I didn't define myself anymore as a traditionist." Tamar, too, chooses to define herself – *vis-à-vis* orthodox Jews – negatively: "That is why I immediately say I am not religious. So what if I observe Shabbat? It doesn't mean anything [to them]."

Many interviewees told of similar cases, in which they encountered such an orthodox dichotomous perspective, which invalidates and delegitimizes traditionism. According to this orthodox view, traditionists are essentially identical to secular Jews, both having lost any claim to Jewish authenticity, and are thus forbidden from donning any outward symbol of religiosity. Roni explained that orthodox Jews who hold to this belief are surprised to learn of the existence of the traditionist "species", well acquainted with and loyal to tradition and yet not orthodox. "They don't think such a situation even exists." The condition they put to the traditionist is a simple one:

> Naturally they would like me to be like them. And if I am not like them then I should not pose as a Jew . . . "If you are not religious then shut up." . . . I feel a hostile attitude on their part, in the religious aspect, of course . . . [They say:] "You can do whatever you want [i.e., observe], but to us it doesn't count at all. We are better." It is a total condescendence.

Sigal offered a unique testimony of this patronizing stance, telling of how she herself, as an orthodox schoolgirl, viewed her traditionist friends critically:

> I had utter contempt for them. I looked at it in a very childish way: I am the good one, the real one; I take something all the way. There was a group of traditionist girls in my school, and I really didn't respect them. They would walk around with minis and shorts and then go to synagogue . . . I saw everything in black and white. You are either orthodox or secular. No middle. I was very disdainful. I didn't even think there was a mean. I thought it was hypocrisy. Much like the orthodox see me today, probably.

This condescendence assumes an identification between "Judaism" and "religiosity" or "orthodoxy", and judges traditionism to be a faulty, lacking

expression of that same Judaism. According to this standard, traditionists are "kind of not really religious" (Bina); they pose as Jews, but are unwilling to shoulder the full burden of being Jewish. The position traditionists occupy in this worldview is an especially problematic one, as they are familiar with – even if only in a shallow, basic sort of way – the demands and requirements of Halacha and acknowledge its authority, while still not adhering to it completely. An expression of this can be found in Hila's statement about the way her orthodox friends deal with her choice of traditionism: "My orthodox friends think it's not enough. It is a lie to them. As far as they are concerned I know the truth [embodied by orthodox Judaism], and still make allowances. They think I belittle it."

Many traditionists, accepting in principle the identification of orthodoxy as the "most authentic" expression of Judaism, become therefore particularly vulnerable to the volleys of orthodox criticism of their "incomplete" lifestyle: "Traditionists are very vulnerable people, more so to orthodox people" (Bina). Traditionists perceive the orthodox delegitimizing viewpoint as yet another form of coercion, aimed at compelling traditionists to behave in a way they do not want to behave. Tehila demonstrated this through her orthodox friends' attitude towards her "immodest" clothing: "They are not nice to me. They can chase me down the street in order to tell me that the slit up my dress is too big". Tzipora, who went through the same delegitimizing orthodox scrutiny, experienced it as a "trauma":

> I was traumatized: I attended a religious school until fourth grade, and once I went with trousers and was thrown out by the principal . . . It was traumatic . . . because of the coercion, the coercing of someone to do the things you think should be done . . . to think the way you think.

It is interesting to see how, precisely when faced with such an uncompromising orthodox stand, the traditionist choice becomes more apparent, and is reaffirmed. Sigal, for example, described how it is just that same confrontation with orthodox criticism which gives birth, within her, to the greatest feeling of inner peace with her choice of traditionism. Similarly, Linor said she recognizes the orthodox pressure but refuses to acknowledge it: "I really didn't like being looked at like that – 'If you drive on Shabbat why don't you just eat pork on Yom Kippur?' I don't believe in that because I think religion is not black or white."

The secular demand: Pick a side and identify with it

As people whose main, dominant reference group is mostly a secular one, interviewees dwelt mostly upon the secular approach to traditionism. They described how the secular misunderstanding and ignorance of the traditionist way of life had become a constant element in their lives. The basic premise of many interviewees was that secular people are typically ignorant of Jewish

religious practice. Without this prior Jewish knowledge, the secular cannot grasp the traditionist attempt to preserve authentic Jewish content.

> Secular society does not always know what a *kiddush* on Shabbat is. It does not understand my relationship with my parents, which is a very close one, generally with all my family. It sometimes does not understand the idea of keeping kosher.
>
> (Hila)

In such an environment traditionists find themselves forced to repeatedly explain – sometimes to justify – their "unusual" behavior. This was demonstrated by Tamir, who described his close friends as being "completely secular," not practicing even the most fundamental of Jewish rituals. These friends asked him to join them on a vacation trip during Yom Kippur, and he had to spell out to them what is for the traditionist both basic and essential; "I told them: guys, I, on Yom Kippur, am in synagogue, fasting." The traditionist set of practices and belief complicates the matter further as it seems to present an inconsistent semi-religiosity; "Secular people have a much harder time understanding the [traditionist] dilemmas . . . They don't understand why I do certain things and don't do others" (Sigal).

From a secular point of view, the traditionist lifestyle simply "doesn't make sense". Traditionists, who participate as equal members of their secular cohorts' circle of friends, bind themselves with restrictions and qualifications which originate in the orthodox world, and are out of place in a secular social context. Interviewees believe that secular society tends to see traditionists as afflicted with a double moral standard:[5] "Secular people say I have a double moral standard. They tell me: 'Decide; you are either orthodox or secular.' " (Tal). Traditionists thus become, to their secular friends, people who have chosen an alien behavior which also lacks a clear sense or logical method. In this spirit, Keren told of her secular peer-groups' tendency to make jokes and comment about her traditionism. These jokes and the comments, she said, in effect broadcast a message that demands her to cease her unique, "strange" practice:

> It doesn't make sense to them [her secular friends] that a girl like me won't join them on a trip . . . on Shabbat. I'll be with them at the beach on a Friday, right up to Shabbat, and then I'll go home to light the candles and pray. I pay a price . . . everything has its price, and I don't regret it . . . It is important to me [to observe Shabbat]. It is a social price that I pay.

It might be thought that in such a non-accepting, misunderstanding surrounding all traditionists have to do is present their traditionism in a clear-cut, unambiguous fashion; once their secular friends get to know the traditionist option and learn to respect it, the problem of peer pressure should be

resolved. This idea seems to be supported by Hila's statement, explaining that her secular friends' (who are her closest, most important friends) attitude towards her traditionist identity is affected by the way in which she presents it. "It depends on how you show it to the environment," she explained; "If you try to hide it [the traditionist lifestyle], it engenders criticism and pressure from your surroundings. If you show it openly then it is accepted by your surroundings." The obvious question is, of course, why would someone hide their traditionist identity from their secular friends in the first place? "Because there are those who would succumb to the peer pressure," answered Hila, who seemed to take the existence of such pressure as a given. Hila also made clear that, even if she herself feels no such pressure, there are those who can foresee its existence, and adjust themselves to it before it becomes explicit.

This means that, in the best-case scenario – in which traditionists do not give in to the secular viewpoint which rejects their way of life – they are forced to form a rigid, unequivocal definition of their identity in relation to their social surroundings. This identity is, almost inherently, of a defiant, isolationist nature. Liron's case shows this clearly: Liron, who said he "couldn't care less" that his secular friends do not respect his traditionist lifestyle, told of many an occasion in which he was put under such pressure. He chose to be indifferent to these demands. So, for instance, when his friends held a party, which included a meal in a restaurant, he was the only one requiring it to be a kosher restaurant, and because of him they were forced to change their original choice. Liron repeatedly claimed that this behavior does not take a social toll.

Under such conditions – where the traditionist way of life is a unique, unusual expression of a "capricious" observance of the traditionist individual within a dominant secular group, which in turn does not recognize nor make the effort to show the traditionist way of life respect – traditionists are condemned to permanent seclusion. Roni, who was deliberating whether to name his friends' treatment of him "pressure" or "lack of consideration", described this treatment as helping him preserve his traditionist identity:

> It is precisely this time spent within a secular, completely Ashkenazi group which defined the act of preserving all my various traditionist characteristics . . . There are people who would have reacted in exactly an opposite manner . . . For example, we went vacationing over Passover, me and my friends. I was the only one observing Passover's dietary rules. I always went alone to eat kosher food. On Yom Kippur they all meet up to watch movies, and I would sit in the synagogue.
>
> *Q:* Does your choice condemn you to solitude?
>
> *A:* Yes, because it is part of me standing up for my principles. I never wanted to assimilate into them. They understood and respected it many times, but a break was created. With all the respect and fun, a break was created.

This and other similar statements suggest that pressure by – and estrangement from – one's closest peer-group is virtually a staple of traditionist identity. Ruth described an experience that turned out to be shared by the vast majority of our interviewees: "It's hard. First of all, when we go out we go to non-kosher places, and I come back home hungry. I don't go out on Friday or Saturday, and all my friends do." To Ruth, her friends' behavior counts as an attempt to force their (un-)belief on her: "The secular don't have faith, and think nothing should be observed," and that is why they don't show any understanding to Ruth's way of life. Insisting upon a solely traditionist circle of friends is not a viable solution, as they are a minority. As Keren explained: "I have two or three traditionist friends. We meet on Saturdays, but I won't be with them all the time, because it is too isolated . . . My immediate surroundings and friends are very secular."

Even if only implicit and indirect, secular dominance and the resulting pressure put traditionist observance in the position of a minority, to be "tolerated" but in no way "forced" upon society. See, for example, how Limor described the terms of her Friday night recreation: "I sit with friends in a café . . . Everyone is smoking [on Shabbat], of course. It really disturbs me. But, obviously in this instance I cannot say a thing." For Limor, such a demand on her part would constitute an inappropriate coercion, since the "rules of the game" in this society are secular to begin with. She, as a traditionist, can only choose to adjust to them or distance herself from them.

A similar outlook emerges from Karin's tendency to silence or conceal her and her family's traditionist markings when around their secular friends:

> On Friday night we meet with friends. We have a Shabbat dinner at home with the children, and then go there [to her friends']. We don't declare it: "Listen, we observe Shabbat, we eat kosher." We don't want people to feel uncomfortable. We let them continue on feeling the best. People also don't know how we behave at home. I don't let them feel uncomfortable.

Karin assumes that drawing attention to her traditionist way of life (not to mention giving it prominence), which is different from that of her secular friends, would be the cause of unpleasantness, making them feel "uncomfortable". Traditionism is here seen as a burden, which must be carried by traditionists alone, not to be forced upon one's secular friends.

In contrast, it is interesting to note that interviewees frequently described how their secular friends forcibly demand that they, the traditionists, change their ways. This is often an insistence that the traditionist's behavior be adjusted to the rules common to and accepted by his/her secular friends. Ravit, who told of being under such secular pressure ("but it doesn't affect me in the least," she insisted), described this demand for changed behavior: "[Secular friends] tell me: 'Why are you like that . . . and why don't you eat that; you are probably the last person alive to keep kosher or fast on Yom Kippur." To Tehila it is "obvious" that her secular friends insist on her

adopting their lifestyle: "Obviously. They know me as a secular person. I don't go out on Shabbat. They want me to. They pressure me." Liron described himself as withstanding such pressure. For example, secular friends he met on Yom Kippur found his fasting to be incomprehensible, giving him a hard time about it. They would want him, he said, to behave as they do. "It seems primitive to them" that he observes the fast.

The awkwardness surrounding the prohibitions of *kashrut* laws is one typical case in which social pressure is ever present. All participants told similar accounts dealing with the tension created where the traditionist of the group is the only one wishing to eat kosher: "There are many such instances, where you are sitting with friends in a restaurant and suddenly you aren't eating [because the food is not kosher]" (Liron). Tamar's story about her workplace is representative in this context:

> We order in food during the day, and every single time it causes problems anew . . . I ask them to order in from a kosher place . . . If everyone is ordering in from the same [non-kosher] place, I will obviously not eat with them.

Her co-workers do indeed try to order in from a kosher place, but, from the get go, she is repeatedly forced to be the exception, the one for whom her friends change their plans. The account given by Tikva in order to demonstrate the problems arising round her *kashrut* observance referred to a friendship of a more intimate nature. She told of her embarrassment when faced with a dinner invitation to the home of an old co-worker:

> Many times she would like to invite me to dinner, and it disturbed me because I knew her house to be completely non-kosher . . . Once she invited me over for dinner, and I told her, "It is hard for me to come over". She said, "Don't worry, I'll fry you a fish." I asked her in which pan and she took out a new one and used it. My partner ate the non-kosher food with them. I will not eat at someone's I know to be completely non-observant.

Ziva described the tension arising round the subject of dietary laws to be the only opportunity in which traditionism assumes an outward form by which the traditionist can be recognized. To her, these situations can be tantamount to secular coercion. "At work during Passover I am perceived to be different . . . Most of the people working there are secular, and most of the food was not kosher for Passover. When I didn't eat they said: 'Oh, come on, seriously!' "

Unlike the orthodox position, which demands traditionists to "strengthen" and grow closer to the orthodox identity, the secular demands are not so unequivocal, at least on the rhetorical level. Secular criticism of traditionists requires them to be "clear", and pick any one of the two supposedly coherent paths: secularity or orthodoxy. This is a result of the rhetorical position of

respecting one's right to live as one chooses, though in practical terms it is a limited choice between two opposing options.

The most pressing demand put to traditionists by the secular environment is that for "consistency", seen to be so sorely missing in the "hybrid" of traditionism. Consistency here means choosing a "clear-cut" category and giving up what is perceived to be an illegitimate mixture of opposing identities. "Secular people say of traditionists – 'What is this, you being in the middle? You are either this or that.' Like you are what is comfortable to you" (Liat). This lack of consistency seems to confuse the secular, as it presents an unclear combination of two elements seen to be mutually repellant: "They see it [the traditionist way of life] perhaps as a sort of hypocrisy. Maybe it seems to them to be an oxymoron. It is not clear [to them] what principles one holds" (Tuvia).

In this regard, traditionists perceive secular people to be afflicted with that same dichotomous attitude typical of the orthodox, in which there is no place for the traditionists' complex, non-dichotomous world. Tehila, describing her secular friends' attitude towards her choice, said they do present her with the option of being orthodox, should she so choose, not insisting that she becomes "one of them", just as long as she stops inhabiting the traditionist middle position:

> For the secular the world is very dichotomous – you are either orthodox or secular. The traditionist compromises. He adopts a bit of this and a bit of that, creating some sort of mixture . . . It undermines their self-confidence; they don't understand it.

When it comes to women, dress becomes the realm in which the demand for "consistency" is most strongly expressed. One of the recurring themes in the interviews deals with instances in which traditionist women's "immodest" dress bewilders secular friends (who are similarly dressed), as it is "inconsistent" with their observance in other areas. Tamar told of one such case:

> One day I came to work in a sleeveless t-shirt and a jean-overalls, with my shoulders bare, so a [secular] co-worker said: "Tell me, you vote for Mafdal [the National Religious Party, representing mostly religious Zionists]; look what you look like, how you dress."

The thing which disturbed her co-worker, Tamar explained, was the "incompatibility" between her quasi-religious practice and the secular message sent by her clothing. The solution Tamar found for such embarrassing situations demands that she constantly declares her identity:

> It [her colleague's remark] was something which really bothered me at the time. But nowadays I have learned to rise above it. For that reason

> I immediately say – "I am not orthodox, so what if I observe Shabbat – that doesn't make me orthodox."

Taking into account the peripheral image of ("pre-modern") religiosity in the context of a dominant secular, westernized discourse of modernization, traditionism emerges as an amalgamation of stigmatized peripheral identities: Mizrahi (i.e., non-western) and quasi-religious. Roni's statement captured the consolidation of the various negative images gathered round the secular patronization over traditionist-Mizrahi "primitiveness":

> From the secular side proper there is much condescending over the traditionists. They see religious people as medieval. Traditionism in general is connected to the Mizrahi-ness and right-wing [political] conservatism. And that exactly is the definition of . . . a primitive. There is this condescending – secular over traditionist, Ashkenazi over Mizrahi, Left over Right – which is all bound together.

Interviewees' statements reveal them to be well acquainted with this patronizing viewpoint, having dealt with it often. One of the most common experiences in this context is the traditionists' coping with the negating perspective of the secular, as traditionists display what appear to be symbols of religiosity, perceived as primitive from the start: "[Secular] people do not appreciate religious people. Secularity holds no respect for religion. It is seen as archaic, unprogressive and old . . . To them I am religious because I observe Shabbat" (Tehila). This was also reflected in the statements of those interviewees who were openly and decisively defiant of any possible criticism aimed at traditionism. Such, for instance, were Tomer's words, when he stated that he is "not ashamed" of his traditionism: "All those left-wing secular teachers, everyone knows I go to synagogue; I'm not the least bit ashamed of it." The relevant point is, of course, the acknowledging of the fact that there are those who would be ashamed, as well as the assumption that others – in this case "those left-wing secular teachers" – expect him to be ashamed of his traditionism. "I always define myself as a traditionist, always. I'm not ashamed of it, of what I am," said another interviewee. He explained that there are indeed others who are ashamed of self-identifying as traditionists, "because society will look upon them differently; there exists a stigma" (Shlomo). Indeed, the fact that so many interviewees found it necessary to point out that they are not ashamed of their identification as traditionists is, in itself, worthy of note.

Considering this negative, derogatory viewpoint, it is hardly surprising that there are those who, while conducting a traditionist lifestyle, choose to self-identify as secular.[6] As Batya, who seemed to be rebelling against this approach, put it: "I know such people; they will say what is comfortable for society . . . I do not hide my identity in order to be a part of a certain society." Liron explained why he sees such behavior as a natural thing: "He [the traditionist] lives in a particular society, a secular one, and he doesn't want to be

the exception." In order to demonstrate this, Liron told of the public institute in which he is employed: There exists there, he says, a strong anti-traditionist sentiment. "There are institutions which will be hard to be accepted into, if you are a traditionist . . . Within certain circles there is an especially strong anti-traditionist pressure."

Traditionism as a threat to identity

Traditionism, it seems, threatens the self-definition of two "players", who position themselves from opposite sides in the alleged modernity vs. tradition dichotomy: secularism on the one hand; orthodoxy on the other. Traditionism serves as a living example of an alternative to the rejection of either modernity or religion and tradition. This statement holds true for both Reform and Conservative Judaism as well, showing various forms of compatibility between religion and modernity. However, their presence in Israel is too weak to pose a threat to either side. The dichotomy which puts modernity and liberty versus tradition and religion has constructed the "orthodox" and "secular" identity structures as opposites, both of which profit from the dominance of such a binary mode of thought: The orthodox camp gains a sort of monopoly over the definition and form of Jewish religion, whereas secular identity gains a hold over the definition of freedom and progress. Acknowledging traditionism undermines this binary image. Traditionism is perceived as a hybrid identity, threatening by its mere presence the self-definition of the dominant poles. It would be hard to claim that most people are actually aware of this, but we can assume that this implicit danger to their identity is a strong element in their dismissal of traditionism.

Tamar presented this argument as she was trying to explain the origins of the secular criticism of her "promiscuous" dress. She explained that her secular friends cannot easily accept the fact that, while dressing as she does, she insists upon observing certain Jewish religious practices. They require of her to dress "appropriately" with her quasi-religious identity. The explanation she offered deals with the psychology of identity. Such a requirement, she explained, is aimed at "justifying the place in which you are". Secular Israeli Jews thus see traditionists as a threat to their secular-modern identity:

> The different is always, in a certain sense and to a certain extent, a threat. Either it makes one feel some sort of guilty conscience . . . that he [the secular] is not doing what he should, or that he is not connected enough to his roots or identity or feeling of belonging. Makes him feel a bit cut off. Anything is possible. Psychology!

A similar stance is to be seen in Bina's statement, also attempting to account for the source of the secular demand for "authenticity" ("They require you to be 'real'," she said). Bina sees this demand as a cover for a different, more unambiguous demand: "[They demand] that you become secular. They do

not understand what tradition and religion give you, as they have no connection to them. Out of fear of being swept up. The traditionist frightens the secular, because his [the secular's] real fear is the orthodox."

Traditionist identity is thus perceived as intimidating, due to its simultaneous vicinity to both the secular and orthodox poles. Traditionism seems to display "religious markings", embodying a dangerous closeness between secular and orthodox. This, at least, is how traditionists understand the secular reaction to their traditionism. Interviewees told us that they know this fear, which the secular have of what is seen as orthodoxy, intimately, naming it as the source of secular reservations about the traditionist way of life. Revital, for example, said she conceals the traditionist aspects of her life from her secular friends, as these seem to intimidate them:

> I don't tell the guys I lit [Shabbat] candles, or that I went to receive a blessing from the rabbi . . . For the secular there is this fear, so people don't talk about it. The fear comes from a lack of knowledge. They [her secular friends] become belligerent as soon as they catch the slightest whiff of traditionism . . . There is the fear of religion.

For a secular person, therefore, the religious markings of the traditionist seem menacing. They represent the danger of "losing" the traditionist friend due to his overly intimate association with orthodoxy. Interviewees gave various examples of what secular acquaintances of theirs perceive as menacing symbols, which are, for traditionists, only an innocent expression of faith, or even a simple habit learned at home. Such an instance is the use of the expression "God willing", common in the vernacular of many traditionists. Gideon related an experience which seems to have been shared by many:

> Sometimes I use the expression "God willing" and it seems to annoy people. They say: "What do you mean, 'God willing?'; what are you: orthodox all of a sudden?" So I say "No, my friend, this is how I express myself."

Gideon's explanation of the discomfort this expression causes in secular people touches directly upon the issue of the threat posed by traditionism to secular identity, by disassembling the orthodox–secular binary construct:

> They see you as secular, and then they say: "Hello, what's going on here; he is changing his status on us. This guy is turning orthodox." It stems from the fear of losing you. They are afraid that if they lose you, you will pull them in that direction, missionary-like.

It was also argued that this negative attitude towards what is taken to represent religiosity is what brings many secular people to renounce the Jewish

aspects of their own life: They will observe some of the *mitzvot*, but not "make it public", nor do they see that observance as an inherent part of their identity. Tamar, who described her workplace as particularly secular, a "hostile environment", told of the gap between the rather negative, anti-religious rhetoric and the Jewish practices of her secular friends:

> Every time there is a Shabbat or a holy day or something, they take a survey: So who is doing what on Passover? Who reads all of the Hagadah? So only I raised my hand. And on Yom Kippur they asked who fasts, and again, only I raised my hand . . . So you understand there are lots of secular people there . . . But when you start talking to people you understand it isn't really like that; they do [observe certain *mitzvot*] at home, but they try to conceal it, to escape from it.

Traditionist loneliness

One of traditionists' main ways of dealing with these pressures is the restriction of such expression of Judaism and Jewish religiosity to the private sphere. In this vein, one of the most fascinating characteristics of traditionism is traditionists' vehement refusal to impose their traditionism upon the Israeli public sphere.

And yet this way of dealing with the set of cross-pressures – that is, restricting traditionism to within the home, so far as to "hide" it – has, in turn, given rise to another form of pressure: a traditionist "sense of loneliness". Traditionists are often unable to identify within the Israeli public sphere the larger group of traditionists to which they belong. One's identity and practice as a traditionist become a private, personal matter, devoid of communal support. The fact that the traditionist collective is not organized into a permanent, recognized community makes individual traditionists into a constant minority within other identifiable communities – the secular or the orthodox. In neither do traditionists fit naturally:

> I think that my main problem is . . . finding a group to which I can belong. In my current traditionist level I can integrate into secular society, bar a few restrictions. I cannot fit into orthodox society. Were I to become more religious, I would completely remove myself from secular society, and not enter into the orthodox one. That is the problem.
>
> (Roni)

This peripheral position forces traditionists to face a constant feeling of questioning the legitimacy of their lifestyle and the choices they have made. This loneliness also further highlights the traditionist sense of guilt. Traditionist life is thus, quite simply, made difficult:

> The traditionist way of life is the hardest. I feel I am socially abstinent.

> Being orthodox is easy, because your rhythm of life is set for you. Also for the secular it is the easiest. The secular has no boundaries. You don't fear God. I go through pangs of conscience towards God every day. As a traditionist, you belong a bit to the secular society and a bit to the orthodox society – you are stuck in the middle. In the secular community they don't understand you and in the orthodox community they don't accept you.
>
> (Ruth)

As a "hiding" identity – in that traditionists refuse to bear telling symbols of their identity – traditionism becomes an identity without any public expression, thus lacking the support which would come from its visibility. Traditionists find themselves in a long line of public-social contexts which are either distinctly "secular" or "orthodox" (going out for a night on the town, on the one hand, and praying in the synagogue on Shabbat, on the other, were both identified as such distinctive contexts in the interviews); and they cannot identify the group to which they naturally belong in such contexts. It is no coincidence, therefore, that our interviewees tended to underestimate traditionists' share within the general Jewish population in Israel. They saw themselves as belonging to a small minority group, "one drop in the middle" (Sigal), which has no substantial hold or expression within the Israeli-Jewish populace.[7]

This experience of social pressure gives birth to the pessimism which seems to suffuse some of the interviewees with regard to traditionism's chances of survival. In such an unsupportive, critical environment, they said, the odds are against them being able to pass on the traditionist way of life down to their sons and daughters: "We are getting lost," concluded Baruch. Trying to infuse the grim prediction with some optimism, his wife awarded the traditionist family a position of extreme importance in helping withstand the conflicting pressures. Traditionist upbringing and education is, she hopes, what will assure the survival of traditionism. "A child sees how the house is run by his parents – he continues. He may deviate, but in the end he will come back" (Vered). Tikva took a similar view of things, though in more sober terms. There is, she said, a chance for traditionism:

> I think there will always be traditionists. Maybe, with time, they too will have clubs, their own social circle [allowing them] to express themselves. Right now it is close friends and family. Right now there is a measure of difficulty in maintaining this identity.

Loneliness and spousal relations

One of the fascinating facets of the traditionist "invisibility" is illuminated by the issue of choosing a spouse or partner. Not surprisingly, many of the singles interviewed stated that the traditionist way of life is an important

element in the choice of a partner. They wanted, in general, a traditionist partner, even though they steadfastly refused to define this as *the* decisive element. Roni expressed a position common to almost all of the participants, when he declared that "it's not a condition, but it's an advantage". And yet, not one of them could pinpoint a place or social context within which he/she could be sure to meet such potential partners: Israeli culture does not offer distinctly traditionist social contexts, and traditionists have no site or social context which they can approach knowing that there they are more likely to meet other traditionists. The issue of a traditionist lifestyle is thus only revealed after a first, somewhat intimate contact is already made. That traditionists bear no external identifying markings further complicates matters. "[Traditionists] do not all fit into one box. It is to be in the group and on the other hand not to be" (Keren). The conclusion reached by most traditionists is that the only social environment in which it is "natural" to meet a traditionist partner is the close family circle – a rather limited circle, of very restricted choice.

The search for a partner served also as a context within which to demonstrate the social rejection suffered by interviewees. Some recounted stories of encounters with non-traditionist partners where their traditionist identity was denounced as "not good enough", "primitive" or "strange". Such, for example, is Roni's tale of an encounter with an orthodox young woman: "We connected in a very good and nice way. But after a while she told me she doesn't date secular men." To her, Roni's traditionism is no different from secularity, thus she ended the relationship. The reaction of his friends, also demonstrating a lack of understanding of traditionism, only served to increase the confusion of identity created by this romantic predicament:

> I told it to all kinds of friends of mine. All the secular ones, bar none, told me: "But you aren't secular at all," and "You're far more religious than most of the orthodox I know." All my orthodox acquaintances said: "So what were you expecting!?" – that is, there was the issue of the orthodox not seeing me as any different from the secular, and that traditionism is a secular definition.

This orthodox point of view basically rejects any possibility of a relationship between Roni, a traditionist, and an orthodox woman, further highlighting the social isolation suffered by traditionists. "It definitely creates difficulties . . . It definitely limits possibilities." Roni also said he would be willing to "give up" some of his traditionist lifestyle choices, and adjust himself to a stricter, orthodox way of life. This willingness, shared by other interviewees, was explained as coming from "that aspect of guilt". Focusing on secular partners is not a real solution either: "Also here there is a certain concession. Non-kosher restaurants and the like." Like many others, Roni expressed willingness to concede and make compromises, just as long as what can be

described as "a necessary minimum" for the maintenance of a traditionist home was observed:

> It's a concession I think I could make easily. I have no qualms about entering into a relationship with a secular woman, as long as no coercion is involved. The home, if and when it is to be formed, must have certain Jewish characteristics . . . This will come naturally.

6 Traditionism, ethnicity, and gender

This chapter seeks to explore the relation between traditionism and other components of identity, as well as the mutual influence between them. Of the various potential components, or dimensions, of one's private and collective identity, two show themselves to be particularly relevant to the context of the current discussion: intra-Jewish ethnicity (or "descent"; what is usually referred to in Hebrew as "*adatiyut*") and gender. These components, and the interrelation they have with traditionist identity, are the subject of my discussion below. I shall start with a study of the relation between ethnicity and traditionism. The second part of the chapter will deal with the relation between feminine and feminist identity and traditionism.

Traditionism and ethnicity

The demographical data is unequivocal: traditionism carries the clear mark of an intra-Jewish ethnic identity. Different surveys show that most traditionists are Mizrahim, and most Mizrahim are traditionist. Ashkenazim are a minority amongst those identifying as traditionist; they tend to populate the poles of the Israeli axis of identities (constructed by those same surveys), and are poignantly lacking in the center.[1] If we were to temporarily adopt a statistical terminology, we could talk of a "significant correlation" between descent and traditionism. It is rather obvious that this affinity is important, and should be investigated. This is the issue before us in this first part of the chapter. I shall focus on the interviewees' understanding and reconstruction of this relation between ethnic descent and traditionism. It should be noted at the outset that there was widespread agreement amongst the interviewees that there is, in fact, an intimate affinity between Mizrahi identity and traditionism. All interviewees – including Ashkenazi participants – admitted that they would be hard put to name Ashkenazi traditionists. To most, if not all of them, Mizrahi-ness and traditionism were identified as two close, though not identical, components of the same identity construct. As I shall attempt to show, such assumptions are to be found also with those who reject the argument regarding an "essential" identification between Mizrahi-ness and traditionism.

I do not intend to present my own explanation for the correlation between traditionism and Mizrahi-ness (such an explanation merits thorough socio-historical research, exceeding the scope of this book), but rather to discuss the significance of this relation to traditionists themselves. It is also important to emphasize that I do not wish to present here an essentialist argument, identifying traditionism as "essentially Mizrahi", nor to present Mizrahim as "essentially" religious or traditionist. This chapter will deal with the way in which these two elements of identity are understood and construed as connected and complementary.

A viable starting point for this discussion is actually the (rhetorical?) stance adopted by a small number of interviewees, by which there is no fundamental or indeed any connection between traditionism and Mizrahi descent. To them, even if there is a "statistical" connection, this connection is a historical accident, and is not concerned with the essential "core" of traditionist or Mizrahi identities.

Traditionism, according to this approach, is not necessarily Mizrahi. After all, there are indeed traditionists who are not Mizrahi. Traditionist identity is reaffirmed here as a private identity, based on personal choice, thus not dictated by a collective belonging of any sort. It is not a surprise that this position was common especially (though not exclusively) among Ashkenazi traditionists. They, even while recognizing their position as an ethnic "minority" within the traditionist, mostly Mizrahi group, feel their traditionism to be a personal matter and not an "ethnic" one, not different from that of Mizrahi traditionists. Sigal, an Ashkenazi participant who was raised orthodox and chose to become traditionist after her marriage, expressed this stance. Her point of departure was, in fact, a familiarity with the relevant demographical data; to her, "it is a fact, it is reality" that most traditionists are Mizrahi. Moreover, she sees Mizrahim as feeling more at ease with the "inconsistent" character of the traditionist lifestyle than do Ashkenazim: "For some reason, people from Middle-Eastern descent have more respect for their past, for their family, and they aren't afraid of it. They will go to synagogue and then watch TV [on Shabbat]. I don't see that among Ashkenazim." And yet this does not mean that her choice of a traditionist identity obliges her to adopt elements of Mizrahi identity. "I think today everything is mixed. At our age-groups [late twenties and early thirties] the ethnic issue holds no importance."

Nevertheless, the markings of a position "naturally" identifying between traditionism and Mizrahi-ness can be easily distinguished, even through this rhetorical veil. With Sigal they showed themselves in the form of a distinction she made between "old" traditionists – which, she makes us understand, are Mizrahim, whose traditionism is inseparable from their ethnic identity – and "new" traditionists – whose ethnic identity is irrelevant, and can thus include Ashkenazim. Sigal used this distinction when answering a question about whether she feels she must adopt Mizrahi elements into her personal identity as part of her choice of traditionist identity. Sigal emphasized that, for the

"new" traditionists, the connection between ethnicity and traditionism is a loose one at best:

> I don't think it [descent] is connected. I think the traditionists I know today came to it from different reasons, not because they got it from the family. On the contrary, they are trying to do something they did not have in the family. They do it out of ideology or disappointment. It is a new kind of traditionists.

It is easy to see that this distinction between "old" and "new" revives some of the dominant images not only of the "old" traditionism (as above: the naturalness of the traditionist "hybridity") but also equivalent perceptions of Mizrahi-ness, such as the family's special role in the individual's life. Be that as it may, the relevant impression that we are left with is the identification between that "old" (and perhaps one might say "authentic"?) traditionism and Mizrahi-ness.

It might be also that Ravit's, another Ashkenazi participant, statement, according to which ethnicity plays absolutely no role in her personal identity – not as concerns traditionism, nor any other aspect of her identity – is an "Ashkenazi characteristic". After all, Israeli culture has made Ashkenazi identity the norm, that "whiteness" not needing to define itself, as it perceives itself to be the representative of the universal, lacking in distinguishing elements of particular identity. This dominant identity also rejects the legitimacy of the "ethnic discourse", underlining the distinction between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. It could be that same position that underlies another Mizrahi interviewee's protestation against the mere mention of a possible connection between ethnic descent and traditionism: "This is an offensive question because my values are not measured by my descent. I don't like the sound of it. I think it is a cunning question. The two things are not related" (Tuvia). This reservation did not prevent Tuvia from presenting a number of possible explanations for the connection between Mizrahi-ness and traditionism. Whatever the case, it is obvious that on such a basis, by which one's ethnic identity is irrelevant to one's personal identification, ethnicity also has no place in determining a person's identity as a traditionist: "Everyone is unique. I can be a traditionist of one kind, and someone else can be a traditionist [of a different kind] . . . it has nothing to do with ethnic origins" (Ravit).

It should be stressed that this attitude, denying the relevance of the connection between traditionism and ethnicity, is in no way unique to Ashkenazi traditionists. It was held by some Mizrahi participants as well – some of whom hold also that their ethnic identity does play a central role when it comes to other facets of their identity. Some even assigned great importance to the conservation of the ethnic identity they inherited. But between that and their traditionism there was no significant relation, they clarified.

As has been mentioned, it might be that these and similar answers stem from the lack of legitimacy that the ethnic identity discourse suffers from

within certain circles in Israel. The damage this discourse inflicts on the ideas of a unified national (Jewish) identity, a modern "melting pot" and the like, is obvious. As such, it is seen to undermine not only the value of the national Jewish unity, but also the personal identity of those seeking to find themselves within that unifying core of Israeli supra-ethnic identity. In this context the interviews seem to have stirred some into soul searching around issues of ethnicity and nationalism. In several cases the interviews' implicit legitimization of an open discussion on matters of ethnicity (by the mere act of raising the issue) had a visible effect. Here, the conversation with Tikva was especially enlightening. When asked if there is a relation between Mizrahi-ness and traditionism, Tikva's first, instinctive response was negative: she, a Mizrahi by descent, thinks there is no connection. But immediately after, upon reflection on the way in which people in her immediate environment identify themselves, she seemed to have changed her mind. She sounded somewhat surprised by her own conclusions:

> I don't know any Ashkenazi traditionists. None of my Ashkenazi friends have this traditionist thing. Really! Not one! I had never thought about it. Suddenly I find traditionism is typical of Mizrahi people. I don't know . . . I have no explanation. And my Mizrahi friends are indeed the traditionists.

Tikva's newfound insight represents a position that many others hold with great conviction. The overwhelming majority of interviewees see some sort of a "necessary connection" between traditionism and descent. "The prototypical traditionist is Mizrahi, not rich, slightly low middle class" (Liron). Particularly prominent is the identification of the traditionist moderation as a Mizrahi characteristic; something in the "Mizrahi nature" is seen to encourage moderation, expressed, amongst other ways, in the choice of that traditionist "middle path". Compared to Mizrahim, Ashkenazim are identified as choosing extremisim – be it religious or secular – as if the "Ashkenazi character" does not accept the moderate traditionist choice.

The identification of traditionism with Mizrahi-ness

Interestingly, even when the identification between ethnicity and traditionism is considered to be a powerful, "obvious" truth, it is sometimes still on a concealed, implicit level, exposed through conversation on other, adjacent subjects. This connection with Mizrahi-ness, it would seem, is forbidden from being overly prominent. The conversation with Liat, who stated that her ethnic (Iraqi) identity is an important part of her identity, demonstrates the hesitant "revelation" of the connection between ethnic identity and traditionism:

> Yes, it [the connection] came to my mind suddenly during the conversation. They say Mizrahim are more traditional . . . Maybe it relates to the

> family. To be a traditionist is to be a part of something. I am part of the Jewish being. It's fun to be part of the group . . . But then again, is that connected to me being Iraqi? It's difficult to answer because I don't know how things would be if my parents were from different descent.

Traditionism is here seen as part of the social set of identifications cultivated by ethnic belonging. In the same spirit, the connection between ethnic identity and traditionism was more overt, direct and significant among interviewees who presented a strong Mizrahi identification. They see traditionism as inseparable from the "essence" of their identity as Mizrahim, embodying some of the central tenets of that identity:

> The whole thing of observing tradition is strongly tied in with a tendency for ethnic leanings . . . I am a Kurd, and there are many strong markings of Kurdish culture at home, and it fits in with the traditionism there. Much as we conserve Jewish culture, we are conserving Kurdish culture.
>
> (Roni)

Like others, Roni emphasized that the Jewish tradition which he knows and observes is clearly colored by the ethnicity to which he belongs. "The traditions [religious and ethnic] are intertwined; my Jewish tradition isn't exactly like the Jewish tradition of someone from different descent." The other side of the same coin is that "secular people are less connected to their ethnicity". Moreover, Roni's (myriad) explanations of this connection between Mizrahi-ness and traditionism are based on the premise that, amongst other things, the emphasis put on the ethnic-Mizrahi identity is what leads to the adoption of traditionism. He thus presented a social-cultural explanation for the connection: Mizrahim are forced to preserve their ethnic identity as a way of defying a dominant "white" identity (which is the "taken for granted" cultural construct), and thus tend to stress also their traditionism. For Ashkenazim, on the other hand, whose ethnic identity is "irrelevant" as it is the one accepted in Israel as the "natural/neutral" one, there is no need to conserve the ethnic tradition, and thus they also neglect the religious one. This is how Roni articulated it, while stating that when he is asked to define himself, he usually selects the "Mizrahi-Jewish" label: "This is why I think Mizrahim are predisposed towards traditionism – because they are more immersed in their Mizrahi origins, thus more occupied by it. And Ashkenazim tend to be less traditionist, because their Ashkenazi-ness is less relevant to them."

Interviewees were also aware of the common social expectations connecting traditionism and descent. This identification between two identity categories, some said, is acceptable also to those who do not belong to either: "By virtue of being Iraqi I am expected to be a traditionist," said Ruth; "If you were to take a person off the street and tell him there are two groups – one Ashkenazi and the other Mizrahi, socio-economically identical . . . he will tell you that

the Mizrahi group is the traditionist." Ruth explained that she shares the essentialist notion arising from these expectations, even where she distinguishes reality from stereotype: "There is a significance to me being Iraqi . . . The Iraqi is a believer, God-fearing and observant by definition. That is the image. Factually I'm not sure it is true, but on a stereotypical level it is like that." And, as above, this image does play a part in her choices of identity.

Many Mizrahi interviewees portrayed a strong connection between their ethnic identity and their traditionist one. See, for example, the quasi-scientific way in which Haim defined this connection:

Q: Is there a connection between Mizrahi descent and traditionism?
A: Yes: if Mizrahi descent is the independent variable, so traditionism is the dependent variable . . . I think that a Mizrahi is a traditionist . . . From what I know of Ashkenazi ultra-orthodoxy, they are very strict specifically about some *mitzvot*. In Sephardic Judaism it is more of a totality, that is, Sephardim are more lenient. The conception of the Jewish way of life is the most important thing to the Sephardim. Sephardic Judaism is less extreme. It doesn't regard life as black and white because it is much more accepting.

Hila similarly concluded that her Iranian descent is more important than any other element of her identity to the understanding of her traditionism. Jewish traditionism (Hila's "religious" identity) and Iranian traditionism (her "ethnicity") were thus revealed as practically identical and inseparable, both touching upon the same field of identity and lifestyle. One of the more interesting expressions of Hila's strong ethnic identity and its relation to her traditionist identity was stated in the negative, when she described Israelis, or Israeli culture, as distinctly secular. The preservation of a distinctive Iranian identity is thus intimately tied in with the conservation of religious traditionism: "When my parents came here, they perceived many things to be too secular . . . They tried to keep us [their children] close to tradition so that we don't spoil, that we don't become too Israeli . . . [Israelis] don't have enough Jewish values."

Similar statements, linking ethnicity and traditionism, reveal "Israeli" identity, devoid of any distinct intra-Jewish ethnic markings, to be markedly non-traditionist. The identity of the traditionist is thrown into sharp relief when contrasted with the image of those allegedly lacking in ethnic identity. The latter, even if they are of Mizrahi descent, are immediately singled out as secular Ashkenazi: "Someone who was born in Israel, even second generation Israeli, completely free of any ethnic traditionism . . . There are also second generation Mizrahim, which you can't even tell are Mizrahi. They would seem Ashkenazi to you" (Hila). The mirror image of this essentialist linkage between Mizrahi-ness and ethnicity is thus the image of a supposedly ethnicity-neutral Israeliness – which is, somewhat paradoxically, also markedly Ashkenazi (i.e., "white") – which has drifted too far from Judaism:

> I don't know any traditionist Ashkenazim; they are on the opposite side. There is no such thing. I know Ashkenazim personally; they are cut off from religion. They have no connection to traditionism. The house is run in a not Jewish fashion. For example: there is no separation of meat and dairy, they do not have a minimal amount of Judaism . . . They do believe there is a God, but do nothing about it.
>
> (Lior)

It is not so surprising, then, that several interviewees made a point of distinguishing themselves from the "Israelis" as a means of preserving their traditionist identity. To Hila, for example, a woman in her early twenties, born in Israel to Iranian emigrant parents, this distinction is important for the conservation of both her Jewish-traditionist and Iranian identity. Like her parents, she said,

> I, too, hold myself apart from other Israelis . . . After you get to know me, I guess you can see that I am different from other Israelis my age . . . There is a particular Persian mentality: an attitude of honor, of respect, of general approach to life, of the treatment of the other.

It is this attitude, in Hila's opinion, which typifies Mizrahi traditionists in general. The latter are characterized, "much like the Iranians, [by] this whole thing of values – values of honor and respect – of traditionism, of Shabbat".

This perception of Israeli culture as characterized by a secular-Ashkenazi dominance, hence spoiling the "original" Mizrahi traditionism and marring it, was brought up several times throughout the interview with Gidi, a man of Moroccan descent. Gidi used this image to explain the practical-behavioral and cultural differences between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. The way in which he described the ethnic differences represents the views of many other interviewees, who identified Mizrahi-ness as essentially moderate, while viewing Ashkenazi-ness as essentially extreme, and thus intolerant of the moderate traditionism: "Ashkenazim . . . are more into rules and regulations," Gidi explained. Conversely, "Moroccans are more traditional . . . There were no non-traditional people in Morocco." In the same vein, when asked if he had always defined himself as a traditionist, Gidi's answer addressed his descent: "The family is Sephardi, Moroccan . . . The Moroccans mostly fall within the niche of traditionists." His statements imply that his own traditionism "follows naturally" from the fact that he is of Moroccan descent. Gidi, who said he knows no Ashkenazi traditionists, explained that traditionism and Moroccan descent are inseparably entwined:

> The basis [for traditionism] is there [in his Moroccan descent], in the fact that I was raised in such a family. The family, not just the nuclear one, but the extended one – they are all like that [traditionists] and that is where the seeds were planted.

Thus, to him, saying "I am Moroccan" necessarily means also "I am a traditionist."

Gidi also offered an explanation as to the source of the divergence between the two groups, by which it is their separate histories which dictated their different Jewish behaviors. As I shall later elaborate upon, this common narrative describes Ashkenazim as having had to deal with critical threats to the religious, traditional way of life, posed by the secularizing Jewish Enlightenment (*haskala*) movement and the assimilation that came with it. Traditional Ashkenazi Jews, so the narrative goes, had to isolate themselves – and take their religious behavior more to the extreme – due to these threats and the doubts brought into the hearts of many Jews. On the other hand Moroccans, and Mizrahi Jews in general, were free of this threat: "They had an innocent path of faith. There was no danger that someone would tell them it has to be otherwise" – until they arrived in Israel. When they immigrated to Israel,

> Sephardim and Ashkenazim were equally vulnerable [to the undermining of faith]. And then the second generation of Sephardim does really grow distant [from tradition]. So with the Sephardim they remained mostly traditionists. With the Ashkenazim they are either extremely religious or not at all. There are no traditionists among them.
>
> (Gidi)

As a result, the Israeli experience is seen as muddying Mizrahi "innocent belief" and encouraging extremism – both secular and religious. The rapport between traditionism and descent is seen again in Gidi's statement, explaining that the Israeli process of growing distanced from tradition was accompanied by pulling away from ethnic identity: the weakening of one necessitated the weakening of the other.

Of course, not all participants showed such a strong, self-assured ethnic identification. And yet even with these, less ethnically oriented, interviewees, the position identifying traditionalism with Mizrahi-ness was to be commonly found, presenting the former as flowing "naturally" from the latter. These interviews paint a complex picture encompassing simultaneously an explicit recognition of the undeniable link between their Mizrahi origins and traditionism on the one hand, and a just as explicit denial of the relevance of their ethnic identity to their self-definition on the other. Tamir was one such interviewee: when discussing his traditionism he chose to describe ethnic-religious practices, of which he prides himself on being one of the few to still observe them, as he continued on talking about his ethnic "us". Yet when he was asked about a possible "basic" connection between his ethnic identity and his traditionism, he denied any such connection, describing the irrelevance of the issue of ethnicity: "There is no point in messing about with ethnicity in Israel of 2003," he declared.

Tamir, in other words, recognizes the relevance of the ethnic element, but when he himself is "pushed" into that rubric, he denies its significance. It

would not seem out of place to assume that this reluctance represents the degraded symbolic status of Mizrahi ethnicity in Israeli political culture; identifying as a Mizrahi can be harmful for one's cultural capital in contemporary Israel. A hint of this can be found in Tehila's interview: She too rejected the relevance of the ethnic component to her self-identification, this immediately after having recognized it as relevant to the definition of traditionism of which she is proud. Tehila, who is of mixed ethnic origins (her father is Ashkenazi and her mother Mizrahi), was one of the many interviewees who described Ashkenazi culture as inhabiting the extreme poles (Ashkenazi people, she explained, are either "very secular people" or "incredibly orthodox"), contrary to Mizrahi culture, characterized by moderation. She even testified to her choice in traditionism being a Mizrahi choice: "The [traditionist] prototype is Mizrahi. Most traditionists are Mizrahi." Yet, she made clear with the same breath, "The ethnicity thing doesn't matter to me, it is despicable to me." At least a partial explanation of this complexity is to be found in her comment that "My father disapproves if I go out with a Moroccan or a Persian man."

As people for whom traditionism is supposedly "in their nature", Mizrahim are portrayed as unable to be "really secular". This is the impression left by several interviews, insisting that Ashkenazi secularism – that is, "real" secularism – be distinguished from (supposed) Mizrahi secularism, which reveals itself to contain clear traditionist attributes:

> If, for instance, you were born to a Mizrahi secular family, so you will know upfront that it's not the typical secular . . . Because the Mizrahi will always have the *mezuzah* on the door and may even kiss it. And then sometimes the child asks: "Why are you kissing that thing?" and starts investigating, and then he hears a lecture by some fanatic rabbi . . . and it blows him away, and he practices accordingly, and even starts strengthening.
>
> (Tomer)

The "natural" traditionist inclination of Mizrahim makes them, therefore, people whose secularity is unnatural, while Ashkenazi secularity is more fitted to the "classic" model of secularity. It is this basic distinction which is behind the story told by Baruch, wishing to describe the atmosphere at his workplace, where a prayer service is sometimes organized during the workday:

> There are at my work Ashkenazim, completely secular. Don't even come [to prayer], don't want to hear about it . . . Yet, on the other hand, everyone [Mizrahim, who do participate in the service] is secular, but they come and pray. They have this sort of affinity with religion. The Sephardic, he has more affinity to religion.

Their Mizrahi traditionist friends, concluded Baruch and his wife, also present in the conversation, will "never be secular, never". "True Mizrahi

secular" therefore becomes a void group, empty of any real demographic substance.

When these traditionists encounter exactly such Mizrahim that have chosen the secular way of life, they seem to be witnessing a phenomenon which is outside the natural order of things. Such was Limor's reaction upon understanding that the partner she is dating, despite being Mizrahi, is a "real" secular:

> I raised an eyebrow. I mean, how is it that someone who comes from a Mizrahi house, how is he really secular? . . . It doesn't add up. Because we assume that a Mizrahi home is a traditionist home, [perhaps] orthodox, but surely not secular.

A similar approach is probably behind the words of another interviewee, of Yemenite origin, who told of a conversation with an acquaintance, also Yemenite: "When she told me her father eats pork, I was appalled . . . A Yemenite – there is no such thing that he won't recite the whole [Hebrew] Bible by heart . . . things like that. It shocks me" (Tamar).

From these and suchlike statements it would seem also that the "natural" traditionist-Mizrahi trait means that a traditionist is someone in whom the seeds of "orthodoxy", at whatever level, are already planted. Thus there is no point in talking about Mizrahim leaving religion to become secular:

> The phenomenon of Mizrahim leaving religiosity and becoming secular I don't think exists. They [those Mizrahim who do leave orthodoxy] just become sort of traditionists. He can drive on Shabbat, but on the [Jewish holiday] will come and dance his son around with the Torah. He won't hate religion or anything; he'll just say: "Listen, I drive on Shabbat so I don't come and pray anymore." On the other hand, Ashkenazi orthodox, for them it will usually mean becoming secular.
>
> (Tomer)

This is the framework within which we can understand many Mizrahi traditionists' statements by which, were they born to an Ashkenazi family, they would probably not have chosen traditionism, but rather one of the "extreme" options – orthodoxy or secularity.

One of the ways in which to understand the Mizrahi "natural" moderation, as well as this identity's inherent traditionist affinity, is its comparison to the institutionalization of the religious moderation within the Conservative movement. Many interviewees cited the close parallels in practice between the two groups. But these parallels are far from fostering any Mizrahi sympathy for the Conservative movement (this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8). The tendency to recognize an "essential" connection between traditionist identity and Mizrahi descent provides an at least partial explanation as to

why the Conservative movement never took root with Mizrahi Jews. Gil's discussion of this failure and its causes succeeds in capturing not only the "natural" identification between Mizrahi-ness and traditionism, but also some of the symbolic-sociological dynamics of belonging to the Conservative movement. The question, then, is supposedly simple:

> How is it that the Conservative movement hadn't struck roots in Sephardic communities? The moderate, flexible, interpretative approach – all these things are true for Sephardic, Mizrahi Judaism. And it would be just perfect for it [the Conservative movement] to have developed there, but it didn't.

Gil's answer to this question again suggests the natural affinity between what he sees as the essence of Mizrahi identity, and the essence of the traditionist identity, both paragons of a moderate lifestyle:

> In Ashkenazi communities it [the Conservative movement] was a way to escape the dogma . . . In Sephardic Judaism it [the reservations about religious dogmas] was something that really permeated everything, it happened naturally. Who today are the more moderate interpreters? The Sephardic [orthodox] rabbis, even though they are under a lot of pressure. They give the more moderate interpretation. So it would seem they wouldn't have to grow a conservative movement; it is more or less imprinted onto their way of thought, their way of life.

The other side of the identification between Mizrahi-ness and traditionism is, as mentioned, that of portraying Ashkenazim as unable to maintain traditionist moderation, located instead in one of the two polar extremes – secularity or orthodoxy: "Most Ashkenazim are 'either-or'. On the other hand, for the Mizrahi there is much more of a middle," said Limor, trying to explain her tendency to confuse the words "Mizrahi" and "traditionist", while also using "Ashkenazi" to indicate "secular".

It is thus hardly surprising that some of the more interesting statements regarding the connection between Mizrahi-ness and traditionism came from Ashkenazi traditionists, who, in this identity, are found to be denying the "obvious" connection between traditionism and Mizrahi-ness. Koren was amongst those interviewees who explicitly and overtly made mention of the "paradox" inherent in their position as simultaneously Ashkenazi and traditionist. Traditionism, to Koren, is indeed a Mizrahi sphere. So, despite reaffirming his Ashkenazi identity, he clarified that from a "religious-traditionalist point of view" he sees himself as Mizrahi: "Where religion is concerned, I am more Mizrahi. Of all the Ashkenazim I know, only two are traditionist. The rest are secular." The social environment also recognizes the inherent "paradox" of the Ashkenazi-traditionist, and, according to Koren, does not spare him its puzzlement. Koren said he is used to "comments and

questions by Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, such as 'You are Ashkenazi; why are you observant?"' As a non-orthodox Ashkenazi, he is "expected", if not required, to choose secularity, not traditionism.

Other Ashkenazi participants also recognized their "tricky" position – an Ashkenazi adopting an identity commonly accepted as Mizrahi "by nature" – but preferred to assign it no importance, and treat it as an irrelevant fact. Thus there were those who did mention the connection between traditionism and Mizrahi-ness, but deemed it completely irrelevant to their identifying as traditionists. Kfir, for instance, accepted that this identification is common, while also dismissing it as a "myth": "The Sephardim – and I here include Moroccans, Yemenites, Libyans, anyone you want – there is a thesis, a legend, that they are more traditionist, and that also the secular among them are closer to religion." For himself, however, this identification is irrelevant, he explained: He does not think he is adopting a Mizrahi identity or Mizrahi elements of identity when he chooses traditionism.

One of the clearest images used by participants to describe the "naturalness" of Mizrahi traditionism was the picture of the Sephardic synagogue as inherently moderate, and thus a comfortable arena for the expression of traditionism. The Ashkenazi synagogue, on the other hand, is portrayed as an uncomfortable site for traditionists and other non-orthodox. Gil ("As far as descent is concerned, I am a mix of many directions," he said), an educator by profession, articulated the position held by many in this context. Traditionism, he explained, "is very much tied in" with Mizrahi identity,

> . . . but it is not necessarily the same thing. I will demonstrate this with an example from daily life: when Shabbat evening prayer is over, in a Sephardic synagogue, even if you are not a regular participant, everyone will greet you with a "Shabbat Shalom" and shake your hand. In an Ashkenazi synagogue you feel like an outsider . . . this is the sort of experience . . . which defines a traditionist. Even if you don't come every Shabbat, and even if they know you drive on Shabbat, and they know you don't observe Shabbat, you are part of the community when it prays. Not an "outsider". In an Ashkenazi synagogue it is very different . . . you feel a bit of an "outsider". You don't feel like part of the community.
>
> (Gil)

But the Sephardic synagogue is much more than just a locus of tolerance for the stranger, the "other": it is seen to represent a unique Jewish experience which is becoming associated with Mizrahi traditionism. For Gil, the experience of praying in a Sephardic synagogue, which he enjoyed as a child, was one of the more prominent elements which led him to choose his Mizrahi-traditionist identity over other elements of his identity: "During my adolescence, the traditionist side was the Sephardic side. You go to a Sephardic synagogue, the Sephardic prayers and tunes, the blessings at home were Sephardic, everything was Sephardic. I think it is very significant."

Ethnicity, nationality, and racism

Much like any set of identities, identifications, and meaning, traditionism does not easily accept the analytical distinctions made by the researcher, seeking to discern the various elements of "The Traditionist Identity". What is discussed here as two allegedly separate elements (the ethnic and religious identities) is seen by many as similar, if not identical parts of the same whole, indissoluble system. Furthermore, some participants emphasized not only the affinity between those two parts of their identity, but included more. So, for instance, there were those who added on to the traditionist = Mizrahi identification also the ideological-partisan context, resurrecting an image of Mizrahim as politically conservative (that is, supporting the Israeli political right) "by nature". Thus Mizrahi-ness, traditionism, and political conservatism appear as different facets of the same identity construct, further honed when faced with its familiar opposite, the Ashkenazi-secular-liberal (= left wing):

> It's a sort of chain: descent, traditionism and political stance. It's all really connected. Descent – the more you belong to the Middle Eastern, Mizrahi ethnicities, the less you are for equality; it's a very crude generalization, but it really holds true: . . . less equal with women, more religious, more voting for the right. And the opposite – the Ashkenazi ethnicities . . . They are less close to religion. They are less fanatic; they will be more equal-minded, less traditionist, and vote more to the left.
>
> (Batya)

Batya, who offered this description, seemed resigned to it like some sort of fate-given directive, or a natural law – she thus concluded the above statement with "So I too am probably more right-wing." Liron seemed to echo her when asked to explain how traditionism, Mizrahi descent and nationalism are as interchangeable as synonyms to him: "It's all one package," he said. Thus, were he to be born into an Ashkenazi family, he would not only lose his traditionism, but also his feeling of national patriotism: "The Ashkenazi has a lesser commitment to the People of Israel . . . Yes, he [the Ashkenazi] is less committed; it is how he was raised."

As I have already mentioned, the ethnic discourse was not unanimously popular among the interviewees. The underlining of the ethnic differences is still seen by many as disintegrating the Jewish-national collective and undermining national unity, so central to Israeli national identity. As is implied by the above references to the "inherent" connection between traditionism and right-wing politics, many participants found themselves in a complicated, delicate position facing the tension between opposing the (nationally) "dividing" discourse of intra-Jewish ethnic differences, on the one hand, and an unambiguous social reality pointing to a distinct connection between them, on the other. The conversation with Shlomo exposed this tension in a rather

lucid manner. When the conversation turned to the matter of his ethnic identity, he displayed visible signs of discomfort. He felt uneasy dealing with this issue, preferring not to identify himself by his descent: "I don't like those definitions. Ashkenazi, Sephardic – we are all Jews, we are all one people," he declared. But, as he immediately noted, there is indeed a common connection between traditionism and Mizrahi-ness, and he is closely aware of this connection. He admitted that the seeming inconsistency of his answers embarrassed him. The facts, however, were clear to him: "The Sephardim have more faith . . . they are more observant than Ashkenazim. That is how it is generally. They are closer to religion, to the *mitzvot*." Shlomo's statement also made evident the fact that acknowledging the significance of ethnic identity would be harmful to his feeling of personal choice. He repeatedly emphasized that, despite all that he had said about an essential connection between Mizrahi descent and traditionism, he himself would have been a traditionist even if he had been born into an Ashkenazi family. His faith, he declared, is stronger than his ethnic background.

Any discussion of the relation between ethnic identity and traditionism cannot ignore the negative element of discrimination and racism associated with intra-Jewish ethnicity. In the course of the interviews several cases presented themselves in which the connection between ethnicity and traditionism was explored within the context of a discussion on ethnic discrimination. The prejudiced view on both traditionist and Mizrahi identities seems to unify the two, marking them both as negative. As was testified by one of the Ashkenazi interviewees regarding his unease in being classified as a traditionist, "It's also something to do with stigmas. The second we say 'traditionist' we immediately picture some provincial Mizrahi from the periphery. That is why I have a problem with the classification of traditionist, because it says very specific things" (Tahel).

The content of those "specific things" was made evident by the personal stories of Michal and Tuvia, in which the biased view on ethnicity is intertwined with the orthodox's critical gaze over traditionists. Both told of being discriminated against in the orthodox elementary and high schools where they studied, or to which they applied. For Michal, this encounter with ethnic discrimination became a constitutive moment:

> I remember my father wanted to enroll me into an *ulpena* [orthodox school for girls]; I recall he was told that they do not accept Yemenites. He was so insulted. He said he would never send his daughter to an orthodox school, and then he allowed me to attend a secular high school.

Similar stories were to be heard also from other participants, showing how an identification between Mizrahi descent and traditionism had become, within the orthodox worldview, an identification of Mizrahi-ness with a sort of flawed religiosity. Another participant, who grew up in an Ashkenazi, orthodox family and chose traditionism after her marriage, gave witness to the same:

her father, she said, had a very negative prejudice against their Mizrahi neighbors, portraying them as people who "cheat" on their religion, calling them "dairy" Jews, practicing religion in a "half-assed" way (Anat). Thus to her the choice in traditionism was also a choice of an identity regarded by all her Ashkenazi relatives as "Mizrahi" and inferior.

The prejudiced, not to say racist standpoint is not, of course, exclusive to the orthodox. Stories of discrimination by secular Israelis, who deem Mizrahi traditionism to be a flaw best kept away from, were abundant throughout the interviews. Tomer's tale of discrimination at the doorstep of a fashionable pub is instructive. The tale came at the conclusion of a discussion about the gap between Tomer and his secular friends, who choose to go to these discriminating clubs (while Tomer is busy having a traditional Shabbat service and dinner):

> "Greeting Shabbat" for him [the secular] is taking a shower, putting on aftershave, getting dressed up, getting in the car, driving to the regular pub with the guys, and staying there until daybreak. When I go to synagogue [for the Shabbat morning services], he is coming home.

The pub, one of the most symbolic secular institutions, signifies therefore not only the vast cultural divide between a traditionist Tomer and his secular friends, but also the identification of Tomer as a "Mizrahi", not welcome to join in the crowd at the pub.

Interviewees often discussed discrimination and racism as an integral part, in their view, of any statement dealing with the connection between ethnicity and traditionism. Tamar and Halit, while finding it difficult to reach a definitive response (in a joined conversation) to a question about the connection between their descent (Mizrahi) and their traditionism, were both nevertheless able to describe the shock and disappointment they felt when they had to deal with the discovery of ethnic discrimination. As in other cases, this encounter with the prejudiced, racist view, which dumps its cultural expectations upon them, brought about a personal, internal investigation into the nature of the connection between their descent and their cultural and identity choices. The point of departure for the following is actually Tamar's reservations about classifying people according to their descent:

> It [classifying people by descent] is dumb, because it only replicates the gap for the next generation . . . At home I was never taught to hate Ashkenazim, or to feel inferior to the Ashkenazim, or to feel superior to the Ashkenazim, or to feel threatened all the time and be defensive all the time . . . And now I encounter it [ethnic discrimination] at work and I am just shocked . . . When I encountered it for the first time, I was shocked. Today I already know how to handle it.

Again, this statement by Tamar came as part of her response to the question

of her ethnicity's relevance to her choice of traditionism. This encounter with society's preconceptions, often touched through with outright discriminatory and even racist notes, seemed to force her to acknowledge a possible relation between her Mizrahi descent and her traditionism.

The explanations: between cultural essence and historical circumstance

Much can be learned from the interviewees' accounts for the reasons behind the linkage between Mizrahi descent and traditionism. These explanations serve as another arena within which the assumptions about this relation, as well as its origin and consequences, are expressed. Three main explanations, repeated in varying versions, can be identified. The first, "cultural-essential" one, sees traditionist traits as essentially imprinted onto Mizrahi identity. This explanation is deducible from what has already been discussed so far throughout the chapter, and I will thus not expand on it, beyond a brief summary of its core points. The second, more sociological explanation, describes this identification of traditionism with Mizrahi-ness as a product of the social and political conditions unique to members of Mizrahi communities. The third is a historical explanation, quoting the varying circumstances and historical events undergone by Mizrahi and Ashkenazi communities as the main cause for the differences, and leading to an association of Mizrahi descent with traditionism. Needless to say, the distinction between these explanations is obviously artificial, as they mostly appear intertwined. Yet, for the sake of the clarity of my analysis I shall be treating them as three separate elements of the discussion.

The "cultural-essential" explanation

This explanation identifies essential differences between Mizrahi culture and Ashkenazi culture. One expression of these differences is what distinguishes between the "inherent" Mizrahi moderation and the "extremist" tendency of Ashkenazim, leading them to a limited choice between two opposing poles: in this case, secularity or orthodoxy. As above, many participants frequently explained the association of traditionism with Mizrahi-ness as stemming "naturally" from the Mizrahi moderate culture. They also emphasized the extremist propensity – be it secular or orthodox – as a distinct Ashkenazi cultural characteristic.

Similar reasoning was also common with those who found there to be no connection between their choice of traditionism and their descent. One such explanation was Liora's (she is of Yemenite descent). Even though, to her, "my traditionism is not an expression of my descent. It is the way in which I was raised, and the path that I chose . . . There is no obvious connection between ethnicity and traditionism," she nevertheless does recognize traditionism to be imbued in her Mizrahi "roots": "Our parents; apparently their roots are those of tradition"; and as opposed to them, "with the Ashkenazim,

either they are ultra-orthodox or they are secular . . . I don't know any Ashkenazi traditionists." A similar "root-based" explanation was offered by Ziva, as to why, according to her, "it seems more fitting when Sephardim are traditionist; it is something in the mentality of our forefathers. The roots, the parents and the grandparents, the wider family. It is something that becomes more rooted with the passing of the years." Ziva's explanation is of special interest, as she herself does not believe her choice had anything to do with her (Iraqi) descent.

Some also suggested evolutionary-like explanations to account for these "essential" differences. Ronit, for example, offered an explanation which sees environmental influences as distinctly cultural characteristics:

> There is a connection [between traditionism and descent], because everyone is raised in his home and environment. Ashkenazim are colder, because they were raised in a European environment. Mizrahi people are warmer because they were raised in different families and in different areas.

Ronit's statement would make it seem as if these environmental differences are transformed into a theological one: "I can accept a conjuncture by which the Mizrahi God is more merciful, less punishing."

The sociological explanation

Explanations such as those above tend to transform the unique social and political circumstance into essential cultural differences. The effects of the separate social-historical processes undergone by Ashkenazim and Mizrahim (processes I shall describe later on) imprint themselves onto the "character", "mentality", "folklore", "culture" and "essence" (all terms used by the participants in this context) of Mizrahi traditionism. Tomer suggested one such essentialist socio-historical narrative. According to the explanation he put forth, social history – in this case, the cultural experience of a Jewish minority under the rule of either Muslims or Christians – was engraved into the identity of Mizrahi traditionists on the one hand, and Ashkenazim on the other. In this sense he is presenting us with a combination of the two types of explanations discussed here. He opened with the socio-historical one:

> Ashkenazim, they tend towards extremism, that is first of all. The tendency towards extremism . . . you have to go back in order to find out: Where was the religious polarization? Where it was spiritually hard. And where was it spiritually oppressive? In Europe. The Christians are more rigid than the Muslims . . . My father told me they [the Muslims] would get angry if a Jew were to remove his sidelocks [i.e., remove his traditional religious markings]. You see, they wanted a Jew to be a Jew. And

> Christians don't want you the way you are. They don't want you at all. And that creates pressure, and pressure begets envy of what you are, and envy leads to extremism in your practices. They became more rigid, and this rigidity probably expresses itself: if you are secular – you are completely secular, and if you are orthodox – so you are a diehard orthodox. Whereas in the Middle-Eastern countries they didn't have that; that is the first thing.
>
> (Tomer)

The other, complementary, explanation, deals with the moderate, pragmatist "essence" of Mizrahi religiosity:

> Another thing: maybe it [the identification between Mizrahi-ness and traditionism] is a result of the nature of religion in the Mizrahi ethnicities, which was a sort of pleasant, accommodating thing. If you look at the Yemenites, they have this saying, "For the man who obeys them will live by them" [Leviticus 18:5]; live by them, and not die by them. They observe it as a Torah directive; it means that if you make yourself not enjoy yourself only because of some minute *halachic* issue, it is not good. You have to go out, live, enjoy, and that is why this whole approach is so pleasant, and in fact this is interpreted as traditionism.
>
> (Tomer)

Roni also identified a social-historical experience as being responsible for transforming traditionism into a synonym for Mizrahi-ness. But to him this experience is not one of the distant past, in the Diaspora, but rather in the near past – and indeed, even the present – of the State of Israel. Roni seemed to accept the modernization and secularization thesis as the framework for understanding the historical phenomenon he wishes to discuss. In his view, the historical process of modernization, typical of Israeli history, "skipped" the Mizrahim, who in response chose to isolate themselves within their traditionism:

> When people [in Israel] are shut off in ghettos, they often feel estranged, foreign to the Ashkenazi establishment, as well as a level of discrimination; all this serves to fan the flames of traditionism. If there were intermingling and integration on the socio-economic level, and a better education, a leaving of all ghettos in the peripheral towns, and tough neighborhoods, the religiosity would naturally fade out, and with it traditionism would change and weaken. Much like what happened to the Ashkenazim when they first arrived in Israel.

This identification between Mizrahi descent and traditionism is, thus, a contemporary, Israeli phenomenon, with non-too-long historical roots. Roni, however, is not satisfied with this historical description, and would tie it in with the above essentialist-cultural perception, which holds the Mizrahi to be close "by nature" to Jewish religion. The disruption of the process of

modernization and secularization, he seems to be stating, means that the second Mizrahi generation preserves that unique Mizrahi flame:

> Mizrahi culture in general, including the Arab culture, creates a greater affinity [between the generations]. That is to say, the generation gap is smaller than in the Ashkenazi, western culture. For instance, it is common to see a [Mizrahi] grandfather and grandson listening to the same music. I think that due to a lesser progress, the bond between the generations is stronger, and this is expressed both in ethnicity and traditionism. When you are sitting in a Sephardic synagogue, you see the father, the grandfather and the grandson, as well as all the grandchildren of the grandfather's friends. With the Ashkenazim it is different.

A similar generational-sociological explanation was given by another participant, of Ashkenazi descent, who attempted to clarify the reason for which Mizrahim are a majority amongst traditionists. Like any sociological explanation, this one is marked by generalizations: "The Mizrahi traditionism comes from . . . the north-African tribalism. They preserve the family, like it was in previous generations" (Dina). Or, in Linor's words:

> Mizrahim, they have a connection to religion which stems from their family values, from life as a family, a tribe, whatever it may be, and in Ashkenazi culture there exists more the matter of individualism . . . Many times this is not compatible with the group, the community.

Historical explanations

As mentioned above, the various explanations tend to greatly overlap. Most prominent is the correspondence between the different explanations of a sociological nature, and those of a historical one. Indeed, any sociological picture worth its salt must be located within a relevant historical context, and it could be said that the distinction between these two groups of explanations is redundant. Yet the historical explanations provided by the participants must be thus distinguished, as they describe distinctive historical narratives, naming certain events, as well as long-term political and social processes undergone by the different Jewish communities, as responsible for the different attitudes towards traditionism. Most importantly, the Holocaust stands out in many interviewees' minds as an explanation of the Ashkenazi-European tendency towards secular and orthodox extremism.

The historical narrative here portrayed is quite uniform, echoing the academic modernization and secularization narrative. It tells of a Jewish (European), peaceful, devout, and observant community, whose world is shattered by the Enlightenment and the corresponding secularization, and their spread amongst community members. These processes are characterized by extremism: they caused Jews to publicly renounce their faith. The

understandable, though not excusable, reaction of the observant community was also extreme: isolation and extreme adoration of the past – that is, stagnation – as a defense against the threat. Additionally, the non-Jewish environment posed another challenge to the Jews:

> [The difference between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim] comes from where the Jews lived. Ashkenazim lived in Christian societies and had to keep themselves apart. The Sephardim lived in Muslim societies. Within certain conditions, Islam is less of a threat to Judaism. There is more to fear from Christianity. The Jews in Iraq and Morocco were not restricted in any way – until the founding of the State of Israel. That is why Sephardic Judaism is more open and accepting.
>
> (Haim)

According to the narrative common among the participants, the historical process which brought about this differentiation reached its peak during the Holocaust. Its incomprehensibility further undermined belief, followed by a corresponding shift towards extremism in European Jews' approach to Judaism and its customs. Mizrahi Jews were – so the narrative goes – free of all these threats to their faith and could thus retain that original Judaism, characterized by authentic moderation.

This narrative is not reserved for Mizrahi interviewees. It was also repeated by Ashkenazi traditionists. Tehila, the daughter of an Ashkenazi father and a Mizrahi mother, presented it fairly clearly. This is how she explained Ashkenazim's different attitude towards Jewish tradition:

> Due to the historical aspect, the European side was exposed to secularity and western culture in very high dosages; there was a lot of assimilation, which meant that all the Ashkenazim were either very orthodox or very secular. The Muslims, the way my grandmother told me about her life in Syria, with them there were no religious clashes, everyone lived in his own way, there was no danger there, no need to protect religion . . . When there is a threat and you have to defend religion, so you move to the extreme. If there is no danger then you live life [calmly].

Tamir's discussion of this affinity between Mizrahi-ness and traditionism shows how the sociological-cultural explanation is tied in with the historical one identifying Nazi persecution and the Holocaust as the reason for the typical Ashkenazi extremism:

> The Sephardim, all they had was religion . . . Many things were centered round the synagogue, round Judaism itself. To this very day the Jews in Morocco have a comfortable life. The Moroccan king treats them as equals. On the other hand, the European Jews, Ashkenazim, at a certain stage, through no fault of their own, they were hunted by the Nazis, and

> due to this their faith in Judaism and in God disappeared, or they made it disappear. "How can God, who is our father, make such things happen to us?" I know lots of people like that, born Jewish, but to whom Judaism means nothing.

Yet, as Tamir himself emphasized, such a historical explanation, powerful as it is, is not enough. Why the Ashkenazi Jews reacted in the way that they did to this crisis of faith requires further clarification. Would Mizrahi Jews have reacted in a similar fashion? From Tamir's statement, as well as those of other interviewees, it can be deduced that they believe the answer to be negative: they resort to essentialist explanations saying that the Mizrahi faith is fuller and more innocent, thus more resistant to such tests:

> Jews were sent to Auschwitz from North Africa as well. I have a relative with a number on her arm [a tattoo from the camps], and she comes from Tripoli [Libya]. Indeed, it was a small group of six hundred people. Not all Sephardim were able to escape. The Sephardim have had their share of calamities and disasters.
>
> (Tamir)

The explanation, therefore, must be cultural-essentialist: "Sephardim are far more accepting of life's vagaries – 'This is what God wanted, this is how it will be.' " And, serving to emphasize the complexity of the situation, Tamir made a point of stating that, despite these arguments, and despite seeing himself as a proud member of his Mizrahi community, he himself objects to the introduction of ethnic identification into his social life:

> If someone were to say to me: "What are you, Moroccan or Libyan?" it really disgusts me. Or a young woman who tells me she doesn't go out with Sephardim, so "move on . . .". To still, in Israel of 2003, after all that this country has been through, you are still mucking about with ethnicity? . . . Right, I am still half Moroccan half Libyan; this is my ethnicity. All right. And that is how it is. But I don't distinguish people by ethnicity. An Ashkenazi can befriend a Mizrahi. I don't see anything wrong with this.

Without having to repeat or re-analyze what has already been said on the subject, I believe it would not be exaggerated to interpret these words as carrying a strong note of vulnerability associated with ethnic discrimination.

The presence of the Holocaust as an explanatory element suggested by Mizrahi interviewees is very prominent. These interviewees have an understanding, sympathetic attitude towards those Ashkenazim who elected for extremism as a response to the Holocaust. They reject any judgmental undertone which could be associated with such historical explanations. When dealing with the Holocaust, they explained, people should not be judged; if,

as a result of the Holocaust, people have come to the conclusion that there is no God – or, as it was put in one account, if due to the Holocaust "they felt that God had betrayed them" (Michal) – their conclusion is obviously wrong, but one can fully understand why they reached it. This is also how Koren, himself an Ashkenazi traditionist, reasoned the fact that he represents such a rare breed:

> I think it is very rare for Ashkenazim to have an affinity with tradition, and it also makes sense to me, because, were I to go through the Holocaust, I would be unable to believe in anything. It is easy to lose your faith in light of the Holocaust. I really appreciate those people who did not lose their faith after the Holocaust.

Liav's discussion on the connection between descent and traditionism elucidates the place and significance of such a psycho-historical explanation, as well as the rejection of any judgmental attitude (or at least explicit judgment):

> I think your descent has a direct connection to the values on which you are raised. Because what I read about the Ashkenazim, the Holocaust, many people are asking: "Where was God when six million perished?" . . . As far as that person [the one asking the question] is concerned, he is right. You can't say anything to him. You can't persuade him that there is a God.

Interviewees, it must be noted, also reconstructed the Mizrahi side of the narrative, portraying Mizrahim as having always had that "innocent belief", which was never threatened and thus never pushed to extremity: "Most Mizrahim came from countries in which they were observant Jews, and they brought that with them. We are the descendants of such parents" (Tuvia); "The Jews who immigrated from the Middle-East . . . they had in them, along with the Zionist aspect, the religious side. They fought for their Judaism . . . And the people who survived the Holocaust, they didn't have that" (Liav).

The "Mizrahi authentic religiosity" thesis is commonly held by both Mizrahi and Ashkenazi interviewees. The latter, it would seem, tended to present a slightly more simplified version, while distinguishing themselves, identifying their choice of traditionism as being of greater significance. As put by Bina, an Ashkenazi woman, who chose to adopt her Mizrahi husband's traditionism:

> Mizrahim have more of . . . a tendency towards religiosity . . . It is their home upbringing, from older generations. Abroad it is different. The Ashkenazim made a point of preserving tradition and religion. But when they came to Israel they became secular. With the Mizrahim it [religious observance] stayed. Tradition passed down from one generation to another. Holocaust survivors' families completely abandoned religion,

> and stopped believing in God, and also there was no one to pass on the tradition.

According to this narrative, the result of the encounter between Mizrahi Jews and secularity/modernity is the "corruption" of their Jewish authenticity. According to some versions, the core subject matter of this book – i.e., Israeli traditionism – should be seen as an expression of this corruption, as it does not represent a preservation of the original Judaism, but rather manifests a way of dealing with that encounter of religiosity with secularity:

> The Sephardim that came here were, for the most part, religious, because the Enlightenment movement was more prevalent in Europe, and there were more secular people there. A situation was brought about by which, if you were Ashkenazi, you were either orthodox or secular . . . almost no middle. With the Sephardim, as they arrived being religious, and here in Israel they started to somewhat "deteriorate", so yes, there was created this compromise [traditionism] wherein you observe the tradition, but live as secular people.
>
> (Tom)

Some point the finger at Zionism as being guilty of this corruption. While "it always seems that Mizrahim have more of an affinity to tradition" (Halit), the Zionist mission to create "a new man" went against this traditionism: "The first Zionists to arrive were from Europe . . . They came here and wanted the new Jew, didn't want any connection to tradition. The Mizrahim who arrived, arrived with tradition" (Hila). The Israeli experience therefore is seen to threaten the natural historical attitude of Mizrahi Jews towards Jewish religion. Thus there are those who predict traditionism's defeat at the hands of Israeli secularism.

Gender, feminism, and traditionism

The choice of a traditionist identity seems particularly complex in the case of traditionist women. These women appear to be adopting a conservative identity; some may say, one inherently oppressive to women. Moreover, the fact that their choice of a traditionist identity happens within the context of a dominant feminist discourse, or at least in the obvious presence of a widespread feminist discourse, only underlines the complexity of choosing an identity deemed by some feminist circles to be alien to the whole notion of feminism.

This tension is not reserved only for those women identifying themselves as feminists, or identifying with a feminist political agenda. The fact which any contemporary discussion on the issues of religious and feminine identities must take into account is that the feminist discourse has become widespread and prevalent in both scope and depth. Moreover, one of the most important

outcomes of this prevalence is its spread to circles and individuals who do not consider themselves feminist (that is, do not identify with what they assume to be the radical political objectives of the feminist movement): in this day and age, in those parts of the world dominated by the western-liberal discourse, even if you are not a feminist, you must take feminist thought and politics into account. This is one of feminism's greatest achievements as a sociopolitical movement: its transformation into a present discourse whose arguments (even where they are twisted and filtered through prisms which often corrupt both form and intentions) hold a prominent place in the cultural, social, and political discourse – as well as the religious one – forming a part of the "toolkit" used by everyone (including men) to construct their private and collective identities. In this context the choice of a traditionist identity seems especially problematic for those women unwilling to forego their self-definition as independent women, who do not bow to patriarchal directives.

This segment will thus deal with the way in which traditionist women construct their feminine identity in light of their choice of traditionism. As I shall demonstrate below, traditionist women are well acquainted with the feminist discourse, and are closely aware of this discourse's negative implications regarding religion and religious identity. They know of, and generally agree with, the claim that Jewish tradition discriminates against women. In addition, they recognize the potential tension which this argument creates with regard to their identity as traditionists. Both these dilemmas and the various ways in which they are negotiated and diffused will be examined below.

It should be noted that this discussion nourishes on a rich and wide body of literature dealing with religious identity, gender, and feminism. As I have argued elsewhere (Yadgar 2006), the case of traditionist women has much to gain by a comparative approach using other, similar cases of negotiating the conflict between traditionism, feminine identity, and feminism. The case at hand may also shed some new light on the theoretical issue under discussion. Yet I have chosen not to elaborate and delve too deeply into the theoretical discussion here, as I wish to focus attention on the way in which the choice of traditionism copes with that "gender dimension" – or, rather, the feminine identity of traditionist women – while keeping to the general structure of the book and the "flow" of my arguments.

Resolving the tension: orthodoxy and traditionism, public and private

The most common way to resolve the supposed conflict between the ramifications of feminist discourse, or the interviewees' feminine identity, and those of the religious discourse, or their identity as traditionist Jews, is the underlining of the distinction between traditionist and orthodox Jews, and the distancing, going as far as estrangement, of the orthodox from the realm of the traditionist. In view of this distinction and estrangement, traditionist women emerge as free of Judaism's subjugating, anti-feminine directives, enjoying a position reserved for them as part of an egalitarian, feminist discourse. In

other words, traditionist women seem to protect themselves from the possible harm inherent in the patriarchal tendencies of religion and tradition precisely by electing a traditionist identity over "more religious" identities (which are, "by definition", also more discriminatory and injurious to women); their traditionism awards them certain defensive latitude and a secure distance from the problematic elements of religious discourse, while at the same time allowing them – as is common among traditionists in general – to see themselves as preserving what they recognize to be the basic and essential elements of their Jewish identity. In this way they also create a safe distance from the secular identity, thought to be too detached from Jewish tradition.

The interviews thus reiterate the significance of the images of orthodoxy and secularity as criteria in view of which traditionist identity is judged and shaped to be one that is simultaneously Jewish and modern. In this context, orthodoxy's prominent role in fashioning feminine traditionism (by embodying the inevitable, but distant, clash between feminine identity or feminist discourse, and Jewish patriarchal tradition) is reiterated. Orthodox feminine identity is perceived to be a sort of inverted role model, against which traditionist women self-identify as free, Jewish women. As we shall see, the image of secular women also plays a role in the construction of traditionist women's identity centered round other, complementary issues.

Inspired by the distinction between traditionist and orthodox women, many interviewees made a point of defining themselves as feminists. As Lital stated, there is no fundamental, unavoidable contradiction between traditionist identity and feminism or feminine identity, whereas such a contradiction is built into orthodox femininity:

> I can surely keep on calling myself a feminist and a traditionist . . . I think an orthodox woman can define herself as a feminist, but she is much more limited in her feminist thought . . . But traditionism doesn't undermine feminine and feminist identity.

Retaining feminist authenticity is enabled by the protective distance traditionist women have from the (religious, orthodox) discriminative laws. As Zehavit explained, as a traditionist, "I have no contact with it [Judaism's discriminatory laws]. I have a full partnership with my husband, and we don't have those differences of man and woman, at home."

This image of orthodox femininity as oppressed, as well as the importance of this image in the construction of traditionist feminine identity, was clearly expressed in Sara's statement telling of the difficulty she experienced when visiting a friend who had recently become orthodox, thus accepting the inferior position assigned to her by patriarchal orthodoxy:

> When I visited my friend who had become orthodox, I saw for the first time the meaning of oppression. She hadn't prepared the *gefilte fish* [as her husband had asked her to], and he was giving her a really hard time

over it. I thought to myself, "Until a few years ago you were like me, you would never let a man give you such a hard time. You were never this submissive."

Q: Does Judaism oppress women?

A: A lot depends on the woman. My friend used to be just like me . . . She became ultra-orthodox, and since then her husband runs her life. I will not accept that. I will not have my husband force anything on me. I am willing to do things from within a full partnership.

Q: Doesn't your choice in being a traditionist mean that you have chosen to jeopardize your independence?

A: Could be, but that was my choice.

Interviewees did not hesitate in describing stark images of discrimination against women in extreme orthodox contexts. In a sort of corresponding move to presenting the status of traditionist women as an issue which is not "a fundamental problem" of Jewish tradition, but rather a practical result of each spousal relationship, interviewees emphasized that ultra-orthodox Jews personify the opposite possibility. They tended to treat members of the ultra-orthodox community as clearly demonstrating the offensive, unequal treatment of women. Bina was quite sharp in her presentation of this argument, explaining why she does not feel her choice of traditionism has impaired her identity as a free woman of equal standing with that of her husband:

> With the extreme orthodox the woman has to stay at home and raise the children . . . With the ultra-orthodox, women suffer because there is no personal advancement. They must hide themselves and their femininity. To suppress. Orthodox women accept this and say it is their role. But inside, their feelings as a human being are only "the wife of" and "the mother of".

In other words there is indeed a problem of discrimination against women, but it is a sociological, cultural one (typical of the orthodox community), and not "Jewish" or essential: the discrimination is the problem of the orthodox, the orthodox women, a difficult situation arising from the culture and the social structure accepted by the orthodox, and not a general issue within Judaism or pertaining to women who observe Jewish tradition.

Unsurprisingly, this positioning of orthodoxy as a model of Jewish-patriarchal discrimination against women, as well as differentiating between traditionism and orthodoxy, plays an important role with women who have left the orthodox world, choosing traditionism (rather than secularity, for example) as their "new" identity. Carmit, raised in an orthodox family, leaving that world in her early twenties, said she "absolutely agrees" with the claim that Judaism is discriminatory against women. This discrimination, she says, greatly annoys her, and she speaks out against it. However:

> This problem exists in the orthodox community, not where I am. I don't suffer from this discrimination, because I left orthodoxy . . .
> *Q:* Are you, by being a traditionist, free of discrimination?
> *A:* Not exactly. Being traditionist means I am distanced from the places in which this discrimination is expressed . . . Traditionism is a sort of safe distance from the discrimination against women common to Judaism. But traditionism does not solve the problem of discrimination; it does not make it any easier in principle.

Tehila, who grew up secular, became orthodox and finally chose traditionism, was amongst those to articulate the claim about the religious injury to women most directly and bluntly. In the orthodox world, she explained:

> . . . generally there is a humiliating treatment of women. As a woman it is horrible to be orthodox. By the most basic perceptions of religion women are discriminated against . . . That is why I found myself the middle. That is the traditionist . . . Were I to be orthodox I would take it all upon myself [all the restrictions and discriminatory bans]. As I am traditionist, I need to take upon myself only half.

An acceptance *in principle* of orthodox authority creates in many traditionist women an opposition to the adoption of feminist changes to Jewish tradition, even where they deem these changes to be welcome and even worthy. Thus there were those who in their statements accepted the discrimination against women, which they deem essential to Jewish religion, and the inherent clash between this discrimination and the discourse of equal and independent femininity, as a given. They accept this "fact" while presenting a high level of self-reflection and self-criticism.

Limor's story is representative of this. Limor described a long line of cases and situations of an "orthodox nature", in which she was the victim of discrimination as someone inferior to men, elaborating upon the humiliating experience common to such cases. She emphasized that she is also well aware of the equal treatment and respect for women typical of Conservative Judaism, for instance. But when asked whether she would have liked to change this situation, in which she is discriminated against, for being a woman, she put forth a complex answer which goes also to show something of her self-reflection:

> Yes and no . . . because of habit, and also because of how they scare you about religion. I am afraid to change, afraid to ignore a ban. It is very intimidating to come and change things which are ordered by religion. This is how we were raised.
>
> (Limor)

Several female interviewees argued that there is no problem, in principle, with religion's attitude towards women, and that this issue revolves around, first

and foremost, the (private) relations between spouses. This approach can be seen as a sort of self-empowerment on the part of traditionist women, who see themselves and their spousal situation as a solution to the possible clash between feminist discourse and Jewish tradition. Dalia's statement, in a joined conversation with her husband, is fascinating in this context. When asked if she believed that as a traditionist her position as a woman was hurt, she answered (adamantly) in the negative. Her husband, on the other hand, insisted that the Torah is chauvinistic, and is injurious to women. Dalia, for her part, was equally firm in rejecting her husband's argument: "I do not feel that observing *mitzvot* puts me in an inferior position. I understand the claim that the Torah is chauvinistic, but I do not feel humiliated or oppressed." She explained that the whole matter is highly dependent upon the relationship that the couple has: "The partner determines a lot. He may behave like he is the dominant one, and then he will humiliate the woman and hurt her. We don't have that problem. Our relationship is more equal." Dalia is also certain that secular women do not enjoy a better position. As a rule, she believes that life nowadays is more equal (compared to the past), but that this equality is reserved only for those who are not orthodox or ultra-orthodox: among the latter, she explained, the Jewish discriminatory potential against women is realized. There, women are inferior, bowing to the male dominance.

There are, then, two distinctions expressed here: the distinction between orthodoxy (whose laws force the discrimination against all women) and traditionism (representing the personal choice which protects women, as individuals, from such discrimination); and the distinction between the public (the context in which women are doomed to be discriminated against) and the private (where the woman and her partner work on an equal relationship). These two distinctions were reflected in Galit's statement:

> There are many things that annoy me [about Judaism's attitude towards women]. I do not observe to a level in which I have to observe all the *mitzvot* regarding women. I don't take the whole package . . . The lifestyle I have chosen protects me from the gender oppression inherent to religion. I don't feel this oppression. I force my partner to cook with me for Shabbat. We share the chores round the house, as well as the preparations for Shabbat.

Interviewees also used the argument, common amongst orthodox women, by which the gender differences are both fundamental and natural, and Jewish tradition is attentive to these differences, serving them (by rules, norms, and practices that others may see as oppressive to women). In some formulation, these rules are even presented as a sensitive expression of the feminist idea itself. Nevertheless, even while adopting this reasoning, traditionist women continue to be aware of that potential clash between their lifestyle and feminist discourse. This combination gives rise to what may be seen as a lack of consistency, stemming from the attempt to combine opposing values. However, as I

have repeatedly emphasized, I believe this combination should be seen as a case of a dynamic and complex construction of personal and communal identities while facing competing and often contrasting discourses.

Liora raised the idea of gender differences as justifying what would seem to be traditional-Jewish discrimination against women. She made clear that she herself identifies many Jewish practices as discriminatory and injurious to women:

> Judaism confines the women to the home, limits them, and in that there exists discrimination. But within that field they praise the woman, glorify her. She is the angel of the house; she runs the house and sets its mood, the education of the children. The only discrimination is in the sectioning.

Liora made clear that she accepts with love this "sectioning": "I see the beauty of it. The familiarity." Liat completed the idea by saying:

> "House wife" means that the woman is the center of home . . . So how can you say that religion is chauvinistic?! Or, with the ultra-orthodox, the man studies and the woman works and supports him. So how can it be that she is inferior? She is, after all, upholding the home. I do not agree with that statement [that religion is discriminatory to women].

In the same vein, Ruth argued that the supposed clash between religious and feminist discourses is not a real one. This misconception, she explained, comes from a lack of understanding of Judaism:

> I think that people who claim [that Judaism discriminates against women] do not really attempt to comprehend the significance behind certain religious laws. This claim is the result of ignorance. For example, the *mitzvah* of *niddah* [menstruation rules] is a strict one. Some would say that is hostile to the woman as she is theoretically impure. This is a very limited point of view. I, as a traditionist, seek to see how the Halacha helps me; I find out that *niddah* has an element which draws husband and wife closer together. The distance strengthens the relationship. That is something very positive. It really depends on how you interpret the Halacha. I think that if you look for the deeper meaning, the Halacha actually strengthens a woman's position.

These and similar statements clearly show that the potential clash between interviewees' identity as women and their identity as Jews is overt and visible. As such it stimulates both guilt and self-reflection, thus also revealing the continuing process of choosing traditionist identity. Traditionist identity is selected, examined, and reaffirmed constantly and repeatedly via these discursive spars, which require self-reflectivity. As put by Keren:

> It forces me into a place of more questions and queries . . . There is the question of just how free and liberated I should be . . . Judaism limits me as a woman, but it also allows me the space to ask questions and examine all the time what the limits are.

Body and dress

Dress, as a tool of self-expression, is one of the most important means by which traditionist women differentiate themselves from orthodox women. Interviewees stressed their refusal to don anything they perceive as a distinct marker of orthodoxy. This "insistence" upon not wearing what in orthodox circles would be considered to be "modest" (this is the term adopted by the interviewees themselves; they described themselves as "not dressing modestly") signifies two separate yet intertwined matters: first, like the *kippa* for men, it signifies the women's refusal to send a false message to their surroundings (a message that would identify them as orthodox). Second, and probably more importantly, this insistence symbolizes their refusal to enter into the realm of orthodoxy, where they will be forced to submit to the discrimination and inferior position reserved for orthodox women. Dress is revealed to signify traditionist women's (relative) liberty: the freedom to choose, the freedom to self-definition not dictated from above by religion – hence also signifying traditionist women's preferred, egalitarian status.

The interviews also reveal an apparent gap between the public, "progressive" and "liberated" message, embodied by the choice of "immodest" clothing, and the personal, private practice, mostly adhering to conservative codes. Traditionist women usually describe themselves as conducting a relatively conservative lifestyle, while at the same time taking special care not to identify themselves as wearing "modest" dress – according to the orthodox code. As aforementioned, the statement "I do not dress modestly" was often repeated in the interviews, and turned out to be central to feminine traditionist identity. The distinction between the public (in the form of the public message sent by the "immodest" clothing) and the private (that is, the lifestyle observed in the personal sphere, at home) resurfaces here as crucial, now touching upon the body itself.

This distinction between the public and the private, between dress as an outward marker of "(im)modesty" and a practical observance of a conservative lifestyle, was lucidly articulated in Limor's statement. Limor described herself as conducting a conservative lifestyle socially and sexually, emphasizing the importance of this conservatism to her identity as a traditionist. She told of an encounter with an orthodox woman, who encouraged her to take it upon herself to observe an additional *mitzvah* as part of the process of repentance and penitence on Yom Kippur. The orthodox woman's first suggestion dealt with dress: she proposed that Limor accept not to wear trousers (which the orthodox dress code deems as immodest) anymore. To Limor this seemed excessive: "I said: 'Listen, I won't promise you something I can't keep.

But try suggesting something a bit lighter.' " In the end she took it upon herself to read Psalms every day, and she has stuck to that ever since.

The issue of cross-pressures applied to traditionists is expressed here in an especially prominent, physical, and corporeal way. Matters of fashion and modesty become areas in which the dominant identity groups (the secular and the orthodox) demand that traditionist women choose and identify with one of them and "remain consistent" – that is, behave according to the common social message of the external marker they choose to don. These pressures, I should stress, do not originate only in the orthodox camp, which attributes a special ethical and ideological significance to dress code, but come also from the secular side.

Tehila, who, as mentioned, had chosen the traditionist identity after having lived as an orthodox, described the way in which her clothing served as an external marker of her changing identification, and how those around her reacted to these changes. Tehila described the moment in which she decided to no longer define herself as orthodox; she put on trousers for the first time in years. This change in her style immediately evoked a sharp reaction from her orthodox surroundings: "They told me that if I am wearing trousers then I am not a real orthodox. So let it be traditionist; I don't care." At the same time she was faced with similar demands in the opposite direction, put on her by her secular family and friends. She conveyed how these family and friends, who consider the orthodox dress code to be an expression of religious coercion which limits a woman's self-definition, required her to obey that code, if she wished to identify herself as not secular:

> That is exactly the criticism I get for wearing pants. When family and friends ask me how come I am wearing pants. For the secular the world is very dichotomous – you are either orthodox or secular . . . The secular had this claim against me: "We had already accepted you as an orthodox, we were showing off with our orthodox friend to show how tolerant we are . . . why are you now reversing your ways?" It shakes their self-confidence. They don't understand it.
>
> (Tehila)

The issue of dress reveals itself, therefore, to be yet another expression of what could be termed "the guiding logic" of traditionist lifestyle: the practice and observance of what traditionists deem to be essential to the preservation of their Jewish identity. A strict, modest dress code is simply not seen as part of that "necessary minimum" for an authentic Jewish identity. This is also the source of traditionist women's willingness to expressly and firmly reject the orthodox requirement of a "modest" dress code. As Tehila put it:

> Shabbat is important to Judaism. There is a basic code in Judaism. Modest dress is not basic. The marking of Shabbat, the *kiddush*, the lighting of the candles, a certain observance of *kashrut*, the marking of

> certain holy days, circumcision, Bar Mitzvah – these stages in life. That is traditionism. You can do [observe] beyond that;

but from a traditionist point of view, you do not have to. A woman can be "a real Jew" even if she does not adhere to a modest dress code.

As already mentioned, secularity also plays a dominant role in the construction of feminine traditionist identity; and here too issues of body and dress have an important place. Within the secular context, the pressure applied to traditionist women presents itself mostly in the form of the temptation to surrender to the most up-to-date fashions of westernized consumer culture.

Traditionist women's bodies are thus transformed into an arena of a struggle between two dominant, competitive cultures. Libi's is a good example of this: she described herself as "believing very, very, very much" in God, and also found it necessary to stress that "inside, in the heart, my faith is very strong", even though she does not display her faith externally in the way she dresses. Like other interviewees, Libi was very upfront and direct in her description of her struggle with the temptation to be fashionable, up-to-date, and desirable culturally and socially. Libi carries on her body a distinct mark of this complex tension: she wears what had become, during the 1990s, the ultimate symbol of fashion's conquest of the human body – tattoos (which are forbidden by Jewish Law). Libi openly admitted to regretting having them done – not necessarily due to the religious transgression, but because of the mistaken social message they send out; she feels that they mark her as a secular.

Menstruation

The issue of menstruation captures the multifaceted and tense relation between body, feminine identity, feminist discourse, Jewish Law, and power. Most of the women interviewed reported that they do observe the Jewish laws of menstruation and family purity associated with it (*niddah* and *taharah*) – although not alwayst according to every single *halachic*-rabbinical directive common today with Jewish orthodoxy. Instead, most said they observe what they described as the "basic" rules. In other words, the traditionist "method" of identifying what is essential to Jewish identity and observing it in a rather strict manner, while neglecting that which is considered to be "less essential", or something which can be foregone while still retaining Jewish authenticity, finds its expression in matters of menstruation as well. Generally speaking, avoiding sexual intercourse during the woman's period is what is considered essential, and thus observed, while other related bans and prohibitions (such as the ban on any physical contact between the spouses or the obligation to go to the *mikveh* [Jewish ritualistic bath] to mark the end of the period and "be purified") are not seen as crucial.

To traditionist women, observance of the "essential" laws of menstruation

reveals itself to be one of those fundamental Jewish principles which must be observed as part of the preservation of the essence of Jewish identity. Interestingly, traditionist men didn't mention practices and laws pertaining to menstruation as such a fundamental issue (even though these rules deal mostly with spousal relationship, and bear on the husband's practice as well). In several cases, interviewees (both men and women) reported the woman's insistence on observing laws of menstruation – in contrast to her partner's indifference to the subject. Such was the case of Dalia and Beni. When they first met, Beni was living what both described as a secular lifestyle. Dalia described how she had set him a list of compelling and rigid demands as a precondition to her agreeing to marry him: "There are things I will not give up on in any way, even when they come at the expense of my comfort: *kashrut* at our home, *taharah* and *niddah*, the separation of meat and milk." To Dalia, these basic practices are what identifies the couple as Jewish, distinguishing them from those who are not: "We need something Jewish, something, anyhow, which will tell us apart from the Goyim. Because if I do not observe *niddah* and *taharah*, then what is the difference between me and some Arab woman?"

In this context, too, traditionist women present the argument by which religious practice – in this case, the observance of the laws of menstruation – as compatible with feminist discourse. This type of reasoning is common with orthodox rabbis: they present menstruation laws as sensitive to the natural differences between the genders and the unique needs of the married woman – thus benefiting women, and not, as some would claim, humiliating them by presenting them as impure during menstruation. Ruth presented this argument as she explained why those who think the Halacha is coercive and discriminatory to women are wrong:

> People who claim this do not comprehend the meaning behind certain Jewish laws. This comes from a certain amount of ignorance. For example, the *mitzvah* of *niddah* is considered a severe one. Some say it is hurtful to women because the woman is deemed polluted [during her period]. This is a limited view of it. I, as a traditionist, look to see how Jewish Law works in my favor. I discover *niddah* has an element which really brings the husband and wife closer together. The distance strengthens the relationship. It is something very positive. It really depends on how you look at each law. I think that if you are looking for the deeper meaning, Halacha actually strengthens women's position.

Yet Ruth also made clear that she knows where to draw the line in her acceptance of Jewish Law's influence over her personal behavior, even where she acknowledges its ultimate authority. As an example of such rules, she mentioned several rules touching upon *niddah* and *taharah* which she has no intention of observing when she marries.

Traditionism, familial life, and security

Many of the women interviewed championed traditionism as a cause having a positive effect on their status as women through family, or, more precisely, through familial spousal life. They presented the traditionist lifestyle as creating a positive family frame, in which the woman enjoys a higher sense of security in her position as a married woman, as well as equality in her relations with her husband.

As in other contexts, here too traditionist self-definition gains much through the comparison between the traditionist choice and other categories of Jewish identity (or at least the image of these categories). In this current context, where the issue at hand is one of the woman's "personal security" (or "confidence") within spousal relationship, it is the secular image that gains relevance. While the comparison with orthodox women underlined the relative equality that characterizes traditionist spousal relationship, the comparison with secular women underlines the spousal security and loyalty, and the strength of the family unit.

Secularity is here seen as a negative example of excessive permissiveness and a lack of commitment, allowing – if not actively encouraging – infidelity, and thus working against the family unit. As was carefully put by Tehila, as she explained why she would prefer her future partner to be traditionist:

> The thing with security, against cheating. That is part of the reason why I am looking for a traditionist man, so that I could sleep a little bit better. It doesn't provide absolute immunity, but it is an impression which is, in part, completely true. Because it is tradition, and in tradition you try to conserve the family.

On the other hand, the comparison with the orthodox brings to the fore, as I have said, the relative freedom and equality reserved for traditionist women. Traditionist women who choose to see themselves as free from a long line of severe prohibitions regarding their interaction with their spouses (prohibitions which they describe as an unnecessary exaggeration of the laws of menstruation, for example) see themselves as having eked out a space, neither too conservative nor overly liberal, within which they are free to express their femininity, while simultaneously being secure in their relationship.

Traditionists' place in between these two extremes – the "patriarchal orthodox" and the "permissive secular" – was illustrated in Sigal's statement. Having been quite clear that her current lifestyle as a traditionist is more egalitarian than that prevalent in the orthodox world (in which she was raised), she also made a point of noting that secular women do not enjoy a higher level of equality than she does:

> In a secular, overly-liberal society it is much harder to keep a normal relationship, because society is like that. Cheating has become more

> normative, and was even ideologically justified, saying it refreshes the relationship . . . With the orthodox, where I was . . . it is overly conservative, and that creates estrangement, remoteness . . . It is hard. In this I am happy not to have any limitations.
>
> (Sigal)

Sexuality and conservatism

One of the most noticeable differences between traditionist men and women that showed up in the interviews was that, for the women, sexual and social conservatism are almost always included as a basic part of their traditionism, whereas the men rarely treated it as a part of their traditionist identity. When asked to describe and explain the significance of their traditionist identity, women repeatedly raised issues of dress, body, sexuality, and social behavior, while men focused on other, ritual aspects, and did not mention sexual behavior or sexual-social conservatism as relevant to their traditionist identity.

Several women acknowledged this gap and criticized it. To Tehila, for instance, this difference is so prominent as to interfere with the ability to articulate a valid, non-gender-biased definition of traditionism. If we were to insist on articulating such a definition, to include both men and women, said Tehila, we would be forced to remove modesty and sexual conservatism from it. Although these are a central part of the female traditionist identity, she said,

> They are not a part of traditionism [in general]. There was a time when I met via the internet many guys who called themselves traditionist. They behaved in the way I did in my most liberal period. Not giving a damn. They observe Shabbat, some even walk around with a *kippa*, but still it [sexual conservatism] didn't interest them one bit. As far as behavior in public with a woman, they behaved the same, and had the same expectations as secular men.

It often seems that issues of conservatism and sexual modesty are the context in which the greatest peer pressure is applied to traditionist women. Dress code emerges again as a powerful social marker: traditionist women do not single themselves out as orthodox (by not complying with the "modest" dress code common in orthodox communities), and in the context of Israeli cultural fashion this means they are signaling, by inference, that they are secular. This, in turn, leads to a series of expectations with regards to their social-sexual behavior. The interviews show this pressure to be quite explicit and intensive. Limor's testimony stands out in this respect: I asked her to elaborate upon her statement that "it is much easier when you know: 'I am orthodox [or] I am secular.' Whereas a traditionist – you are not well accepted on either side . . . you are the odd one out." She began her explanation with a description of the orthodox pressure, also aimed at her body and clothes as a woman:

> I have relatives who became orthodox. When I walk into their house I feel very alien. I wear trousers . . . They don't comment, but I feel uncomfortable, and I always try to adjust to the surroundings in which I am a guest.

On the other hand there are the pressures applied by the secular society, which is dominant in Limor's life. She told of her time in college, where most of her friends were "Ashkenazim, secular, from a high socio-economic status":

> They have their views on the world. I am considered odd by them. For example, most my friends from college, they have been having sex from a young age. I am twenty-four and still a virgin. To them that is "Wow!" – it is inconceivable. To me it is normal; I have no problem with it. It has to do with my traditionism and it is out of choice. This the orthodox understand and sympathize with, but secular people don't understand it . . . to them it is somehow wrong . . . I tried to explain to them that it was my choice . . . it doesn't help.

In the context of a modernist discourse, at least in the version free of political correctness, this conservative, "traditional" (in the sense of "pre-modern") behavior is "primitive". Interviewees related how this derogatory name is thrown against them by secular acquaintances of theirs. It is most often used in the context of sexual conservatism and social modesty. Ruth, describing herself as "very conservative . . . I don't believe in an overly permissive lifestyle", was amongst the women who told of an abundance of cases in which they were accused of being "primitive" because of their sexual conservatism:

> A guy at work says I am primitive because I maintain my limits, with certain things. I think a girl should be with one guy. And my friends think I'm crazy . . . When they say the way I think is primitive, I answer that secularity has yet to prove itself . . . Secular society is bankrupt; a vacuous, empty culture.

Repeating the argument with which I opened this discussion could be helpful here: the prominence of feminist discourse in the public arena, and its influence over even those who do not identify with a feminist agenda, is an unavoidable context within which to understand the feminine traditionist identity. Although it would be a mistake to describe a direct, one-dimensional connection between feminist discourse and liberal views on sex, it would still seem that to the interviewees the conflict between traditionist identity and feminist discourse reaches a crescendo on issues of sexuality, conservatism, chasteness and personal liberty. The importance of traditionist identity as an identity of choice is forcibly reiterated here, where women testify to accepting limitations on their sexual and social behavior, under ceaseless social pressure.

Liat, who described herself as a conservative woman, told of the temptation

she was faced with to become more liberated, as she described the complexity of living by a tradition passed down by a community while at the same time being continuously re-elected by the individual:

> I have met guys . . . and I also stopped myself from meeting guys, because I knew that it had no chance of working, so there was no point in even starting it. But also with people I went out with or met, I was always reserved. I was never free . . . I did not express myself . . . It passes [when she married], but not a hundred percent. Because it is much more than that; it is something so deeply rooted that it cannot be untangled . . . It is part of a tradition, from home.
>
> (Liat)

This discussion should be concluded with a qualification of the statement with which I started regarding the differences between men and women on the issue of sexual conservatism. As we saw, the interviews reveal a clear difference: women talk of sexual conservatism as a part of their traditionist identity; men do not. It might be deduced, based on this, that it testifies to a difference in behavior (that is, that the sexual behavior of traditionist men is more liberal than that of traditionist women), and such a conclusion would probably not be groundless. Yet we must take into account another, complementary argument, which can be echoed in the interviews. This explanation touches upon the common, dominant discourse within which the traditionist choice takes place, as a sort of "other side" of the omnipresence of the feminist discourse: I mean by this the discourse which presents permissive sexual activity as a central component to masculinity. As it was put by one male interviewee: "For men it is an embarrassment to be considered conservative" (Roni); even if they do behave in a conservative manner, it is not common to be proud of it.

Women in synagogue

Synagogue has become a central locus for Jewish women's struggle for equality. It is a distinct case of attending to issues of gender within an institutional, formal framework of Jewish religion. As can be inferred from my discussion so far, it is not surprising that traditionist women do not fit into these frameworks for the struggle for gender equality. Generally speaking, the formal-institutional struggle for equality in the synagogue is of no interest to traditionist women, having no pull in recruiting them, even where they approve of its principles, the motives behind it and those conducting it.

Traditionist women tend to welcome the position by which Judaism releases them from certain formal, ritualistic duties (such as prayer in synagogue, reading the Torah and laying *tefilin*) – duties which have become a major subject of the struggle between Jewish feminists and the rabbinical establishment – and do not wish to assume them. A distinct majority of the women interviewed stated that they would not wish to attend a female praying service,

and would not be interested in adopting the male religious duties. Libi described the difference in ritual duties as a "bonus" which women have been afforded, and made clear that she would not wish to give it up:

> Traditionism does not discriminate against me. I feel good with the conditions it sets me. There are those who would not accept them. To me they are comfortable. I can study, work, go on with my plans. So I was given the bonus of not being under the same obligations as men.

Traditionist women, much like traditionist men, prefer the orthodox synagogue – where women are confined to the women's section, physically detached from the religious ceremony – as their synagogue and the sacred arena in which they take part in the relevant rituals. They usually accept the confinement and limited status awarded them in this synagogue. Most importantly, they do not feel compelled to attend it in the first place. Many women said they prefer the private, personal prayer, within their individual sphere, mostly not according to the prayer book – that is, not dictated by the rabbinical ceremony.

Traditionist women's views on female status in the synagogue is of particular interest in cases where they have been exposed to egalitarian ceremonies in either Conservative or Reform synagogues. The recurring theme, as I shall be demonstrating later on (see Chapter 8), is that although traditionist women perceive the egalitarian prayer as something essentially positive, they believe these egalitarian ceremonies to be misinterpreting Judaism, and refuse to accept them as legitimate. Limor, telling of her visit to a Conservative synagogue in Los Angeles, stressed that though she appreciated the egalitarian ceremony as respectful of women, she herself would not consider joining such a community. She did not elaborate clearly why, but her tone made clear that she believed her apprehension to be completely understandable and rather "obvious".

A possible explanation for such a vigorous rejection of the possibility of joining such an egalitarian praying community can be found in Hila's statement about a similar visit to a Conservative synagogue in Los Angeles. After explaining that she has no problem accepting the segregation practiced in her synagogue ("I have no access to the Torah . . . and I have no problem with that") she stated that: "I had never seen anything like it before, that a woman should step up to the podium. And it didn't seem right to me. Women should not be rabbis and cantors." Does that mean she is cooperating with her oppression as a woman? "I do not see it as oppression . . . Were I to now lead the prayer, it would not make me un-oppressed, because everyone is reading the same lines, so it doesn't matter if I am cantor or not."

A somewhat extreme expression of both of these approaches – that is, the (passive) discomfort caused by women's inferior standing in the orthodox synagogue, and the objection to expressions of gender equality in Conservative or Reformist synagogues – can be seen in Tehila's statement. Tehila said she

does not attend the (orthodox) synagogue on Saturdays, but rather prays alone, at home. "I can't connect with this entire synagogue bit . . . I sometimes come with my mother on the holy days to synagogue, but I do not feel at my ease, and prefer to be with the children playing outside." Tehila also made it clear that her discomfort stems from the inferior position she is assigned to, as a woman, in the synagogue: "I don't like being behind a curtain. It frustrates me. That is third grade, not second grade [treatment]." She was also very critical of the status generally awarded to women in the orthodox world. But contrary to what could be expected, she was also unambiguously unappreciative of the non-orthodox alternatives, precisely because of the equal status women are awarded there. This is how she described her first (and last) encounter with a Reform synagogue:

> I was absolutely shocked. I saw a woman reading the Torah. I am a feminist, but this was still very hard for me. It disturbed me. I accept [the spiritual idea] . . . that there is purity and impurity. When a woman has her period she is *niddah* and impure. And if we treat the Torah as a holy thing not written by man, so the woman comes and pollutes the Torah . . . Just for the sake of raising a flag? That isn't the idea . . . It was a terrible declaration of "let's break all the rules".

Tehila also explained the moderate nature of the egalitarian changes she would like to witness. The "opening up" of orthodoxy to gender equality should be done, in her opinion, in a much more conservative fashion:

> The opening up should occur in a much smarter way and not in such a demonstratively rebellious way. Like all feminists trying to conquer all strongholds without applying the least bit of sense. We were born different. I'm not into all this breaking everything in order to restart from scratch.

7 Traditionists' images of "the orthodox" and "the secular"

The discussion throughout the previous chapters has returned repeatedly to the central role played by the images of "the orthodox" and "the secular" in the construction of traditionist identity. Traditionists utilize these images as dual anchors of identity, two intimate "significant others", faced with which one defines oneself. As such, these identity images prove to be crucial in the investigation into the array of meanings associated with traditionist identity. Such an investigation is the subject of the current chapter.

Indeed, such an investigation could be taken to contradict one of my central arguments, by which traditionism is not to be dismissed as a "middling identity" occupying the "hybrid" space between "orthodoxy" (or "religiosity) and "secularity". Indeed, it could be argued that the central argument of the current chapter places traditionism specifically in relation to the two dominant categories of Jewish identity in Israel, commonly seen as mutual, binary opposites of "systematic" unambiguous representations of secularity and orthodoxy. Is that not enough to re-evoke the image of traditionism as an "in-between" identity?

The response to such a possible criticism must highlight the difference between my arguments – by which understanding traditionism as a residual, middling category is indeed a mistake – and the way in which traditionists use the images of Jewish identities provided them by the dominant discourse in the Israeli public sphere, in order to construct and reaffirm their identity. Put differently, even where traditionism stands as a distinct identity in its own right, not "just" a filler of the space created by the gap between a complex reality of Jewish identities in Israel and the categorical distinction between "orthodoxy" and "secularity", traditionists are still able to use these dominant images as part of their identity's toolbox.

In light of this, my attention will be focused on the ways in which traditionists use the images of these two "generic players", "the orthodox" and "the secular", in order to construct their identity. Traditionists invariably return to the differences between them and these "others", and through these differences they shape and reaffirm their identity as traditionists. It is not surprising that traditionists do so through a reinterpretation of these dominant images. That is not to say that this interpretation involves a complete

reversal or transformation of these representations, but rather a shifting of the focal points in them: "the secular" thus becomes the prototype of detachment from tradition, whereas "the orthodox" becomes the symbol of "excess", impractical authenticity. Traditionists' image of "the orthodox" will open my discussion. The second part of this chapter will focus on traditionists' image of "the secular".

Traditionists' image of "the orthodox"

The central elements in traditionists' image of orthodox, or religious Jews, are focused round the view of orthodoxy as a zealous, absolute though exaggerated and unrealistic expression of authentic Judaism. This is not to say that traditionists award the orthodox exclusivity over Judaism, Jewishness or their definition. Traditionists do not view themselves as any "less Jewish" than the orthodox, while still seeing the orthodox as setting an ideal, absolute model to which one does, or would like to, aspire. This leaves a wide space for traditionist criticism of the orthodox. This is honed by the particular apprehension regarding *haredim* (ultra-orthodox Jews), seen as a distinct example of excess extremism.

This segment follows the main contours of this image; it will start with the positive aspect of the orthodox image as an idealized, symbolic (and thus unrealistic) representation of Jewish life. Later I shall move to the traditionist criticism of the orthodox; criticism in view of which it is the traditionist who comes out as living the correct model of Judaism and Jewishness.

Orthodoxy as an exemplary model of normative behavior

For many interviewees, orthodoxy serves as an idyllic model of Judaism, representing true religiosity (I shall be returning to the distinction between it and other, false models of religiosity) as an ideal to which any Jew should aspire. It is a model of Jewish life, which submits itself to the laws of Judaism, respects its history and customs, and living Judaism "as it should be". As such, orthodox Jews are transformed into role models.

The interviews clearly evoke an image of the orthodox, especially the religious-Zionists, as an ideal, symbolic model of the Israeli-Jew. In this manner, Liat described the "knitted *kippa*" (which in the Jewish-Israeli context has become a social marker of religious Zionism) as a worthy, almost perfect model of the orthodox image in her eyes: "moral people, good, smiling, will always offer you help. More friendly. They don't coerce." Koren seemed to be echoing her tone, describing the ideal orthodox image to him as: "Mafdal [the National Religious Party, representing religious-Zionists] . . . The positive image is veterans of combat units, Mafdalnicks . . . The Mafdal is the ideal – salt of the earth, observing Shabbat, serving in the army." Needless to day, these and similar statements are indicative of the national element of this identity construct. The "Mafdalnick", who combines the life

of Torah studies with military service, is seen by many to be a paragon of Jewish-Israeli citizenship.

One of the terms repeatedly used by the interviewees in order to describe the positive aspect of orthodoxy was the word "*erkiyut*", which in colloquial Hebrew denotes a sense of one's living in accordance with values and morals. Orthodox life is more laden with values; orthodox Jews are more true to their values, and these values are essentially positive, worthy ones. See, for example, Revital's statement, which also deals with the negative image of the orthodox (particularly the ultra-orthodox), which she finds to be widespread in secular society:

> The orthodox are stricter about family life and spousal life. Things are different there. You don't just get home, switch on the TV and stare at it all night. [Orthodox] people develop themselves more and are open to everything; [they] are different from the ultra-orthodox stereotype. These are people with broad horizons, who read a lot, and listen to music . . . It is so wrong to think that the [orthodox] world is gray . . . There are freeloaders there as well,[1] but we also have freeloaders amongst us.

As such, orthodox Jews serve as a sort of idealized marker, necessary for the existence of the traditionist choice. Revital put it in rather direct, unmistakable terms:

> I think traditionism is possible without secular people, but not without the orthodox. The basis of traditionism is in religion. Orthodoxy is an extreme version of traditionism. If there were only secular people, there wouldn't be traditionists; they wouldn't have anywhere to get it from. The orthodox is the model.

Some also projected this positive image onto the realm of moral and ethical judgment. One of the recurring themes in several interviews was that the orthodox way of life, though not assuring higher levels of morality and ethics, does at least provide comfortable, correct conditions for them. In other words, orthodoxy is seen as a better point of departure for being a better person. As we shall see later on, many other participants had their reservations about that position, presenting a more complex one, which recognizes a gap between orthodoxy and morality and ethics. Meir numbers with those who represent the correlation, if not complete identification, between orthodoxy and morality in the clearest terms:

> I expect him [the orthodox] to be moral, to have high moral standards. [Secular people] are not committed to that. That is . . . I expect someone with a *kippa* not to be a liar . . . I think that someone who takes it upon himself to declare to the world with all sorts of markings . . . [that] he is orthodox . . . – I expect him to take upon himself also moral obligations.

The orthodox are therefore faced with a sort of "horizon of maximum expectations". They are "supposed to be" better people – more moral, more tolerant, more attentive to their surroundings and the community, since the values of Jewish religion, to which they are loyal, assure this – or at least set the way for this high level of humanity. Thus, "When you get on a bus and see an orthodox not getting up for an older person, it will disturb you much more than if a secular guy were not to get up" (Tamar). Or, from the other direction, "The murder of Rabin [the Israeli prime minister shot by an orthodox Jew] would shock us less were it a secular guy [to have shot him]" (Halit). Liron, holding similar beliefs, told of how he "immediately favors" those coming from a religious-Zionist educational background for various entry examinations he holds for the non-orthodox educational institution for which he works. They are just more suitable, he explained: they are better educated and their abilities are higher. To him, orthodox people are just better people. "I have this stigma," he admits. "Knitted *kippa* is, to me, were I ever to be reincarnated, the lifestyle I would choose."

I should reiterate that not all interviewees share the position which identifies orthodoxy with morality. In fact it is, in a way, a minority position (*in a way*, as the symbolism behind it is common to all the participants), outweighed by the majority who perceive there to be an important distinction between orthodoxy and morality. One of the main distinctions made emphasized that, even if orthodoxy, or the "authentic" Jewish-religious lifestyle, is, in itself, a recipe for improving one's morality and ethical standard, the orthodox have no exclusive hold on that ethical life. In other words, (most) participants do not identify "orthodox" with "a good person". They repeatedly stress that they know many non-orthodox – including "absolute" secularists – who live a socially and personally moral and ethical lives. And they stress that orthodoxy in no way guarantees that the orthodox person will be a better person than others. This distinction permits traditionists to portray their choice positively, as it does not inherently signify a flaw in one's morality. As Keren explained: "Morals need not change [in accordance with "level of religiosity"]. If you are a good person, you should remain one."

All interviewees agreed that a good person is a person leading an ethical life; that is, a person who chooses the good in interpersonal, social relations. They also made clear that the domain of one's relation with God is reserved for another context (in which, presumably, the orthodox are in a favorable position). In all social and ethical matters traditionists do not see themselves as inferior in any way to the orthodox. This position is nominally true regarding the secular as well, but, as we shall see, the situation is somewhat more complex, as secular Jews are portrayed as being lacking, people for whom it is "easier" to fall into an immoral way of life. Interviewees did not hesitate to compare themselves to the orthodox in matters of morality and ethics, only to find that the orthodox are lacking and they themselves are thus acquitted, as a sort of proof that orthodoxy does not necessarily guarantee morality or better ethical living. Gideon demonstrated such a rhetorical move. After

exclaiming that a secular person is also capable of being good, he explained what a good person is:

> A person who helps others who are in need of assistance . . . If my father-in-law needed orthopedic treatment, and I took him over [to the doctor's office] for two months, three times a week, and his orthodox children, all of them of considerable means, did not do so, then I was a slightly more benevolent man than them, and I feel like I did something good a bit more than them. So the matter of orthodox or not doesn't matter.

The orthodox advantage: wholeness, consistency, and support

A number of positive characteristics prove to be central to traditionists' image of the orthodox. These characteristics, comprising the building blocks of the positive portrayal of orthodoxy as a Jewish ideal, underline the intricacy of the choice of traditionism, as they emphasize the things which the traditionists feel they lack. These characteristics are clearly the object of envy for many interviewees. Of these attributes, the feeling of self-content and completeness which accompanies the orthodox choice, the lack of a feeling of guilt, and the communal and social support are the most important. Our conversations show an image of orthodox Jews as people who are more content with their life, and who do not suffer from ambivalence, as traditionists do; orthodox Jews are seen as enjoying a great correlation between principle and action in their daily life. Interviewees farther explained that this consistency and self-confidence are possible due to, amongst other things, the support and encouragement of the strong orthodox community, which affirms the individual's identity. Traditionist individuals, they added, lack similar support.

Wholeness

Clearly, such jealousy or feeling of lack on the part of traditionists is based on a positive estimation of "the young man and woman in orthodox society; they grow up in a better environment, they have values and tradition" (Ronit). As such they are seen to be a model of/for a consistent, full life. Belief and practice, or, more precisely, the correlation between faith/values, and action/observance of religious practice, are the main object of traditionist envy. "Strengthening" and becoming orthodox is thus an enviable process of attaining self-content (its negatives notwithstanding) – a wholeness with one's self:

> Tell you the truth? I am jealous of those who become orthodox . . . jealous of them . . . And I'll tell you why: because for them everything is in its right place. With us there is a lot which is not yet ordered. Many things not in order.
>
> (Beni)

Similarly, Meir, who also idealized the identification between orthodoxy and morality, described the source of his envy in the orthodox lifestyle:

> The orthodox have complete faith in something, which is beautiful, and the dedication to execute that belief. Someone who does it right, he has total loyalty. A lot of investment in one thing, and he loves it, he feels complete with it. Those who do not observe it correctly, that is, lie, practice only half, and all kinds of things like that, so he is not doing it right.

Note the expressions "complete faith" and "total loyalty", which are tied in with the notion of "wholeness", and are all identified as orthodox attributes. This sense of a release from ambiguity is seen by many interviewees as an integral part of orthodox identity, which they themselves lack. Meir's positive depiction of the self-content orthodox, both consistent and unambiguous, must project onto Meir's image of himself as one who doesn't "do it right", in his own words.

The interviews clearly reveal this to be an issue of identity – or, more precisely, of one's need for a feeling of security in one's identity. For this reason these two components are key: the personal feeling of the individual that s/he has a meaningful identity (expressed in values and principles) to which s/he is true, and the existence of a community supportive to the individual, which sets his/her identity as acceptable and natural. Such social support turns personal identification into a positive symbolic and social capital. In this way traditionism presents itself – here confronted with the ideal image of the orthodox – as only a partial solution to the problem of Jewish identity. Traditionism is preferable to secularity, which is typified by a weak identity ("not Jewish enough") and "vacuous" morals, yet it (traditionism) does not enjoy the wholeness and consistency typical of orthodoxy. Of course, not all participants would use the same terminology as I do here. Tahel, for instance, used the word "path" as a relevant code, aiming to describe the orthodox advantage over the secular. The orthodox, he says, have a "path":

> A path is a value system which has been constructed in the past, and which is ours, the Jewish people's. We are Jews. It isn't a value system which appeared out of nowhere. It is our value system, and it is beautiful. There are many people in the secular world who aren't even aware of its existence. It's not that there are no values in the secular world, just that what I see is that there is no preordained path.
>
> (Tahel)

Wholeness and consistency make orthodox life, in a way, easier. The correct moral choices are self-evident, relieving the orthodox individual of doubt and dilemmas which haunt the traditionist:

> They [the orthodox] have a very nice and very clear frame for their life . . . in that they have an education aimed at very clear values. It is much

> harder to get mixed up when you know more or less the direction in which you are going. If you look at the Torah as a compelling frame of rules and regulation, so they know more or less what they are morally committed to and what not. It really helps.
>
> (Tom)

In this respect, orthodox life is also considered to be trouble-free and more comfortable, in part due to its detachment from the bustle and tumult of a secular culture of consumerism, business, and entertainment. The orthodox culture "has more values", helping one to fight consumerist culture's temptations, which undermine one's serenity. In orthodox life "there is a lot of quietude, a lot of peace. There is never the pressure of doing everything very, very fast. Everything to them is 'take it easy', and they have time for everything" (Liora).

Similar expressions depict orthodoxy as emanating an aura of enchanting peace, spirituality, and contentedness. Yet the interviewees, almost without exception, also immediately pointed out that this positive impression has "another side" – the orthodox imperviousness to the modern world (this will be expounded upon later). Some of the interviewees see themselves as enjoying a similar experience of a safe and tranquil religious life only in those opportunities into which they enter under the purview of religion, such as celebrating the holy days. And for all of them this "religious" experience is a very positive one, an opportunity to reaffirm their identity within a serene, secure context. This was how Ravit put it:

> There is something really-really-really magical about all the radiance of religion. On Rosh Hashanah, for example, when we are not driving during the holiday, we all sit at home, and everything is calm . . . suddenly stopping everything and being for a moment with the people who are important to you and to know "OK, now I'm not going shopping or going to a restaurant and I know how to connect . . . who I am, why I am, where I'm from". To stop this crazy rat race, to understand that there are things beyond materialism and hedonism.

Community

Many identified a close connection between the feeling of personal wholeness and the tranquility which accompany the coherent and consistent way of life, and the presence of a strong, supportive community. Nearly all interviewees, including those who held very critical opinions of orthodox Jews, mentioned community's dominant role in orthodox life as a positive, enviable feature – even where they portrayed their choice in traditionism as a preferable, more worthy one. See, for example, Tomer's statement:

> I think that the orthodox life . . . is organized, they are more tranquil . . . There is more innocence in what they do. God said, so we do. They do

> not need to put too much thought into anything, they don't need to invent any theories for themselves, they go by an existing theory. They are usually associated with a specific community. Secular and traditionist people are usually not associated with communities. You can say "the secular community", but, between you and me, you are left alone. But when you are orthodox you have your regular synagogue. True, also a secular-traditionist goes to the same synagogue, but that isn't a community, it's just some guys going to the same synagogue to pray. But I know what orthodox are – it's community life.

Following the same logic, Koren explained that orthodox education is preferable, as it makes a person "more value-oriented and makes him belong more". Roni, who made the same connection between those elements (self-completeness and community life), was quite open about portraying the traditionist with more critical colors:

> Belonging is, in my opinion, the most important and consequential thing. The biggest advantage the orthodox have is that they live in a community, that their bonds with each other are very strong. The connection to each other and to the community is very powerful; they know exactly where they belong. It is the great advantage that they have and I don't. They don't cut corners.

The lack of a traditionist figure who could be set as a community role model should be seen as an expression of the same notion. Interviewees could not name even a single Israeli public figure who could serve as a traditionist role model to them. The people they did mention as potential role models were all identified as orthodox.

One of the consequences of this positive orthodox image is the transformation of the orthodox lifestyle (in its positive version) into an ideal. As we have seen, many interviewees expressed the wish to "strengthen"; they would have liked to become orthodox in order to resolve some of the difficulties with which they are faced. Such a change, they said, would help them clarify – both to themselves and to their environment – their identity, and make their choice more complete and thus more comfortable. Interviewees' insistence on differentiating between this ideal aspiration and its matter-of-fact impracticability shows this ideal to be a symbolic image which does not compel corresponding behavior. As it was put by one woman, "I admire the orthodox way of life, in a certain sense. I think it is good, but I will never achieve it" (Dina).

The negative side of orthodoxy

The proximity to the orthodox seems to simultaneously attract and threaten traditionists. It contains the seductive promise of wholeness, security, spirituality, elevation, and a strong sense of Jewish identity, while at the same time

being seen to be threatening the freedom of the traditionist individual, as something that is but a step away from turning into coercion. This "theoretical" tension between attraction and aversion seems to be resolved quite decisively on the "practical" level: Practically all interviewees agreed that, despite the attraction and numerous advantages intrinsic to the orthodox way of life, it is an impractical choice, impossible to be maintained in a modern world. Orthodoxy is judged harshly, deemed extreme and closed, laying unnecessary, unfeasible constraints on the individual, and thus not viable. Many interviewees believe that the orthodox lifestyle, in its contemporary form, carries pointless restrictions, which are not only not necessary for the observance of a Jewish lifestyle but also twist Jewish identity's true meaning. Compared to this excessive extremism, traditionism emerges as the "normal", correct, and authentic choice of a strong Jewish identity.

Traditionists are here making an important distinction between theory and practice in Jewish lifestyle. They are willing to concede that the orthodox lifestyle is correct "in theory" (i.e., according to Jewish Law). However, the realm of "practice" is different, and traditionists are those who lead a more "practical" Jewish life. Roni's words sharply capture this theme. He explained why he does not observe some religious practices, even though he "knows" that from a Jewish-religious perspective he should:

> I know that this is what should be done on the *halachic* level. I don't necessarily accept upon myself the burden of Torah and *mitzvot*.
> *Q:* But that is the real Judaism?
> *A:* Yes.
> *Q:* Meaning that what the orthodox rabbis say is the real Judaism?
> *A:* Listen, saying it is "the real Judaism", people immediately think that the ultra-orthodox are the real Jews, the most real, and the more you go down [in levels of observance], the less it is [really Jewish]. But I think everyone has his kinks. Last week I saw in the mall an ultra-orthodox Hassid, and I thought to myself that this twisted mutation of Judaism – are they the successors of Yahouda the Macabbi, Bar-Cochva, or Moses? That is a ridiculous and foolish thought and there is no doubt that me, and my family, are far closer, on many more parameters, to the original Jews or to the heritage of our forefathers than those people imitating seventeenth-century behavioral patterns from Galicia. I don't think they are the real Jews, but I do think they stick more to the Halacha in its original form, because religion is, by nature, a conservative thing.

For others, who seem to be less convinced in their criticism of orthodoxy as inauthentic, traditionism is the right choice from a practical, day-to-day point of view. There were also those who refused to sweepingly treat all of orthodoxy as wrong. They made a point of underlining the personal element

of their choice – that is, that orthodoxy is personally wrong for them, but should not be rejected on a general, collective basis. These interviewees carefully avoided the use of a judgmental tone when speaking of orthodox Jews. Thus, for example, Tzipora:

> That is what is good for them [the orthodox] and that is how they are happy. I have relatives who are very religious. I don't have one bad thought about them. They are happy like that; they feel good about themselves, enjoy the fact of their life; they should continue like that, having fun. I respect them and they respect me.
> *Q:* And you think traditionism is the right way to live?
> *A:* For me yes, for them no. So how can I judge it? Everyone is different; everyone lives according to what is good for them and their family. It could be, and I say this with all honesty, that were I to be born to a very, very secular family, who eat pork, so I too would probably eat pork as well; that is why I judge no one. It is a combination of the society you grew up in and the family you were raised in.

The orthodox closedness

Being closed to the "real" world is revealed in the interviews to be one of orthodoxy's prominent negative traits. Interviewees repeatedly described orthodox Jews as having chosen to lock themselves away from the modern world, condemning themselves to a life "beside" the real one, rather than as a part of it, and that this choice carries with it a heavy personal price tag. Some portrayed the orthodox picture as a closed circle of remoteness and closedness, breeding ignorance which, in turn, leads to prohibitions which entail further, excessive closedness. This is how Baruch described the things that "disturb" him with the orthodox (one should note that he aims much of the criticism at the ultra-orthodox, which will be elaborated upon below):

> The orthodox, [those] who are ultra-orthodox, they have nothing to do – all day they are at the *Yeshiva*, looking within the current bans, where more could be banned . . . And it doesn't work like that. You can't live like that. Any rope, stretch it on both sides, stretch and stretch, it will stretch and stretch until it finally tears. That is how our religion is: one day you will see it tear if we don't see some flexibility.

Many also claimed that orthodoxy's strict demands turn into a debilitating construct constantly putting the individual to invasive social tests:

> [As an orthodox Jew] I [would] constantly have to examine myself, behave according to a certain model. I keep on comparing myself to the ideal model I have in my head, how to behave in different situations.

> On the one hand, being an orthodox is a great joy; on the other, it is to limit myself.
>
> (Keren)

Hila recounted the story of her relationship with an orthodox man, which she had "stopped just in time", as his orthodox lifestyle was "overly constrictive" for her:

> In what? In insisting on a skirt on Shabbat, the covering of the head for married women on Shabbat, the physical distance from the family, everything just a little, but in the end it is too much . . . It is many things you have to do and they make me feel that I am erasing myself; the restrictions on dress and behavior.

In addition, what seems to traditionists to be a pseudo-obsessive interpretation of Halacha – an interpretation taking place, as above, in the mistaken context of obtuseness to the world, and which encourages, in turn, detachedness and aloofness – lights the orthodox in even more negative colors, as people whose lives are empty, and who lack any interest in the goings on of the real, contemporary world.

To traditionists, therefore, the option of becoming orthodox, with all its inherent spiritual attraction, is threatening, and includes a concession of many important elements of life: "The orthodox do not live; other than those who lie, and are only pretending to be orthodox. Being orthodox means renouncing life. They do not feel the people, the environment" (Yair). It would seem that the positive, "total" image of the orthodox makes an appearance here as well: this time, though, not as an ideal of morality and worthy Jewish behavior, but rather as a threat, as a monumental symbol, the awe of which engenders not only respect, but also fear and apprehension. Orthodoxy, with all its good, comes with a price, and that price seems to traditionists to be too steep. This price tag is not only that of the bans and prohibitions, it is also the relinquishing of the definition of the ("modern"?) self by the traditionist as a member of this "secular" world. Thus Ruth, who identified herself as having a very strong faith and as being very observant, explained why she could not be orthodox:

> I was born into secular society. I have one orthodox friend, and my interaction with her is very different from the rest of my secular friends as far as freedom and many other things are concerned. It is the way of life in which I was raised . . . [Were I to be orthodox] I would have to give up many things, and I don't know if I would be able to, not because it requires any special effort; I just don't think it would sit well in my soul, because I didn't grow up like that.

The one word which was repeatedly used in order to describe the orthodox

lifestyle, summing up the traditionist apprehension of orthodoxy, was "coercion". Interviewees reiterated their fear of being coerced – privately – to behave in "orthodox ways", which would conflict with their modern, practical, freer lifestyle. The orthodox way of life thus becomes a constrictive, coercive stock, forcing the individual to live under a set of uneasy conditions. Traditionists also greatly fear becoming a coercive force in the life of others. This is demonstrated in the way that the fear from being coercive enters into Zehavit's definition of her traditionist identity. She explained her reasons for being observant at all:

> In order to give my family that thing connecting them to where they came from. That is, to not be completely detached from Judaism. That to me is traditionism. Beyond that, to cross the borders, that to me is religion [i.e., orthodoxy]. It is too much, to me it is suffocating . . .
> *Q:* Where does the line run between traditionism and orthodoxy? Where does it become suffocating?
> *A:* The coercion – I don't like it. I won't dictate to my daughters how to dress, how to behave, not to drive on Shabbat or not to light a fire, or to go to orthodox schools. These are things in which I will be crossing the line, to coercion – which is unacceptable to me . . . To me orthodoxy is coercion. Because [as an orthodox] you have no freedom of choice.

Ziva presented a similar picture when describing the differences between herself and her orthodox relatives as stemming from the fact that they

> . . . have a dictated way of life . . . there is something a bit coercive there. There are many orthodox that have been coerced. I believe that there are a great many orthodox that, given the choice to leave everything and go over to the other side, would say yes, but lack the courage and initiative to get up and do it.

This point of view paints a negative picture of orthodox individuals as those whose behavior – even if it is correct in a Jewish-*halachic* way – is forced upon them, rather than chosen by them. To traditionists such a concession, giving up independent choice of lifestyle and customs, is both too costly and unnecessary. Thus Meir criticized "some of the ultra-orthodox", who "don't know why they observe the *mitzvot* and why they follow this or that rabbi, and it is simply because there is a brainwashing going on. They don't know what they are doing; they have no freedom of thought."

The instinctive resistance to coercion was especially evident in the statement of Shlomo, who described himself as being "right on the brink of becoming an orthodox man". Coercing one to practice religion, he stressed, "destroys religion, and pushes people away from religion".

In light of this critical position, traditionists can reaffirm their identity when confronted with the orthodox model. They are aware of orthodoxy, know its worth and its difficulties, and choose the practical, freer option, which is at the same time true to its Jewish element. Accordingly, Vered explained why, despite her affinity to and love for Jewish religion, she chose traditionism:

> I don't want to be orthodox. Don't want someone to force me to be orthodox. Me, I'm happy like this . . . I don't want to be orthodox. I don't like the life of the orthodox . . . because I see that everything [in the orthodox life] is not real.

Vered demonstrated the orthodox lack of authenticity using a story about a son of friends who became orthodox, coercing his family to follow suit: he forces his mother to wear a wig, to dress according to a severe code of modesty, makes her buy only meat slaughtered under extremely meticulous conditions of *kashrut* and much more. "If my son were to do something like that, I would kick him out of the house. Nobody will coerce me to do anything. This house is run in this way. If it suits you: welcome. If not – Godspeed."

The traditionist attitude towards the orthodox thus emerges as running the whole gamut from admiration through to aversion and harsh criticism: "The orthodox are more ethical," but they are also "too extreme; I don't want to be pulled into that" (Koren). Tikva managed to capture this complexity in sharp relief. She showed how respect and admiration for the orthodox lifestyle and the values it embodies encounter the fear of coercion and the limitation of personal liberty:

> The orthodox person, to me, is a person with faith in his heart, who believes, who is afraid of God, who wouldn't mess around. That is a better person. We expect this, and mostly I also, so that it is like that. For example, my grandmother: a woman who lived all her life ascetically, only her and God, nothing else interested her. Only synagogue and the home . . . I admire her for that. She is really a good person. She won't gossip or be envious of anyone. The basic things. And that is beautiful. I see it also in my mother, and I think they made sacrifices. I see it as a sacrifice. It is a sacrifice which does them good. In my eyes it is excessive. It isn't any good for me. It disturbs me . . . I think the orthodox lose too much of their independence, but they feel good with it. They choose it. I wouldn't choose it.

Similarly, some interviewees explained the phenomenon of orthodox Jews who decide to abscond from the religious world as a negative step taken as a reaction to the coercion of the orthodox worldview and the obtuseness it breeds. In Karin's words, this is an educational failure:

> It is difficult to take a child and tell him to sit around all day and study the Torah, not doing anything with himself. I think it is a wrong thing to do. A child should learn more things . . . In the end they reach adulthood just to find a certain emptiness . . . They are missing a lot of things; they don't flow along with everyone.

This reference to religious closedness and coercion further emphasizes the significance of the term "comfort", which appears repeatedly in traditionists' descriptions of their choice. As was discussed in Chapter 2, "comfort" is a code word denoting the participation in the contemporary, modern world (even where this participation not "easy" or, indeed, "comfortable"). The orthodox relinquishment of participation in the "normal", "secular" and "contemporary" goings-on in the world is thus seen by traditionists as a costly concession of comfort. This reveals the image of the orthodox life as a "fantastic" (in principle) life of constant nearness to the sacred, yet as impossible (in practice); as being "too hard" since this life requires the sacrifice of "comfort"; that is, it demands a complete cut-off from the secular, contemporary world. See, for example, how Tehila discussed the issue, when dealing with her experience of the orthodox life which included observing the Shabbat bans:

> Shabbat, for instance, is something which chains you down; at first it was terrible [to observe Shabbat]. For someone like me, who is used to going out on Shabbat, it was awful. I would tear down the walls out of sheer boredom.

Even though she ultimately chose to forego these prohibitions, Tehila still deems the orthodox way to be a positive one. "It is an excellent thing," she said of Shabbat restrictions. Koren, who also expressed a great appreciation of the orthodox lifestyle, made clear that it does not, nonetheless, suit him. He articulated this with a clear note of self-criticism:

> I don't know if I would be able to, today, give up my secular indulgence. I do what suits me. I don't know if I could give up football and the beach on Saturday, or observe two weeks of *niddah* [by which the husband doesn't touch the wife for two weeks due to her menstruation].
> *Q:* Were you to become orthodox, would you have to give up on crucial things?
> *A:* Right now I can't say I would give up [on those things] for life. As a young person I wouldn't want to give up those things. Perhaps as a married person. Then you are anyway within a certain framework. As a bachelor I strive to set as few limitations as possible.

Orthodox extremism and dichotomous thinking

One of the arguments repeatedly directed by traditionists against orthodox Jews, and which would seem to serve as a justification of their apprehension of the orthodox world, is the picture of the orthodox as having had their priorities spin out of control, a spin which is embodied by their excessive and unnecessary extremism. This religious extremism repels all non-orthodox beyond the Jewish framework set by them. It is a sort of lack of proportion, which highlights the balance and proportionality which exist within the traditionist choice: in light of orthodox extremism, traditionists view themselves as people who, even where unable to correctly observe all Jewish practices, are able to adhere to an adequate, humane Jewish identity viable under current conditions – something which orthodox Jews, so it is claimed, are unable to do. Some even went as far as quoting the highest sources as saying that traditionism is completely true to Jewish authenticity, much more so than orthodoxy, which, in the name of extremism, loses its affinity with Jewish essence: "Judaism is traditionist by nature. I don't think Abraham the Patriarch was orthodox. The politicization of religion in Israel has made Judaism extreme" (Haim).

In some articulations orthodox extremism is seen as transcending merely Jewish Law related behavior, becoming instead a general trait of human character and religious ethics. This extremism is harmful to orthodox Jews' humanity, twisting their moral standards. Spinning out of proportion with regards to what is commendable and what is offensive, possible, or desirable, right and wrong in the realm of religion seems to project, according to these statements, into the realm of the general human behavior of orthodox Jews.

"The orthodox" is here depicted as a symbolic figure of the Jewish "maximum", which is impossible. If we are to utilize Max Weber's terminology, traditionists expect – even require – of the orthodox that they all be "religious virtuosi" while at the same time perceiving this virtuoso behavior as threatening. The orthodox is at one and the same time the embodiment of the "fully authentic" Jewish life as well as the living proof of the impracticality and impossibility of such a life. Thus the orthodox is transformed into a symbol forbidden from straying outside its confines. One must note that the interviewees do not in any way place blame upon Judaism itself. The "correct" Judaism, they all agree, is the right way of life, the good, the most possible, and most worthy way of life. But orthodox religiosity (which is the only point of reference in this context; in the next chapter I shall delve into the traditionist treatment of Reform and Conservative Judaism) is also a sign of extremism, of being caught up in the opaque web of excess observance, for which the orthodox pay by way of detachment from the "normal", possible way of life, the livable life. Gidi, who described orthodox Jews as living "a life of safeguards and restrictions, set in place to keep out unnecessary temptations", clearly distinguished between orthodoxy, which he was more than willing to criticize, and religion, which is afforded a positive position:

> Religion, according to what I know and believe, is the right thing: it is a wonderful thing; it is a thing which, much as people consider it to be decadent, outdated and so on, is none of them. Quite the contrary: this way of life, especially in matters of education, child education, teen education, proves time and again how right it is to be raised, to live according to values long forgotten by us. Mourned by us.

Religion, Gidi clarified, is the realm of the "ethical", a world guided by authentic Jewish values, promising a better, more correct life. It is religion which allows a man "to be a better person. Better to himself, better to his environment, more 'worthy' in his general being. Simpler, deals with less problems and dilemmas". Yet, with the same breath, Gidi emphasized that orthodox people ("*datyim*", or religious, is the term he used) are no better than others. The reason is their extremism:

> Because, much like the secular, there are probably those who take religion, values, and use them as an axe to dig with, and not in a good way . . . All extremity is wrong . . . Anything which substantially distances you from being close to God is wrong.

Traditionists are also severely critical of what they see as dichotomous thinking – a polarized worldview, which is unable to recognize the shades of gray hidden in a picture cleanly divided into black and white – which permeates the orthodox worldview. In this worldview Judaism is rigidly divided into orthodox (hence, real Jews) and secular (who have long since lost hold of the true content of their Jewish identity):

> The only problem is that they [orthodox Jews] hold themselves apart from the people. That is the problem – their saying, "We represent religion and we know everything better than you, and we will do our thing and you will do what you want." Their leaving the group, their aloofness.
>
> (Liron)

Such rigid, uncompromising thought prevents the orthodox from sensing the subtle nuances that form the fabric of the traditionist identity. Orthodox Jews, several interviewees stated, judged traditionists harshly, much like the secular, for not "going all the way", and not committing to the orthodox lifestyle. Such a polarized worldview simply erases the traditionist alternative.

This worldview is expressed in orthodox Jews' preoccupation with public, external symbols. Their focus on the way in which one identifies oneself, through such symbols ("modest dress" for women and the donning of the *kippa* for men recurred most frequently in the interviews), distorts their perception of the world, preventing them from seeing the true values of the people around them. Thus they can judge their traditionist acquaintances to

be worthless, only because they, their traditionist fellows, do not demonstrate orthodox markings. Dalia and Beni, a married couple, told of a case clearly indicative of this. A work colleague found himself in need of financial aid, and they were happy to oblige. Not long after, that same friend held a social event for a community comprised mostly of ultra-orthodox Jews. Dalia recalled how they judged her by her dress, and found her to be empty of any values despite the fact that she – having donated both generously and discreetly – knew that she was a better person than most of them, who had refused to help their common friend.

> I felt quite clearly that I was looked at with a bad eye, purely because I was wearing trousers . . . There were no explicit comments, but it was obvious that they were looking askance at me. They were whispering behind my back. Staring. You feel like some sort of leper. Like you don't belong; like you are being told: "Understand this, and get out of here."
>
> (Dalia)

Beni explained all the embarrassment and misjudgment as stemming from an orthodox emphasis on outward trappings, and reached the obvious conclusion:

> It is hypocrisy. The way they treated her. And it is unnecessary, and it stems from the outward markings of clothing and so on. That is why we, as traditionists, are opposed to those outward trappings – let them judge a person by her content and essence, not her clothing.

That same dichotomous perception which causes the orthodox to judge the traditionist so severely is what controls orthodox life in general. Traditionists, as we have seen, are hugely critical of it. They see it as distorting the view of the world, making the life of the orthodox intolerable. In light of this polarized perception, the traditionist choice is again reaffirmed as the correct, commendable one. As such, traditionists embody – in practice if not in their guiding principles (as, due to the "flexibility" of these principles, they are forbidden from becoming a religious rule) the correct *religious* alternative. This, for example, is how Tehila explained it:

> The orthodox world is yet to have found itself, and does not yet speak the right religion . . . The right religion must be constructed. The traditionists are the beginning of the correct religion, but, unfortunately, due to pressures from both sides I don't think any of it will last.

This traditionist stance can be summed up with the claim that orthodox Jews' dichotomous way of thinking leads one to exaggerations. The orthodox exaggerate with the prohibitions, exaggerate with the negative attitude towards other Jews, exaggerate with their seclusion and isolation, and exaggerate by turning Judaism into a religion of restrictions and dictations which in turn

cut one off from the normal world. Religious extremism makes Jewish life impossible. This contrasting of the "extreme religious" with other religious Jews (mostly, in the current case, religious-Zionists) serves only to underline their extremism:

> There are the religious-Zionists, who are mellower. I think they are cool. They know how to have fun, to have a good time. I think the more extreme orthodox live in great asceticism. It comes from their faith. It's not good to go all hedonistic with sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, but sitting at home all day avoiding dealing with things which are not the Torah, which is a good and important thing, but . . . you have to enrich the soul also in other places. I'm not saying that those who study the Torah are not smart enough, or don't have broad horizons. But they seem very ascetic to me.
>
> (Ravit)

Extreme religiosity as a distortion of Judaism

This critical stance toward orthodox Jews, which portrays them as having turned Jewish life into a twisted and impossible thing with their fervor to conserve its virtue, is often taken a step further and turned into a blatant accusation of the orthodox having consciously sinned against the original, worthy connection between Judaism and morality. The orthodox, with their extremism, with their polarized thought, with their mountains of pedantic prohibitions placed upon themselves and their surroundings, "forget" the essence of Judaism, and twist it. The price they pay is the loss of the moral path upon which Judaism was supposed to lead them. As the self-appointed representatives of authentic Judaism, the orthodox are more obligated than others to live this model, to embody the Jewish moral ideal. When it is revealed that they do not (and their extremism is to blame for this) they are deemed to be hypocrites.

This criticism is born, as we have seen, from the initial expectation that orthodox Jews will be the model of moral behavior on the inter-personal, social level, as a result of their observance of a Jewish lifestyle: "The mere act of donning a *kippa* and a *tzizit* binds you to a certain norm, a certain behavior" (Kfir), which is more moral. Having elected not to bear these markings, traditionists see themselves as exempt from the strict obligation to observe these behavioral directives: Traditionists forbid the orthodox, or expect the orthodox Jews to forbid themselves, what they, traditionists, allow themselves; Jewish Law is correct, the orthodox are its ultimate representatives, and they should be more committed to it than others. Tikva, telling of her orthodox relatives, who are "betraying" their religiosity – as they act immorally and inconsiderately of others – clearly demonstrated the position by which the orthodox are permitted "no concessions", while she herself "let myself get away with it as a traditionist":

> It disturbs me as I have seen it many times: I see it and am aware of it that the orthodox, much as they are devout, know full well how to cut themselves some slack when they feel like it. I expect one who wears a *kippa* to go all the way with it . . . I expect that if you are orthodox, be orthodox to the end. No dispensations. As a traditionist I let myself get away with it. We let ourselves get away with it because we choose. We are in the middle. There are moments in life, in which we are not completely sure about what we are doing. But with the orthodox we expect them to be [sure] . . . I see hypocrisy and I see a lack of complete faith with the orthodox. I expect them to feel a bit of heavenly inspired awe.

This criticism – in which traditionists expect a higher moral standard of behavior from the orthodox than they do of themselves – might sound to some as though it echoes the male criticism which puts the full responsibility of chastity upon women. And indeed, some of the participants did make that connection. Thus, for example, Tomer, who conveyed his criticism of "orthodox hypocrisy" as part of his description of his intimate relations with girls from orthodox families; he expressed his impatience with orthodox women's excessive emphasis on outward markings, implicitly criticizing the gap between this outward façade and their (im)moral behavior:

> She does everything [in terms of intimate behavior] – she will make out with you in the bus only if it is dark, but when we are near people [she will say]: "Don't touch me." And it is important to her that you wear a *kippa*. That is, she does things that have nothing to do with orthodoxy, and she is more sexual than you, but it is important to her that you put on a *kippa*. It is the external thing; it's a sort of hypocrisy.

Many were inclined to judge the orthodox lifestyle against a measure of "Judaism as it should be". Mostly this means turning to "God's will" as speaking for this Judaism, the "true purpose" of Judaism. In this manner, several interviewees did not hesitate to identify the true intention of Judaism, or "the essence of Judaism", and put it to the orthodox that they betray this essence:

> What is it, all that God said to the children of Israel? What was he trying to tell them? The whole basis is integrity, truth, faith and obedience. These are things that they do not do, all these ultra-orthodox. They hit, they throw stones, they curse.[2] They do everything that is forbidden . . . Religion is both things together – both between man and God and between man and his neighbor; one must do everything in order to combine the two.
>
> (Karin)

This criticism also teaches us something of what can be called "the guiding principle" of traditionist practice: an attempt to preserve the fundamental

core, the meaningful content of Judaism, as compliance with God's will expressed by Jewish tradition. Naturally, then, it would seem that the stacks of prohibitions and *halachic* interpretations are deemed to be a deviance, if not a complete distortion, of this divine will. It is worth repeating that this approach goes hand in hand with the belief in the orthodox interpretation of Halacha as the only legitimate expression of religious Judaism.

Tzipora, who described herself as one who "really believes in God", presented a pseudo-Biblical image which, in her opinion, reflects God's will. She also identified the deviation from it as stemming from orthodox fear of progress. It is this fear which leads orthodox Jews to extremism and isolation:

> I do not believe that God's will is that people wear black all day, cover themselves up and pray. OK, three times a day is normal and respectable, but there are people that get into it, and twenty-four hours a day they are studying the Torah. And the fact is that throughout the Bible our forefathers were great and rich, and had cattle and flocks and didn't sit down all day just to study the Torah. Quite the contrary: they were men of labor. The great rabbis of the past . . . were people who owned businesses and textiles; they were men of trade and profession, not people who sat all day and studied. It's just something which appeared; this fear of secularity and the internet and progress has made people increasingly extreme. I think it put them behind a barricade of "Do not come near", and they make everything more extreme, digging deeper into themselves, something which I think is wrong.

The orthodox are, therefore, deviating from the essence of Judaism. In light of this standard – that is, the preservation of Judaism as a moral way of life based on an unshakable belief in God – traditionists are able to issue a counter call to the orthodox criticism of them, showing themselves to be observant of the essence of Judaism at least as much as is done by orthodox Jews. Ruth, who presented herself as strong and firm of faith, explained the logic behind such a judgment, repeating the criticism which requires the orthodox to be upheld to an especially firm moral standard. Here the context is the sin of lying – regarding cheating on course exams at university:

> I think that in my soul I am much more religious than many orthodox. Strong faith and perspective are more important. I have blind faith and need no proof.
> *Q:* Does this also have to do with being a better person?
> *A:* I'll give you an example: when studying for my undergraduate degree in Jewish studies there were many orthodox, wearing *kippot* . . . In many of the fluency exams we were asked about the Halacha. Everyone copied from each other, but I never did. Nearly every year, throughout my undergrad studies, [orthodox] people would come up

> to me and say how they admired my way of life and my devoutness and strong faith.

Hence, in view of the criticism over the excessive, impossible seclusion of the orthodox, and the understanding that the orthodox themselves are unable to live up to the conditions of moral behavior set forth by Judaism, traditionism is reaffirmed as the correct choice of a Jewish identity: one that is sustainable, while not giving up the essentials of Judaism. In this context one can expresses oneself decisively:

> I do not see myself to be lesser in the eyes of God [than an orthodox], even not than an ultra-orthodox living in Me'a Shearim [a stronghold of ultra-orthodox Jews in Jerusalem]. I think I am better than them, also in my grasp of Judaism as it really should be . . . Everything that has happened to the religion over the 2,000 years of exile is one distortion over another. We, two thousand years ago, when we left here [i.e., the Jewish exile from the Land of Israel], were something completely different, except for the *tefilin*, the circumcision and a few other things. The rest is just hodge-podge . . . In short, so how I see myself: if orthodox means religious, then hell, I am more orthodox than they are, no matter the style.
>
> (Tomer)

This criticism of the ultra-orthodox (on which I will elaborate below) can also be seen as a resolution of the tension, or the paradox, underlying the current chapter: the tension between the perception of orthodox Jews, or the orthodox lifestyle, as representative of a purified core, very moral and positive, of Jewish authenticity, and the apprehension towards the orthodox lifestyle and the presentation of orthodox Jews as failing the mission they have been set, twisting Judaism and living an impossible life of extremism, isolation and exclusion of others. The solution of this tension is the laying of blame on the orthodox – or, to be precise, the ultra-orthodox (as they are "the most orthodox", they are the "the most authentic" but also "the most twisting" of the essence of Judaism) – for the existence of the paradox. Those clamoring the loudest about being "the truest" to that core of Jewish essence are also the ones guilty of its greatest distortion. Thus we are presented with an unrefined historical narrative, the basis of which is: The orthodox or the ultra-orthodox were, in the past, true to the pure core of Judaism, but they drifted away, repeatedly distorting its nature. Moreover, they are blamed for transforming religion as a whole into a socially rejected, feared and avoided thing, one from which the non-orthodox Israeli steers well clear with dread:

> In the past it used to be better. There was a sensitivity and empathy for religion. Today it is exactly the opposite. And that is what makes

> me angry. There used to be respect for religion. [Orthodox] people's ignorance, and the way in which they represented it, has made people hate religion.
>
> (Batya)

The ultra-orthodox (**haredim***) as a negative model*

As I have mentioned above, many of the traditionists interviewed sought to clearly distinguish "religious" or "orthodox" (particularly religious Zionists) and "ultra-orthodox" (often using the Hebrew name *haredim*). This distinction aids them in fine-tuning their somewhat complex attitude towards religiosity: they tend to display a positive attitude towards the former ("Mafdalinicks", "knitted *kippa*", "modern orthodox", "Mizrahi", "religious Zionists" – all those and many others were used as code words in identifying the group), while their criticism of the orthodox lifestyle is amplified tenfold when devoting their statements to "*haredim*". Under this heading, many of the participants did not hesitate to use very strong, negative language, further focusing the apprehensive approach outlined above.

It should be noted that for the most part the traditionist discourse dealing with the ultra-orthodox is in no way a simple replication of the common, popular Israeli discourse – which rejects the ultra-orthodox community as one of threatening, anachronistic draft-dodgers. Even when presenting a distanced, critical position, the interviewees qualified their statements by saying they will not accept what carries a hint of racism against *haredim*. Roni's following statement about the Shas movement is an instructive example of both traditionist criticism of the ultra-orthodox and the traditionist rejection of the racist undertones which sometimes accompany discussions of them in the Israeli public sphere. Roni chose to open with an outright rejection of what he described as "anti-Semitism" aimed at the ultra-orthodox in general and Shas in particular:

> I think it is a very important thing and it is good that it [the Shas movement] exists . . . And I think that the image they were forced into, of criminals and thieves, is in many ways unjustified. It constitutes proper persecution. It is abusive and anti-democratic. It is a combination – they are twice black, as they are both Mizrahim and *haredim*. It should be a warning bell. The reaction to this we can see in Shinui [an Israeli, decidedly secular, decidedly anti-orthodox political party], which is an extreme right-wing party, which would be defined in any other country as a classical party of xenophobes such as the ones of Le Pen, Haider and others. It [Shinui] expresses all the ugly, sometimes anti-Semitic treatment of Shas.

Having clarified that he in no way accepts the racist anti-*haredi* or anti-Shas discourse, Roni, who stated that "I have family relatives who are members

of Shas", turned to his sometimes harsh criticism of those same Mizrahim-*haredim*:

> That is what I think of Shas as a symbol. From that to agreeing with its actions, the distance is great. Many times I disagree with them . . . I personally would not send my children to be educated in schools run by Shas; I think it [the education offered by these schools] is obtuse – there isn't enough general [i.e., "secular"] education. I wouldn't want my child to come out some sort of "Heil Ovadia" [Rabbi Ovadia Yosef is the spiritual leader of Shas]. This is not what is suited to modern life. But it is good that the option exists . . . All the issue of military service really disturbs me.

Much of the interviewees' criticism (most of them, I must reiterate, self-identify themselves as Zionists) is aimed at what is commonly identified in Israeli society as the *haredi* refusal to participate in the State's institutions. Meir exemplified this criticism by distinguishing himself from the ultra-orthodox through their separate value-systems. The values which are important to him, he stated, are:

> Zionism: very, very much; integrity is very important to me; and hard work is very important to me . . . both manual and in the head. I think that is the key to everything. And I think this is where I have criticism for the *haredim*: from the place of integrity, from hard work and from a Zionist point of view. All the things which are to me standards to live by, pillars, they do not exist among the ultra-orthodox.

Generally, the *haredim*, as a sort of symbolic representation of the orthodox Jew who "goes all the way", were used by interviewees as a screen upon which to project and focus their criticisms against the orthodox lifestyle. The extremism, the excess, the obtuseness, and the isolation – all leading to the loss of that essential core of Judaism – were mentioned time and again in the interviews as the sum of what traditionists find distasteful in the ultra-orthodox lifestyle. In this spirit, one of the most common accusations directed at the *haredim* was that of "distorting" the original intent behind the *mitzvot*. As Meir put it: "I don't think they [*haredim*] are observing Judaism. I think they are observing a twisted Judaism."

Similar criticism portrays *haredim* as having used Judaism and Jewish Law as instruments by which to profit. "Commercialization" recurs as a code word encapsulating the interviewees' view of this distortion:

> They take religion and make of it what they want, and our religion is not like that. That is why it looks now the way it does, at an all-time low. They commercialized religion. They find a phrase in the scriptures to suit any nonsense which happens to pop into their head.
>
> (Batya)

As people identified most intimately with Jewish religion, as people who (should) personify the "true essence" of Judaism through its observance, *haredim* are found to have betrayed their calling:

> I want [the secular] to learn. I want them to see what Jewish religion really is. But what [the ultra-orthodox] are doing now is turning Jewish religion into something loathsome. It now belongs only to a certain layer of society, a certain group; all the others are forbidden from touching or coming near . . . Certain people have taken the religion all to themselves, and now they claim it is theirs and they will run it because we don't know anything. (Batya)

The ultra-orthodox "obsession" over a strict and restrictive interpretation of Jewish Law, and an equally strict and restrictive lifestyle, also draws traditionist fire: "What annoys me is the pettiness about nonsense – is it permitted to pick your nose on Shabbat?[3] . . . The attention given to trivia, that is what annoys me" (Roni). This approach is often evident in the realm of the practices that traditionists do observe. The meticulous excess of the ultra-orthodox, the unnecessary and obsessive preoccupation with minutiae and details within the text, and the consequent attempt to enforce this new interpretation onto Jewish practice, interviewees exclaimed, make *haredim* forget the original intent of the *halachic* imperative, and turn them, *de facto*, into transgressors against the Jewish *mitzvot*. Ziva told of her disgust at seeing the filthy water into which the ultra-orthodox put their cutlery and dishes to prepare them for Passover. It is obvious that they achieve no cleanliness of the utensils, this cleanliness which, she stressed, is the real goal of the Passover rituals. By focusing on a specific blessing, and the details of the ceremony, she explained, the ultra-orthodox lose the true meaning of the Passover ritual cleaning. "We traditionists, on the other hand, focus on the important stuff, making sure every pot is shined, pure of even a crumb of old fat or *hametz* [leaven, forbidden during Passover]." Vered, also using the standard of Passover cleaning in order to compare her Jewishness to that of the ultra-orthodox, related what she sees as the *haredim*'s complete lack of respect for the Judaism of non-*haredim*:

> The *haredim*, when do they clean their house for Passover? The same day of the eve of Passover. Us? A month before we start taking the house apart, as if the *hametz* would go into the cupboards or under the cupboards . . . And we start cooking a week before . . . What do I care about him [the ultra-orthodox Jew who would judge her Jewish behavior to be inadequate]? It is enough for me that He who sits above sees it . . . I report only to God.

It seems that the ultra-orthodox rejection and criticism of traditionists (at least as it is perceived by traditionists themselves) stir within the traditionists

the strongest reactions. At the very least it evoked the bluntest rhetoric regarding *haredim* in our interviews. Thus, for example, Vered made a point of emphasizing that her criticism (above) is directed at the *haredim* and not the orthodox community in general: "The knitted *kippa* [marking religious Zionists] – I love them. The Black [*kippa* – marking *haredim*] I hate. Not hate, God forbid, don't like. Why? They are bad. They are bad. I don't like them." Vered's husband, who was present during the conversation, was quick to qualify and soften her sharp tone, explaining that it only stems from the fact that Vered had recently heard of several exceptionally extreme cases in which the traditionist way of life was rejected and scorned by ultra-orthodox Jews. Even if he does not agree with his wife's complete, sweeping rejection he is nevertheless aware of the problem, which he thinks stems from the orthodox failure to observe the religious directives to which they are meant to be committed:

> There are so many people who put on the *kippa* and don't even know how to pray. And they don't pray. And there are people who put on the *kippa* just for the business in their store. That is deception.
>
> (Vered)

Traditionists' image of "the secular"

"The secular" also functions as a powerful ideal-typical image, against which traditionists self-identify. The question of the value of secularity and the place occupied by secular Jews in traditionist life was raised in all of the interviews. These references construct "the secular" as a model of those who have overly detached themselves from Jewish tradition and its associated identity. Traditionists see secular Israeli-Jews as a group who have completely lost any meaningful connection to their collective Jewish identity – its customs, values, duties, and its past and future – in the name of the pursuit of personal liberty. As such they are considered "vacuous", individuals lacking a meaningful content in their life. Many interviewees consider this image to be the absolute expression of personal freedom – both in the positive (as this freedom is seen as enabling the individual to act as he or she wishes) and the negative (as this freedom can easily deteriorate into hedonistic unburdening).

It should be noted that, for the greater part, traditionists live within a secular environment: most of their friends define themselves as secular, they consume a culture which is generally considered to be secular, and the public domain in which they live their daily lives is a secularized domain, at least as so termed by the Israeli popular discourse. In light of this fact it should be rather obvious that the traditionist attitude towards secular Israelis is complex, and cannot be summed up in the stereotypical image which the discussion below may imply.

Interviewees' "natural" vicinity to the secular world encourages them to be more cautious with stereotyping and drawing generalizations regarding secular Israelis. This requires further emphasis: the interviews do show that even

if interviewees believe it would be wrong to speak of a stereotypical image of the secular, they nevertheless seem to share an image of a secular "ideal type", against with they reaffirm their identity. Still, they also know intimately many secular people who do not fit in with this type, hence their sensitivity to – and apprehension of – such generalizations. This "generalized" image plays an important role in the construction of traditionist identity, and there exists a critical dialog between this image and that which traditionists actually know from their friends and surroundings. They know the secular variety and are aware of the complicated sociology of what hides behind the label "secular"; and they adjust their attitude accordingly. Keren demonstrated one such sociological observation, which recognizes that the name "secular" serves a wide variety of non-orthodox Jewish behaviors:

> There are secular people who believe but do not observe the *mitzvot*. There are secular people who observe a small number of *mitzvot* such as the fasting on Yom Kippur, because that is how they were raised – what they got used to . . . There are secular atheists, who do not believe. You can't generalize all the secular people, treat them [as if they were] all behaving in the same way.

It is interesting to note that Keren later also conjured up the image of the "extreme secular": one who is in no way bothered by questions of the Jewish people and collective identity, and as such is "egotistic, who doesn't care a whiff about anything, and is only interested in himself".

Liav, presenting a similar distinction between various levels of secularity, also demonstrated the distinction made by many interviewees between secular "essence", which is distinctly negative, and secular "practice", which is often no more than obedience to current fashion trends, and thus does not merit any special condemnation:

> I think we can divide the secular into several levels: there is the secular who completely denounces everything. He can walk in with a lit cigarette to a synagogue on Yom Kippur, and let nobody tell him what to do . . . He wants to spite; "This is a free country and I do what I feel like." He may be anti-orthodox. There are the secular people running away from religion; religion hurt them in some way, so they are insanely extreme . . . There are the secular who are part of the period; it is fashionable to eat sushi and shrimps, and they are proud to eat [non-kosher] seafood . . . a large part of this is fashion.

Similarly, Tamir described his own social circle as being comprising mostly "totally secular people", who do not care to observe even the most "basic" practices and rituals. He did so after having outlined the division amongst different levels of secular people, identifying his friends' secularity as the most extreme. Tamir also stressed that such extreme secularity is the equivalent of

the ultra-orthodox extreme religiosity. When this extremism reaches the secular, it becomes a threat, equal in its severity to "devil worshiping":

> A guy or girl born in a Jewish home, the parents were probably traditionists who, as the years progressed, declined [in the level of their observance]. Suddenly the children went and joined a satanic cult, or were baptized or became Muslim.

Liora, addressing in her statement one such imaginary "totally secular" person, also displayed the traditionist critical approach to this prototype:

> OK, be secular, do what you want, but on Yom Kippur – show some respect! It hurts me to see that precisely on Yom Kippur they decide to barbecue, decide to travel . . . or have grand dinners. Why? Eat quietly at home. Does everyone need to know that you are eating? They don't need to know you are eating . . . It's disgusting.

As such, the image of the "total" or "complete" secular (*hiloni gamur*) emerges as the binary opposite of the image of the orthodox as one who through the meticulous observation of all the *mitzvot* represents full Jewish authenticity. The secular, in this context, becomes the image of the Jew who has lost his Jewishness, and thus a meaningless person. And, here again, the connection between morality, values and Jewish authenticity is present; the complete abandonment of Jewish (religious) practice is tied in with moral corruption:

> Let's say that being orthodox is to observe *mitzvot* and live up to all the rules dictated by the [Hebrew] Bible, as well as ethical and moral guidelines written in the Torah, and everything connected with that, and being secular is exactly not [all of the above].
>
> (Ronit)

I shall further explore this below. For the time being I will focus on the question of the secular's Jewish identity.

The secular and the detachment from Jewish identity

The detachment from Judaism – from Jewish tradition, to be precise – transforms secular Jews into individuals devoid of Jewish identity; a type of Jew without Judaism, "people not enough in touch with their Judaism" (Sarah), ever in danger of a complete loss of their identity as individuals and members of a collective. Without a traditional Jewish element in their identity – as "the secular person has no connection to tradition" (Koren) – they become people whose life in general is empty of any meaning or content that awards one his or her identity. Underlying this position is the belief by which a Jew

– "by his very essence" – must sustain Jewish content in his/her life, in order for this life to have any content or meaning whatsoever.

Many chose the "absolute" or "extremist" secular as the clearest, most complete embodiment of this image. By doing this they also reiterated the approach which distinguishes between the secular stereotype and the recognition of the sociological-symbolic complexity. After all, the experience of most, if not all, interviewees shows that there are those who identify as secular "and yet" still observe certain Jewish religious practices, and are connected to their Jewish tradition in a way which does not sit well with the extreme image of "the secular". Sigal described the image of the "absolute secular" as that of one who is intimidated by the hefty obligations of Jewish tradition, choosing instead to flee from them:

> "Absolute secularity" is the idea of not being affiliated in any way with something which is difficult and comes from Judaism. That is the image of the total secular. He is afraid of Judaism, of tradition, will not go near it in any way; to him [the Jewish holy days] are only a few days of vacation, with no Jewish markings whatsoever.

In this context, the image of the secular is summed up by the secular Jew's detachment from Jewish identity. As I shall later show, to many interviewees such a detachment from the essence of Jewish identity must necessarily lead to the complete loss of a whole system of values which stems from the fact of belonging to a collective. See, for example, Tamar's explanation:

> I have no specific image of the secular person, other than that he is to me someone who is very removed from religion . . . from his Jewish identity and from his roots . . . I see the orthodox as having many more values than a secular.

Such a total, complete image of the secular as Jews who have lost touch with their Jewish identity and are primarily busy with chasing each personal happiness is sometimes so extreme as to practically void this identity category of any "demographic" content. As some explained, though such an image does exist, there are nearly no people who really match it; there is no one who is "really secular".

Be that as it may, the question which rises in light of this description is whether it would be correct to identify the secular, or at least the "absolute secular", as Jews at all. Put differently, if the symbolic logic presented above is indeed valid, and the secular have lost all relation to Jewish tradition – that which awards content and significance to the life of the Jewish person – would it be right to count them as part of the Jewish people? And if so, based on what? For many of the interviewees the – unfortunate – answer would be that the secular's detachment from Judaism is too great for them to be truly worthy of being termed "Jewish".

It should be noted that these interviewees in fact deem the *halachic* word on the subject of "who is a Jew" to be insufficiently "formal", lacking a practical-essential dimension. To them the question of a person's "technical" Judaism (i.e., the *halachic* rule by which anyone born to a Jewish mother is a Jew) is irrelevant if this identity does not include some positively Jewish content. Interviewees stressed that a person, even if a child of a Jewish mother, cannot "truly" claim to have a Jewish identity if s/he does not charge it with "minimal" observance of ethno-religious practices. As has already been discussed, traditionists see themselves as fulfilling that minimum; herein lies the source of the traditionist questioning of the Judaism, or at least the "quality" of Judaism, of secular Israelis. Roni based just such an opinion on a lofty philosophical authority:

> There is an argument of [Yeshayahu] Leibowitz, which I have found myself contemplating from time to time: he claims that the secular are not Jews; they are spiteful Epicureans. They could be defined as Jewish, as they have been circumcised. There are people who are miles away from anything which would mark them as Jewish. *De facto*, there is absolutely no reason to define them as Jewish. In their case, it is nothing more than a formal definition. I think the limits of true Judaism end with us, the traditionists, those who observe the necessary minimum of Judaism needed in order to define one as a Jew.

Secular Israelis' Judaism is, at best, "a formality", which, lacking any practical content (which is symbolic and ceremonial), is meaningless. At worst, seculars are completely stripped of Jewish identity. Michal presented a somewhat extreme version of this approach. To Michal, who works as a teacher in a public (secular) school, secular Israelis' detachment from the Jewish cultural tradition erases their Jewish identity: "If on Yom Kippur they eat and listen to music, they are not Jewish. Maybe as far as the Halacha is concerned they are Jewish, but they do not know their own culture. That is what distinguishes Jews"; and secular Israelis have lost this distinction. Beyond his "*halachic*" Judaism, a Jew must observe a necessary minimum ("circumcision, Bar Mitzvah, a Jewish wedding, the holy days, and it would be preferable if he keeps kosher", as Michal put it) in order to be truly identified as Jewish. Secular Israelis, by their own self-definition, do not uphold this minimum. Thus they are not to be regarded as Jews, but rather as the lost children of the Jewish people:

> It is a shame about them. I have students [in the school where she teaches] who have no idea what [major Jewish holidays] are. Our tradition is our culture. You won't find an American kid who doesn't know what Thanksgiving is. Here we have many youths who know nothing of tradition. And tradition is culture.
>
> (Michal)

Though this is an extreme version of that position, it must be noted that in its less blunt accounts it is widely accepted by the interviewees. So, for instance, Michal's husband, who was present during the interviews, attempted to soften her decisive tone; secular Israelis *are* Jews, he stated. We do not have the right to strip them of this identity, even where it is obviously very much in need and weak. But even from this softer version it is obvious that he sees secularity as a damaged Jewish identity, as it is lacking that "necessary minimum" of basic practices, which single out a Jewish person:

> I have no problem with a Jew who is not religious, doesn't keep kosher, drives on Shabbat, and does not fast on Yom Kippur. I just feel that it is a shame that he does not accept certain values distinct to the Jewish people, which are what make us unique. But I do not think he is not Jewish. It is the way he chose for himself . . . He was born Jewish, he defines himself as Jewish, he does not pray to a foreign God. Most of them circumcise their children, marry in orthodox weddings. I have no right of conscience to say they are not Jewish . . . If they feel Jewish, if he fulfills his civic duties and respects the Jewish religion I have no problem with terming him as a Jew.
>
> (Tuvia)

Just as traditionists judge themselves in terms of "minimal" Jewish practice, so they apply the same yardstick of observance when they assess secular detachment from Jewish tradition. Ziva, who described secular identity using just such ritualistic and symbolic tools ("the secular will eat pork and sometimes fast on Yom Kippur"), touched directly upon the question of the significance of observance to secular people:

> There are secular people who, in their extremism, actually scorn religion. It does not interest them: they think it is silly to keep kosher and that it is silly to observe Shabbat or Passover, or all kinds of things like that . . . people to whom this holds no appeal. They think it is stupid. People who are really distanced . . . He [the secular] supposedly has no need to uphold these practices. I see the secular people around me; some say it [observance] is silly, and some say: "OK, there is a God, but who says I should do [observe] all this crap?" But I really don't see it that way, I see the beauty in all those things . . . And knowing that you are connected to a certain mentality, a certain way of life: it lets you belong to something. I see in secularism some sort of a disconnected, detached thing.

Ziva went on to explain that, as they do not see the beauty inherent in Jewish custom, secular Israelis become "devoid of any connection" to the Jewish collective, and thus devoid of identity. As people who do not accept the symbolic and emotional logic of observance, they stand before a radical choice, which is ultimately in accordance with the orthodox directive requiring

complete adherence to all of the *mitzvot*. They are incapable of even considering a "milder" option such as traditionism. She explained that the same binary thought pattern which leads to both the secular and the orthodox criticism of the traditionists (that they are "neither here nor there") is what denies secular Israeli Jews the possibility of enjoying their Jewish identity:

> With the secular people I know there is a choice between doing everything and doing nothing. They say: "You are ridiculous, you light [Shabbat] candles and afterwards you drive the car. It is just silly." Yes, there is something silly about it, but it is a way of life with which I am content . . . They have this "either you do [observe], or you don't". OK, but for them the choice does not exist. They immediately choose not to do. Maybe because they do not know the feeling of belonging and identity when you do, so it seems superfluous to them. Maybe if they were to experience even a bit of the feeling of belonging and fun and identification, and this distinction, maybe they would change their ways. Perhaps they are unaware of this feeling.

Within this framework secularity – and especially "extreme" secularity – is revealed to be dependent on orthodoxy for its own self-definition. This is so since the prominent "meaningful" content of this secular identity is focused on the violation of – and transgression against – the hallowed values sacred to orthodox Judaism. Here many of the participants spoke of the "spiteful secular" (*hiloni lehach'is*), who makes a point of publicly breaching the common rules of traditional Judaism. It is blatantly obvious that these "spiteful secular" owe a huge debt to Jewish tradition. Their blasphemous gestures have no meaning if they are not acknowledged by Jewish tradition. (The prohibitions related to Yom Kippur, against which the "spiteful secular" publically and defiantly transgress, appeared time and again in interviewees' descriptions as the most obvious examples of this cultural fact.)

Several interviewees considered the secular problem presented here to be the problem of Israeli culture in general, or rather, the problem of Jewish-Israeli national identity. The dominant, secular-Israeli Judaism, they explained, is lacking the necessary connection to Jewish tradition, and is thus doomed to being a shallow identity, devoid of actual content. In this vein, one of the participants identified an affinity between Jewish identity and meaning and national-Zionist identity and meaning – deeming the secular deficiency to be a Zionist deficiency:

> The secular have a terrible emptiness . . . We are not the People of the Book – we are rubbish, worse than all other peoples – and that is best seen in secular culture. This emptiness, children staring all day at the TV set . . . They have no meaning, the children today in Israel . . . I think their self-expression is poor, since they have no tools. They do not internalize nationalism and the connection to the Land of Israel as I

> think they should. Then they go to the army, so I hug them and love them . . . but they are still incomplete people.
>
> (Tomer)

For traditionists, secular Israelis are simply lacking. They lack a Jewish identity, lack values, and lack the Jewish essence. They do not achieve the spiritual level maintained by traditionists, which is reserved for the latter by virtue of their closeness to the essential core of Jewish identity. It would sometimes seem that traditionists perceive secular life as a life of decadent pleasure-seeking, not leaving any room for the spirituality which comes from the Jewish sense of identity. Revital, who described the secular lifestyle as "very permissive; everything is extreme: the permissiveness, the lack of respect, promiscuity in religious terms, license (*prikat oal*) for its own sake", explained the spiritual dimension of one's connection to tradition – which is missing in secular life:

> The fact is that today there is a great search for spirituality. As far as values are concerned, a kabala lesson, or going to the Wailing Wall, far outweigh listening to music or reading. For example, you could visit a very impressive church or mosque, but if you were to walk into a shack and be told that it was once a synagogue, that is what would move you.

And secular Israelis are devoid of that emotional-spiritual aspect. Thus they do not have the capability to fully appreciate human existence, and are not able to properly enjoy their natural existence. Tehila described this lack by comparing her ability to appreciate the beauty of nature, and the secular unresponsiveness to it:

> When I see something beautiful in nature, and it fills me, it is a spiritual experience. A secular person would say "nice bird" and keep on walking. They take it for granted. They are empty on the inside. They have no answer as to why they are here.

Whether formulated bluntly or implicitly, the danger traditionists see as hovering over secular identity is both private and collective. On the more individual level, as has been discussed above, the problem is one of a loss of personal meaning. On the more general, collective level, the secular detachment from tradition puts Jewish identity in general in danger of dissipation and disintegration. Secular Israelis are failing to fulfill the historical duty which faces all Jews wherever they may be, to preserve their tradition in the name of the preservation of the Jewish whole. It is hardly a surprise that here, too, the connection between Jewish tradition and national, Zionist identity is a very strong one, often considered to be identical:

> Had the people of Israel not observed tradition in the Diaspora, they would have been extinct like the rest of the ancient nations – the Assyrians,

> the Chaldeans and the rest of them. What is happening now is that we finally have a state, and all these seculars come and bite the hand of tradition which fed them. They have no value to tradition. This is very sad for me; it is the end of the Jewish people, if the majority becomes like that. (Michal)

As those who do not adequately preserve their Jewish identity, secular Israelis become a danger looming above the historical continuity of the Jewish people. Interviewees explained that, without the education and Jewish sentiment accompanying traditionism (and orthodoxy), even the most ethical and most nationally committed secular is in danger of losing his commitment and the commitment of his offspring to the Jewish collective. See, for example, Tahel's statement, where he made a point of repeatedly emphasizing the great commitment many secular Israelis do have to the State of Israel (in his interview he identified between this national commitment and the historical commitment towards the Jewish collective), while at the same time expressing his doubts as to the secular ability to ensure the continuity of Jewish identity:

> The problem with the secular way – I mean those . . . secular to whom the country is as important as it is to me – the problem with them is that because they are not part of a pre-constructed value system, it is much harder for them to pass it on to their children. Something which for me, for instance, will be much easier. The problem is with continuity. I don't think I love the country more than someone who is secular. [But] it will be easier for me to pass it on.

The secular world, therefore, is one in which hedonism, egoism, and lack of values stand as constant threats not only to the secular individual, but also to the Jewish nation in general. The national need of individual commitment to the collective is threatened by such an unrestrained pursuit of self-gratification. In a rather cautious wording, Hila explained that we are currently dealing only with a threat, a potentiality, rather than a reality of the disintegration of secular commitment to Israel: "Here [in Israel] they [secular Israelis] are not so egotistical, but that is not because of tradition or religion, it is because of the military, the security situation . . . not because of tradition." Were it not for the security situation, "We would be just like any other country, we would be completely indistinguishable in every way."

Secular freedom and the danger of emptiness

The secular "emptiness" (*reikanut*), with its myriad expressions and formulations, recurred constantly throughout the interviews. Without Jewish identity, meaning and content, interviewees explained, the secular become empty. As I shall elaborate shortly, this "emptiness" is manifested first and foremost in the loss of values and meaning to their life. Secular individuals are dragged

into a pursuit of pleasure while being devoid of moral restrictions, wallowing in worthless materialism. This emptiness is a result of secular liberty. Traditionists see secular life as a life of chasing freedom in order to wallow in it.

It should be noted that the positive aspects of the secular freedom are not absent from the interviewees' assessments of secularity. In this context secularity is grasped as a liberated lifestyle, free from prohibitions, restrictions, obligations, and external dictations. As such, secular identity is a virtual celebration of absolute personal freedom; secularity offers the individual "liberalism, maximal self-expression, ambitiousness, the lack of borders" (Tehila). As I shall discuss shortly, the dominant critical approach to this image, which emphasizes its negative aspect, views secularity as a life of ethical and moral unburdening. But before elaborating on this topic (as was done by practically all of the interviewees), I shall further examine the elements of the positive image traditionists have of secular liberty.

Such an examination shows that, even where traditionists see a theoretical positive aspect to secular liberty, they do not strive to apply that same liberty to their own lives. So it is for Gideon, who was amongst the interviewees who presented a positive image of secularity as a life of limitless freedom. I asked Gideon to outline the image of his "secular stereotype". A secular person, he answered, is a person "without limits": "He does not limit himself. He doesn't have to come back for *kiddush* on Friday night, his wife doesn't have to light the candles [on the eve of Shabbat] . . . complete freedom." Even though a slight tone of criticism can be detected in the above statement, Gideon made sure to stress that "it is not excessive freedom; it is the freedom of the secular", and that secular individuals should not be regarded as "licentious" (*porek oal*). Yet even where Gideon maintains such a positive approach to secular liberty, he stated clearly that it is unsuitable for him: "It is not suitable for me, because it goes against my faith. I believe God exists somewhere and that there is providence." Gideon also emphasized that he does not think secularity carries a moral threat. Unlike some of the others, he does not believe that secular liberty leads to ethical deterioration. He accordingly outlined a model of a secular Israeli Jew who is also a good person:

> I am thinking of a person who finishes his day working in the hi-tech industry . . . goes to sleep for three or four hours, and then takes out of his shed all of the clothes he had collected over the week from all sorts of people, and gives them to the needy. He is a man of grace. He is just as good a man [as non-secular people].

Secular freedom repeatedly returns to the issue of observance. The secular are free from the chains of ritualistic behavior, and it is in that – in the non-observance of the *mitzvot* – that their freedom is expressed. Tahel further explored this notion when he presented secular freedom as ultimately expressed by the freedom to go on trips on Shabbat. To Tahel the "advantage" that secular individuals hold over him, as a traditionist, is that the secular can

travel, uninhibited, on Shabbat. But even this freedom is not as glamorous as it would seem: "The secular conception of freedom is that you choose what to do. There are beautiful things to that, but, of course, it's not all that glamorous. [Yet] there is something to secular freedom which always attracts you."

For Meir, the essence of secular liberty is the freedom of thought, which is more important than the abstract idea of freedom typical of the secular. This freedom of thought, he explained, is also what prevents the secular from falling into the "fanaticism" to which the orthodox sometimes fall. In much the same vein, Ziva described the positive part of secular freedom as the freedom from coercive religious distates. Linor demonstrated the subtlety of this positive image, which in her statement immediately, almost unavoidably, clashes with her awareness of a more complex reality: The secular, she said, are supposed to be freer and less dogmatic, but they are not:

> Intuitively I would say that the secular are more open, have more space for experiences and all that, but I don't think it is true. I don't know who is more closed to whom: religious to secular or secular to religious. Within the secular there is an obtuseness which is very great, a will not to get to know.

The secular obtuseness or closedness mentioned by Linor reflects on the nature of the secular Israelis' choice of their Jewish identity. This argument came up many times in different versions, all of which were aimed at the core of the same reasoning: secularity equals a type of ignorance of one's Jewish identity, a lack of knowledge of and familiarity with Jewish tradition, which are a necessary precondition to a real choice of any sort of Jewish lifestyle. As such, secularity is seen as a "closed option", an identity not chosen by the individual, in much the same way as orthodoxy is forced upon the individual, and unlike traditionism, which is based rather on an intimate knowledge of the competing alternatives.

*Secular "license" (***prikat oal***)*

These and other positive references to secular liberty, however, are just a drop in the ocean compared to the negative allusions, describing secular freedom as uninhibited indulgence, which – in the context of an overall lack of identity – leads almost unavoidably to a licentious moral unburdening and a loss of the moral compass.

Roni, who portrayed a rather critical image of secular Israelis, demonstrated the way in which this negative image is intimately tied in with the notion of emptiness. In fact it would seem that this emptiness is nearly inherent to the secular "essence". This is how Roni described his word associations for "secular":

> Ashkenazi, left-wing, rich, Tel-Avivian, egocentric, hedonistic – more hedonistic than egocentric. I don't think there is a difference in the ethical level between those who are secular and those who are not. I wouldn't tag the secular as "with values" or "valueless", though he will probably be a vacuous person. Actually, that isn't true: I have met many traditionist and orthodox Jews who were very immoral. I don't think the two things are related.

The hesitation in the final clauses of Roni's words, as opposed to the unambiguous decisiveness with which he started, reveals the gap between image-expectations and the actual, "sociological" encounter between traditionists and the complex world of Jewish Israeli identities. On the one hand, this image clearly connects traditionism and Jewish orthodoxy with morality and humanity, while on the other hand the complex reality repeatedly undermines this connection.

Tel Aviv, which Roni mentioned as an expression of secular hedonism, was repeatedly mentioned throughout the interviews as the symbol of Israeli secularity, with all its faults. Tel Aviv here becomes the symbol of detachment and ignorance seen to characterize the secular, at least when it comes to their Jewish heritage. Thus, if "secularity is downright ignorance", it necessarily leads to the favoring of empty Tel Aviv over Jerusalem, which is brimming with content, significance, and Jewish history:

> Once you don't have the knowledge, once you were not raised with the Bible in your hand, with history, then you can really just give it up. You can also give up on Jerusalem; Tel Aviv is enough. What does it matter? In Tel Aviv there are more cafés than in Jerusalem.
>
> (Dina)

Like many other Israelis, traditionists too have their fair share of criticism of Tel Aviv and the pleasure-seeking secularity it signifies. This criticism is nourished by great intimacy and a deep acquaintance with the city – as well as with secularity. Thus Liav spoke of "Tel Aviv . . . or what is known as 'Sodom and Gomorrah' " as embodying the danger of secularity. To him this is the clear threat of moral corruption. In Tel Aviv/Sodom, he explained,

> There is a moral and religious deterioration. Maybe they aren't connected. But you see a deterioration of morals; it is expressed in the behavior. People are willing to undress in order to buy clothes. When you see pictures like that from Portugal, then it is amusing, but how does a father feel when he sees his daughter undressing for a shirt which costs 70 shekel?[4] . . . Everything goes, everything is permitted.

It should be noted that Liav testified to a rather intimate knowledge of the Tel Aviv hedonistic culture, as it is his main haunt on nights out. Yet in his

statement the empty liberty, "that you have no borders", becomes the main, if not sole meaning of secularity. Limor expressed that same idea using the presence or absence of "borders": Jewish practice, or religious observance, teaches one to be cautious and calculated in one's actions. Without it, in a state of absolute secular freedom, humans may deteriorate into animalism. She explained this when arguing that the life of the secular is more comfortable than the traditionist's:

> What they [the secular] want – they do . . . A person needs to have limits. For example, if I have just eaten meat, so to eat dairy I have to wait for six hours . . . This is what distinguishes us from the animals. I have the ability to restrain myself. And if I were to do the whole time only things I feel like . . . you have no limitations.

Secular emptiness is revealed especially when faced with what many interviewees see as the value-oriented morality typical of the orthodox. As I have shown earlier in this chapter, many traditionists hold a popular image of the religious Zionists as embodying an ideal model of all that is positive and moral in Judaism. This image re-emerged when dealing with secular identity. Much as the religious Zionists stand for the required mix of religiosity, morality, and values, so do secular Israelis exemplify this same mix, but by way of lacking all these positive traits. See, for example, Michal's argument, explaining why, in her mind, secularity should be identified as vacuous, promiscuous, and materialistic:

> I'll explain why I say emptiness: I look at the religious youth, the knitted *kippot* [marking religious Zionists]; some of them did volunteering jobs with us [at the school where she teaches] . . . and I see that they have different values. Secular youths have no values. They join Satanic cults, go to discotheques. Very materialistic and vacuous . . . The general rule, the stereotype of the secular, is vacuous.

If traditionist and orthodox value-orientation – that is, the presence of a strong value system that guides one's behavior – is that which lends meaning to a person's life, then the lack of such a value system – i.e., secular emptiness – means existence without meaning. This, for example, is how Zehavit summed up her attitude towards secular Israelis, after making clear her refusal to judge them or require them to change:

> This thing, by which there is neither judge nor jury for anything, it seems very meaningless to me, takes away the interest in life . . . Nothing interests them. It is like only the trivia, the minutiae things [interest them]. They have nothing by which to give meaning to life. That is why they are searching . . . for a meaning for life. This entire thing with going to India, the Far East, the parties and orgies . . . They have no point to life, so they

> look for excitements. Everything has to be exciting . . . The entire secular thing, to me, seems like a person has no point to his life. You get up for work, come back, and so on, day in day out. No Shabbat, no holy days, nothing. He has no break from his life. Not a thing. At a certain point a person is doomed to crack. He suddenly sees himself as void, empty. This is where traditionism, Judaism, gives you some meaning to life, fills your life with something . . . Listen here . . . the secular have a serious problem. They are empty, vacuous. I think that if one does not know one's own tradition, it is a terrible thing. There is no meaning to his life.

A similar description of the negative stereotype of the secular, also emphasizing excessive liberty as a harmful trait, stands out, coming, as it does, from an interviewee who was raised secular, and works as an educator in a secular institute:

> Everything is blown wide open, everything is permitted, over-democratized, lack of discipline, lack of order and organization, no guiding hand. An exaggerated representation of the "I" from a very young age, over the top individualization . . . no fear of God, so everything is allowed.
>
> (Bina)

In some statements, secularity becomes negative by essence, as it is nothing more than anti-religion. Some interviewees saw no positive aspect in secularity whatsoever, even while stating that many secular Israelis are indeed people endowed with very positive values. Secularity itself, they explained, is simply an identity based on the negation of the (religious) "other", and as such has no positive, independent facet. Hence Liron described the secular archetype as "one who retains nothing of the Jewish markings, and does so on purpose . . . anti-religious . . . There is nothing to it, really, to secularity. On the extreme side, it has nothing." Liron, like many others, made sure to stress that "a secular person can be a good person", but as he considers religion to be an element which practically by nature "leads to a better sort of behavior", he concluded that secularity is empty. Facing this vacuous category of identity, Liron sees himself as leading a traditionist life full of meaning, without having to forego freedom: "I live it [secularity], and I live the other side, the good things that come with religion."

From their intimate knowledge of what they consider to be unbridled liberty bordering on emptiness – and thus also lacking any meaning or identity – interviewees identify their traditionism as an identity of duty, which is that which lends it significance. Batya demonstrated how traditionists self-identify in opposition to this image of liberated secularity. Secularity, she clarified, is a lifestyle of choosing the comfortable and the easy:

> It is very easy not to separate the dishes [into dairy and meat]. It is very

> comfortable not to have to look for a kosher restaurant; it is very easy not to have to celebrate all of the holy days, to eat bread on Passover . . . I don't want that [secular comfort]. I don't want the liberated and free. It doesn't suit me; it's not me . . . They [the secular] are not Jewish enough. They are Jewish by virtue of being born to a Jewish mother, and that is it. What about deeds? I don't want only headlines . . . I want things in earnest. What you do. All of Judaism is *mitzvot* – things you should do. Judaism is in the actions. Judaism is a religion of lots of actions, and for many people that is uncomfortable.

Faced with this image of secularity as a void, traditionists believe they benefit from a rich system of values and content thanks to their observance of tradition, something which is missing in secular life. As such, traditionists become the objects of secular envy:

> Many secular people would like to have more tradition in their homes. They also would like to sit down with the family on the eve of Shabbat . . . they are jealous of the traditionists who can afford to be with their family on Friday nights, but they [the secular] cannot make the sacrifice required to be a traditionist, giving up some of their habits.
>
> (Tuvia)

The centrality of the family was one of the values most prominently raised as dominant in the traditionist life while being perceived as lacking in the secular one. If traditionism is seen as preserving and conserving family and spousal life (see Chapter 6), then secularity – seen as promiscuous, hedonistic and vacuous – is a constant threat to those same things. Thus, if in orthodox and traditionist life "the priorities are different – home, family, children, spouse come before anything else" (Revital), secular Israelis demonstrate the extreme fragility of these values. An interesting articulation of this attitude was presented by Ruth, who told how her choice of social and sexual conservatism was regarded by her secular environment as primitive. Her reaction to this judgmentalism was rather blunt:

> Secular culture is bankrupt. A vacuous culture without essence . . . Very inane, lacking any essentiality, unbridled sexual promiscuity . . . Chasing pleasure . . . There are secular people who are moral . . . who have borders. But less so than the traditionist, because the traditionist always senses that God is watching over him. The secular is more impulsive because he has no fear of God.

In place of the family centeredness and the social-sexual conservatism associated with it, there comes in the secular world – according to most of the interviewees – an unrestrained pursuit of personal happiness often accompanied by uninhibited sexual promiscuity. In this context secularity is

transformed into a synonym for excessive sexual openness, almost condemned to become complete sexual anarchy. As has been mentioned, traditionists emphasize that they are drawing these conclusions based on a close acquaintance with the secular world. See, for instance, how Ronit described the school in which she used to study as a distinctly secular arena, in conflict with her traditionist values: "There was there [at the school] an air of promiscuity, too open and free, no limits, you can wear anything, even when it is too short. But it didn't affect me or scare me. Because my home is traditionist." This is also how Liora explained that, even though the secular "can be morally saintly people", it would still be true to say that if a person does not observe *mitzvot* and has no fear of God, then s/he is destined to be more self-centered, and less aware of her/his social surroundings: "There is nothing in front of you; you can do whatever you want. People like that do whatever they want."

The most extreme expression of the traditionist criticism of the secular world is the portrayal of the secular emptiness as leading to moral unburdening and complete corruption of ethics and values. This has already been hinted at in the quotes given above. The common connection made between morality and religion is in force here as well. Even though many interviewees reiterated that religiosty does not necessarily guarantee higher morality, and that one can find good and bad people on both sides of the secular vs. religious axis, here too the expectation, or dominant image, is indeed that which associates morality with religion: the secular are regarded as always being on the brink of moral deterioration, as they are not well enough acquainted with religious tradition. The point of departure, therefore, is that "anyone you ask what is the good, would say that it is actually what the *mitzvot* represent. There is no contradiction between the *mitzvot* and the good" (Batya). It is thus obvious that the chances of a secular person, who is not observant, to be a good person are lower than those of other, observant, people:

> Because the *mitzvot* are a sort of framework; when everything is breached, why would I care? What difference does it make? So I stole a little . . . The second you have that frame of the *mitzvot*, it's like having someone telling you: "Wait a minute! Don't do that because it isn't good." But those who have no faith and no religion, there is no one in their conscience to warn them . . . By my definition, a secular person is a person who obeys no God . . . That makes them more licentious, but that is a crude generalization. It also has a lot to do with individual morals and personality.
>
> (Batya)

The picture becomes even bleaker when it turns out that the secular unrestrained pursuit of momentary pleasure is, in fact, based upon a false promise of happiness. As Hila – herself the product of a secular home – explained, secular people "live a lie":

> It isn't real. This perception that "everything was created for me and I am the king" is a faulty perception. Terrible egoism. Emptiness . . . It is a less social life, each one to oneself . . . Secular people take it to the extreme, stepping on each other. Everything only for me.

As could have already been deduced from the various remarks above, many traditionists consider the belief in God – or more precisely the divine awe, the fear of the all-seeing, examining eye of God – as one of the most fundamental differences distinguishing them from secular Israelis. The secular, they repeatedly stated, have no divine awe: "They do not have that fear – at least that is what they themselves say. They have no God" (Koren). Some of the participants even regarded the belief in God – or lack thereof – as a defining criterion of secularity. Divine awe, they repeated, is what prevents a person from becoming hedonistic and egotistical, a nihilist preoccupied only by the need to fulfill her/his own needs and wishes. Fear of God guarantees not only the minimal observance of the *mitzvot*, but also – and more importantly – the preservation of certain moral and ethical standards regarding one's social life. Stripped of this belief in God and fear of Him, the secular become valueless individuals, indifferent to their human surroundings. Baruch demonstrated the use of such a standard in order to distinguish between traditionist and secular Jews:

> The secular, to me, is one who does not acknowledge God, or acknowledges Him only partially. It is fine by him not to pray, it is fine by him to smoke [on Shabbat]; he doesn't give a hoot about anything. He has no values. A traditionist is one who respects God, fears God, but does the maximum possible, without making an effort.

Traditionist closeness to "the secular"

The comparison between "the secular" and traditionists does not underline only their differences and distance from each other. As I have mentioned earlier, to an overwhelming majority of the interviewees secularity is the closest, most significant social and cultural circle. Traditionists identify secularity and construct its image – both positive and negative – out of great proximity and intimacy. In fact, many interviewees describe how they are often forced to deal with a recurring demand that they self-identity as secular; after all, within the binary division of orthodox vs. secular they are "clearly" not orthodox (they refuse to bear the outward trappings of orthodoxy, nor do they define themselves as such); moreover, their experience teaches traditionists that many secular people do observe, albeit in a limited fashion, some of the *mitzvot*, much like themselves. Koren eloquently described the "presumption of secularity" he encounters due to his outward appearance: "Many people say I am unrepresentative [of traditionists], because I have the outward appearance of someone who is completely secular; jewelry, long hair, earrings, Ashkenazi look."

Tamar suggested defining this vicinity between secular and traditionists in terms of "horizons" of identities, which in turn can help to explain the variety of Jewish identities in general: "There is always some sort of horizon. I am a traditionist in an orthodox horizon. There are secular people in a traditionist horizon and secular people in an epicurean horizon." Based on this, she explained, one can identify not only the myriad secular identities, but also the traditionist approach to them:

> There are secular people who are really sacrilegious, and there are secular people who are more attached to tradition. If you told me to choose sides between religious and secular in an absolute manner, I would lean towards the side of the orthodox.

Put differently, the difference between traditionists and secular Israelis is defined in terms of guilt: both groups behave similarly by being lenient with regard to the observance of Jewish (religious) practice, but only members of one of the groups – traditionists – are aware of it and agonize over it. Such reasoning exposes not only the similarity between traditionists and secular Israelis, but also highlights the complexity of the relation between the two groups: traditionists feel close to the secular, envying what they perceive to be a feeling of wholeness and consistency, while at the same time they have reservations about and are critical of the weakness of the secular's Jewish identity and its shallowness. Tehila, whose forceful criticism of secular Israelis was quoted earlier in this chapter, displayed this complexity when discussing her intimate closeness to the secular social scene. The explanation she offered for this proximity touched mainly upon issues of cultural and social capital:

> Someone secular is someone who is perceived by himself and by the orthodox as progressive, western. And the orthodox are seen as antiquated. Traditionists would like to belong to the secular group. I observe tradition so that my children will know what Passover is, but, when you get down to it, I want to be with the winners.

Tehila explained the difference between her and her secular friends, so close to her in behavior, as something connected with her sense of guilt for not properly observing Jewish religion:

> I am really not too far away from secularity in the practical things that I do. The temptation [of secularity] is that you don't have to think before everything you do: I feel like it – I do it . . . I am not tempted to be secular, because I am not so far from it . . . I feel guilty, and that will never quite leave me. I think that they [her secular friends] live their life without asking if it is OK.

In such a complex situation, the sense of traditionists' proximity to the

secular is also used to justify the distinction between the two. This is how Tamir explained why he is not at all attracted to the secular life:

> I don't know if I could live like that [as a secular] . . . But what is the difference between us? That he keeps pork in the fridge and I don't? There is no difference, because much like he goes clubbing, I go clubbing and to cafés.

The discussion of traditionists' image of "the secular" would be incomplete without reiterating that many of the interviewees stressed that, despite an agreed expectation for a correlation between religion/tradition and morality/values, many secular people are good, moral, and normative people, "even though" they are totally non-observant. To a large extent, such a clarification by the interviewees reveals not only the complexity of their relation to secularity, but also the depth of an expectation of the existence of a correlation between religion and morality. The reality of secular people who are also good and moral people seems to clash with an opposite presupposition. Keren, for instance, made clear that there were "traditionist seculars":

> I have encountered very moral and honest secular people who came from very good homes. There are secular people who eat pork on Shabbat, even on Yom Kippur, but their parents raised them beautifully. They were raised honest, with values; moral, with a good head on their shoulders.

Keren, it appears, was surprised to encounter secular morality: "My expectation was that they [secular people] would have less values and morality, but there still are . . . I met with this surprise four or five years ago." She also insisted on delineating the limits of her proximity to secularity: even if her social surroundings are distinctly secular, her partner could never be like that:

> It isn't important to me whether my friends are irreligious, as long as I can connect with them. I can relate to them as long as they are good people. I don't care about their attitude [towards religion] . . . I can also appreciate secular friends. But they will only be my friends and never my partners. For myself, I want a different kind of spouse.

8 Rabbis, *halachic* reform, and the non-orthodox movements

Traditionists' attitude towards rabbis and their position on rabbinical authority in their private lives have captured the attention of various speakers and writers. These have mostly focused on what they have described as the unique authority conferred upon rabbis by traditionists. They describe traditionists' acceptance of rabbinical authority as a remnant of pre-modern culture which, alongside other elements, inhibits traditionists' progress towards modernity.[1]

This current chapter will attempt, initially, to examine in depth some of the major components constituting traditionists' attitude towards rabbis. As I shall attempt to show, it is a far more intricate relation than the commonly held, one-dimensional image which presents traditionists as accepting rabbinical authority out of some sort of instilled "pre-modern" reflex. The first part of the chapter will illustrate how traditionists show a basic respect for the rabbis, while maintaining a healthy distance from them. Interviewees were not afraid to criticize rabbis openly, demanding what traditionists deem to be the right behavior and correct function for a rabbi – a standard which, unfortunately, so they stated, does not always characterize rabbis.

The first part of the chapter will, therefore, discuss the limited though significant place awarded to rabbis in traditionists' lives. I shall also deal with what traditionists deem as the right way in which a rabbi should execute his authority. The section will investigate the harsh criticism traditionists have for the performance of orthodox rabbis, and their reservations, often extreme in nature, about the rabbinical establishment. This criticism is further focused in view of traditionists' belief in the necessity of certain *halachic* reforms. The nature of these desired reforms and their implication for orthodox rabbis will also be discussed. In light of these issues, the traditionist attitude towards rabbis and the rabbinical establishment is revealed to be a failed hope for a Jewish-religious leadership which is both and at the same time conservative and modern. This section highlights the viewpoint of a sympathetic, though not inherently committed, audience, regarding rabbinical authority. As such, the following discussion can shed some new light on the potential, proper role for rabbinical authority in a modern, secularized world, which does not accept this authority as a natural given.

The second part of this chapter will examine traditionists' attitudes towards

what can be identified as (especially in a non-Israeli Jewish context) the dominant alternatives to the orthodox rabbinate – i.e., the Conservative and Reform movements. These attitudes appear to be essential for the understanding of traditionism, as they underline the limits of the demand for *halachic* reform, as well as traditionists' unequivocal rejection of a pseudo-*halachic* legitimization of a "partial" observance of (religious, orthodox) Jewish practice.

Traditionists and (orthodox) rabbis

How present are rabbis in traditionists' life? How often, if at all, do traditionists turn to rabbis – to take their counsel, or to ask for advice, guidance, or blessing?

Our interviews clearly show that traditionists seldom turn to rabbis. Generally speaking, one can say that approaching rabbis does not present itself as a major element, nor a secondary-yet-significant element within the daily life of the average traditionist. Traditionists respect the rabbis and ascribe no small importance to their role within the Jewish community, but they do not make the rabbis a prominent component of their personal lives. Few participants had attempted to approach rabbis, and they had come to understand that such a contact simply did not suit them. Others told of a distant acquaintance with the rabbinical world, through friends and family. The majority had never come in close contact with rabbis, and said they have no intention of doing so.

Granted, those interviewees who said they do not turn to rabbis did not immediately reject the option of doing so in the future. Ravit, who never addressed a rabbi, explained that she does not rule it out, as "I don't know where life will take me and what may happen . . . I don't rule it out." Yet, until such a moment should arrive, if at all, Ravit sees no room for rabbis in her life: "At present I see no one who could suddenly save me, or something like that." Similarly, Tamar discussed the relatively low position of rabbis within the hierarchy of religious authority in her (personal) Jewish life:

> First of all [if in need of advice] I would ask my mother. First thing, before going to any sort of rabbi. If I were to run into a really rabbinical question which is truly important, and I would not know how to act, I would ask the rabbi. But I am not looking for some rabbi to control my life, truly not.

A similar tone was adopted by Tikva, who described her rare consultations with rabbis as "stemming from a need". She compared the role of rabbis in her life to the position occupied by God in it:

> I know many people who turn to God when they are in need, not on a daily basis. I turn to God on a daily basis. To rabbis, people who are like

> the agents of God, I went as need dictated. Today, upon reflection, I think I would not go again . . . Rabbis have no place in my daily life.

The proper role and performance of the rabbi

What, therefore, is the proper role of a rabbi, in a world in which his authority is thus limited to start with? Interviewees, so it seems, have quite a well-rounded, clear idea as to the appropriate position of rabbis in both their private and public lives. This role could be summed up as "guides and counselors". A rabbi, they repeated, must serve as a counselor who does not impose his opinion. He should give advice and offer the correct path (in his opinion), while sketching the plan for its achievement, but he must never dare impose it upon his audience.

Two relevant images recurred within the context of the discussion about the position of the rabbi in the private lives of traditionists: the rabbi as a doctor and the rabbi as a psychologist, to whom one turns when one feels amiss, be it in body or in soul, asking for professional help in order to heal and fix that which requires fixing.

> All in all it is the same as a doctor. It is a person here to help you, give you some advice. He knows more than you on matters of religion and *mitzvot* and you turn to him for a consultation, or alternatively he gives you a remedy and tells you what to do with it in order to get better.
>
> (Roni)

To begin with, what is at issue here are not repetitive, continuing encounters with a rabbi, but rather "ad hoc" occasions of such encounters. Those who do choose to approach rabbis for such consultations and spiritual-psychological support do so only in a moment of need. Moreover, much like with medical doctors, sometimes the encounter itself and the professional discourse are sufficient, and there is no real need for an actual medical action. Furthermore: the comparison between doctor and rabbi doesn't necessarily imply equal professional knowledge, each in his own field. Many interviewees avoided portraying rabbinical wisdom and knowledge as representing an absolute, unambiguous truth, emphasizing the psychological component of rabbinical guidance: "So even if what [the rabbi] says is false . . . he still gave you the good feeling. He is like a father; you hear his advice, you think what he says is true, you feel good with it, and you feel secure" (Roni).

Indeed, the comparison of the rabbi to a psychologist – as one who offers emotional support and encouragement for the troubled individual, even where he is unable to actually resolve the situation – was one of the most common images brought forward in the interviews. Ronit, seeking to explain when and under which conditions one turns to the rabbi, described it clearly:

> It is nice that you have what to believe in, what to hold on to, that there is

> hope. I don't know if there is really anything to it. In moments of distress I would turn to the rabbi just to talk, in order to know that there is someone who is listening to me. I don't know if he could really help me, but it is fun that someone gives you a solution; perhaps not a solution, but more a kind of help. It could also be a therapist, but because of faith, a rabbi can help.

It is hardly surprising that this fits in well with a "new age" trend of spiritual guidance. Tamar, who does occasionally turn to rabbis in order to receive their blessings, explained that such encounters, whose purpose is mystical, are devoid of any true, "hard" meaning. This is opposed to her encounter with a certain orthodox woman, who serves as her spiritual counselor:

> I go to her occasionally, when things are difficult, too heavy to bear, when I need to be directed and guided in all kinds of subjects – so I turn to her. She is really a sedative, equal parts rabbi and psychologist . . . There are situations in which you arrive at a sort of labyrinth, and you want some advice: you want to know what to do with it; you are at a junction and are looking for someone to help you, and that is how I got to her.

Much like the physician or the therapist, it should be reiterated, the rabbi must wait to be approached, and not be the one to initiate the encounter. A rabbi also should not interfere personally in order to make sure that his advice is being followed through by the seeker of the advice. Were he to do that, he would be committing one of the gravest sins to traditionists – the sin of coercion. The rabbis' authority, therefore, is limited and dependent upon the consent of the traditionist to bow to it. As was clarified by several participants, the individual turning to the rabbi is the one awarding him the authority, and thus also the one to set its limits. This is how Tamar emphasized the limitations on the authority of the woman with whom she consults: "What is authority? I can always take, or not take to heart what she tells me; she has the position of an advisor."

On the public, collective level, the rabbi's role is to delineate the correct path of Judaism. He has to be a guide and role model for an authentic, correct, and commendable Judaism. He must create out of what many traditionists (as well as other sectors in Israeli society) see as a convoluted and impractical set of rules, something accessible and coherent.

Most of the interviewees, even those who saw no place for rabbis in their private life, agreed that rabbis have an important public role. Thus, for example, Roni (after having made clear that "personally, I am not seeking a shepherd or a guide"): "I think [the rabbi's] function is . . . outlining the direction in which Judaism is to evolve. I don't think he has a role which relates to me as a person. He has an obligation towards the community . . . laying down the directions of development." Revital, who was amongst the

few who do, on occasion, turn to rabbis ("I go when I feel like it. He serves as a therapist," she explained), described the rabbi's role as making Judaism accessible to those who are not orthodox. She was very positive in her description of the way in which a rabbi sets about doing that:

> He [the rabbi who performs his job well] reads out loud parts of the *ketuba* [the Jewish contract of marriage, traditionally written in Aramaic] in Hebrew, so that everyone will understand. He uses loopholes in order to make it easier for us. He enables the woman to give a ring [in the engagement ceremony, a practice usually reserved only for the groom]; he gives us a feeling of fun.

The identification between rabbinate and orthodox religiosity

All of the interviewees agreed that in order for a rabbi to be able to adequately fulfill the role of outlining the correct path of Judaism, embodying it as a role model, the rabbi must be orthodox. He must observe Judaism in its most meticulous and severe version, displaying that "religious virtuosity". One could say that this condition is that which distinguishes between the rabbi and the psychologist. See, for example, how Liat explained why she thinks that a rabbi must be a strictly observant orthodox person:

> Because he is called a rabbi. Were he just a psychologist, he wouldn't have to be religious. But if he is a rabbi, he has to be religious. He is a teacher of religion. As far as I am concerned he has to be orthodox.

Several interviewees do indeed see "rabbinate" and "orthodoxy" as synonyms: "Because he is a rabbi. A person, who is a rabbi and was ordained as such, must observe 613 *mitzvot*. That is how it seems to me" (Tikva).

The identification between Judaism and religiosity/orthodoxy thus gains momentum in this context. The rabbi, as a representative of authentic Judaism, must also correctly represent Jewish religiosity:

> [The rabbi] must be an example for the way in which a devout Jew lives. That is for sure. That is the role of the rabbi . . . A rabbi must give the most real, the most tangible example in every way regarding religion. Of all the values, all the customs, all the *mitzvot*. That is a rabbi to me.
>
> (Liora)

As one who holds a symbolic position – serving as a model of correct Judaism, a model of the way in which authentic Jewish life is to be lived – the rabbi is compelled to behave in a representative fashion: "It is sort of something he must emit. That is, he must be orthodox. It fits. He emits that by virtue of his power, authority, position, and obligations" (Ziva).

In this vein, virtually all interviewees agreed that a rabbi cannot be

traditionist, living as they do, without observing all of the *mitzvot*: "No, there is no such thing [as a traditionist rabbi] . . . A rabbi cannot be traditionist" (Liora); "I come to him with questions, so he has to be more than me" (Tehila). Liora even told of rabbis she knows who lead a life similar to that of traditionists, "but that is not a rabbi to me. They define themselves as rabbis, but I do not accept them. That is not serious." It is due to this same symbolic logic that all the participants agreed that a rabbi could be neither a Conservative nor Reform Jew (I shall further explore this below).

Several interviewees explained that the fact that some people do turn to the rabbi for advice, deciding to involve him in their lives, is what forces the rabbi to maintain at all times that perfect façade of orthodox Judaism. He is compelled to do so by anyone who would turn to him for advice. Ziva's following comments, testifying to this position, are instructive also because she makes a point, like other interviewees, of distancing herself from the rabbinical sphere of influence, while at the same time requiring of the rabbi religious virtuosity in the name of that same influence:

> For many people [the rabbi] serves as an example . . . You are a rabbi, and you have an influence over people's lives; I personally may not be influenced and do not follow his example, but there are people who listen to what [rabbis] say, and do what they say, and try to imitate their way of life. If you are in a position to influence the life of a group of people, you have to be a role model.

The limits of being a role model should also be clear. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that a rabbi must not try to force his Jewish, correct, total way of life upon his audience:

> He must serve as an example. The people – how they would imitate him, and what they would do of what he does – that is something else; that is each to his own. But [the rabbi] must provide the full example.
>
> (Liora)

The limits of rabbinical authority

As can already be deduced from the above statements, the call for the rabbi to avoid coercion was one of the most prominent, consistent, and adamant demands expressed by interviewees. Coercion is perceived to be wrong and ill-suited to the world of Jewish identification. The latter must come from one's free will, and not from a duty imposed from without. "It should come from the heart. Not by force. The second it becomes coercion most of these things don't work out well" (Liora). Liora also said that she wishes to "strengthen", and that any sign of coercion on the part of rabbis is what deters her, further distancing her from becoming more observant.

Interviewees demand that rabbis acknowledge their Judaism and respect it,

even if it does not meet all of the strict orthodox *halachic* codes of conduct. The role of the rabbi, they explained, is to be himself a role model of correct Judaism, and to respect and accept any Jewish individual, even if this individual does not live up to that same demanding model. Baruch, who was one of the more decisive articulators of this position, also demonstrated the great caution with which most demands and criticism set to the rabbis is worded. Baruch wished to compare the rabbis he encounters at present with those who used to live in his community in the past. The latter, he recounted, never rejected any Jew: "We had rabbis who radiated the divine presence . . . [They] would sit with you – even though [the rabbi] knew that you are secular, or that you smoke on Shabbat – and respect you nonetheless." They did this, according to Baruch, because they intended to bring all Jews closer to tradition gently, in a moderate fashion, without any coercion. Compared to them, present-day rabbis are characterized by intolerance, distancing themselves from anyone who does not lead a life as strict as their own, and do not hesitate to criticize and reject outright non-orthodox Jews' behavior: "Instead of smiling, [the rabbis] curse, and you can see the hate written all over their faces."

Rabbis' readiness to criticize other Jews' lifestyles, and the estrangement and division caused by this criticism, are seen by traditionists as a serious transgression. The fact that there is amongst the rabbis themselves much strife, tension, criticism, and mutual rejection (on either personal backgrounds or association with certain movements and different schools of thought) is also seen by traditionists to be a severe violation of Judaism's most basic rules, namely collective unity and mutual responsibility. See for instance Gidi's statement, explaining why his general attitude towards the rabbis is characterized by hesitant reservations:

> It is hard for me to witness a person not accepting [the adage] "All Jews are responsible for each other." Whether you are religious or not. To see the way one person slanders the other, how they don't respect each other. It is one's right to live as s secular, just as it is his right to live as an orthodox. So I do not enter into the narrow points of conflict which exist anyway, because who am I to resolve these problems? But "live and let live", that is how it should be, more or less, to me.

As far as Baruch is concerned, this behavior by the rabbis is such a gross deviation from the correct path of Judaism as to be worthy of divine sanction: "[The rabbis] live apart, outside the people, and they will be punished for that, [from] above."

In this context, there emerges an image of religion as an area saturated with power and potency, and the rabbi – as a formal, authoritative representative of this Jewish religion – is expected to know how to use this power with caution and moderation. He must never force this power, nor use it in order to threaten his audience. The correct way to represent Judaism, interviewees

explained, is through the correct management of positive public relations, rather than through scare tactics: "All those [rabbis] that threaten me that I go to hell. That is not the way . . . I have enough of my own guilt feelings; I don't need you to burn me in hell for that" (Tehila). As one who deals with psychology, a rabbi should know better than to threaten the souls of those who turn to him:

> In these situations I am scared of myself; there is an aspect of fear to religion. I am afraid that in matters of religion I will begin to fear all sorts of things. It is sometimes better not to hear something, in order not to know it. It is better to not know and stay naïve.
>
> (Liat)

Instead of this menacing use of the power of religion, Karin suggested the constructive, positive, therapeutic method that the rabbis should use:

> I have this message to the rabbis: you want me to light candles on Shabbat? Do not tell me that if I do not light candles on Shabbat, Sunday will be a dark day for me. Tell me that I will be illuminated, and that this illumination will give blessing to my children, and that it will only do me good [if I do light the candles]. [Tell me that] this light will provide illumination for the whole week and for the whole month. All those things – I really would enter into this world. But if he [the rabbi] darkens the day, I will retreat into myself and think of that fear; it does not matter if I do or don't light [the candles on Shabbat]. I think that the rabbis should come to us from a positive direction.

The demand for the separation of the rabbinate from politics

The worst, most significant sin that a rabbi could commit – as far as the interviewees are concerned – is the mixing of politics with the rabbinate and religion in general: "The connection between religion and politics is the source of all evil" (Gidi). Interviewees repeatedly protested against rabbis' intervention in politics and the transformation of the rabbinate into an instrument for the amassing of power and wealth.

According to the majority of the interviewees, such a mingling of the rabbinate with politics is a grave offense against the true, profound meaning of the rabbinate and of the religion it claims to represent. The rabbinate is more sublime and purer than political activities, seen as earthly and dirty, and any combination of the two, explained the interviewees, is harmful to the rabbinate: "There has to be a complete separation between the rabbinate and politics. Politics is a very dirty thing" (Koren).

> [The rabbis] were destined for something else . . . I don't think you should involve it [the rabbinate] in politics at all. Faith is within the person;

> [the rabbi] should care for the person's soul. Not to which school I go, not how my bus will look.
>
> (Hila)

These and similar comments refer to that fundamental traditionist distinction between the personal/private and the collective/public. Judging from a number of statements it appears that rabbis should be in charge of the spiritual realm (which, at bottom, is inherently personal), and steer clear of the public domain, which is inherently involved with politics and is stained by it. This is true even where interviewees understand the full complexity of the situation, in which the rabbi fills a distinctly representative leadership position (as they themselves demand that he does). Hila, who had actually emphasized the public aspect of the rabbi's responsibilities, also set very clear limitations on the way in which he is to fulfill that role: "Without it touching upon politics – lest he become a politician." Similarly, Roni made clear that he fully accepts the rabbinate's power and authority, but:

> The words "power" and "authority" must be limited to the purely religious domain. The distance from here to a state run by Halacha is huge. Rabbis must receive the respect due to them, but their influence is only in matters of religion. I would like to accept their authority on matters of religion . . . not beyond that . . . Judaism is not a religion that is meant to be a state [political] religion. I don't think it would be right to do such a thing nowadays.

Rabbis who do not respect these borders and interfere in politics tend to lend the special aura reserved to religious matters to their political opinions. Several participants saw this as empty presumption. Thus, for example, Koren decided that it "didn't make sense" that rabbis interfere in policy-making decisions: "It is too much. The rabbi is not God. Nor is he the messenger of God"; "They have knowledge, but they are not God," explained Bina. Hence she holds no special regard for rabbis, and has serious reservations about the blind admiration of them: "I am against serving them like they were God."

Rabbis who turn their status into an instrument for the amassing of wealth, power and influence are considered by traditionists to be betraying their calling and slandering the name of Judaism everywhere. Many know stories of such rabbis, and some have even, either directly or indirectly, encountered them. The overwhelming majority treat them as fringe cases, further emphasizing the need for a clearer definition of the limits of appropriate and correct rabbinical behavior.

Criticism of the rabbinical establishment

If traditionists' treatment of rabbis is typically one of somewhat distanced respect, which is occasionally able to dull the sting of one or another form of

criticism traditionists wish to express regarding rabbis' behavior, the rabbinical establishment is given no such leeway and is the target of much more poignant and immeasurably less restrained criticism. The rabbinical establishment can be described – based upon the interviews – as the epitome of all that should be forbidden to the rabbis: mutual intolerance, coercion, the mixing of religion and politics, and the hunt for power, status and wealth. These all are stated to be typical of the rabbinate as a formal institution. Tomer's comments reflect the opinions of many other interviewees on this subject:

> I do not find it acceptable that they turn [the rabbinate] into an instrument with which to pursue their interests . . . You can see for yourself the corruption running rampant in those places [municipal rabbinates] . . . Why should it be like that? Why make a bad name? . . . Why has Judaism in Israel become a business? . . . And what do they [the rabbis] do? They instigate hate.

To Tomer it is this ability to objectively examine the rabbis' functioning and to be able to criticize it when and where necessary which makes the "sober" traditionism, in his own words, preferable to orthodoxy – which adopts a positive uncritical position towards the rabbinate. On the other hand, the danger, as Roni pointed out, is that this criticism could position the traditionist alongside anti-religious secularists, whose criticism of the rabbinate is beside the point. This is how he described his attitude towards the rabbinate:

> I am getting more and more extreme in my disgust with the religious establishment in all of its forms. As the people of Shinui and other anti-Semites say, the religious establishment is appropriating Judaism. In general . . . my attitude toward the rabbinate is definitely not positive.

Roni, seeking to distance himself from the secularist criticism, explained that, unlike the hatred which guides the anti-religious criticism of the rabbinate, his criticism is guided by the love of Judaism: "With me there are more levels to the criticism, born of the desire to remain a part of the Jewish collective. Criticism about the lack of will or ability to change and fix things." Roni explained that he would like the rabbinate to take a more active part in public life, but that, of course, will have to be restricted by the no-mixing-of-religion-with-politics rule.

Interviewees explained that the traditionist attitude towards the rabbinate is even more intricate, as they (unlike other non-religious Israelis, who are characterized by ignorance and indifference to Jewish matters) know Judaism and wish to observe and respect its laws and practices. Like all other Israeli-Jews, they are forced to do this via a rabbinical establishment which has no respect for itself or for its position. As Keren explained, underlining her disgust with a debauched rabbinate, the common point of departure is that which sees traditionists as accepting the rabbinate's authority:

> To me, let them tell me that I have to sign in for marriage in the rabbinate, to go to the *mikveh* – I can understand that. But to a secular woman it is coercion and humiliating; no wonder that [secular Israelis] are "anti" [religion]. And to demand that they pay the rabbinate [for its services]. People distance themselves due to this revolting practice of the rabbinate.

Tamar similarly described the dilemma which permeates her treatment, as a traditionist, of the rabbinical establishment:

> A religious marriage ceremony is a very beautiful thing that I would hate to miss out on, and not because I want to be married in a rabbinical court, believe me . . . If I could, I would not pass through them [the rabbinate representatives],[2] but I do not want to miss out on a religious wedding because the religious establishment is bad, really bad, and that is an understatement.

The most common instances of encounter between the average Israeli-Jew and the rabbinate – such as the organization of marriages – are those around which the criticism over the rabbinate is most bluntly and systematically expressed. The image of the rabbinical establishment as corrupt and obtuse gains much force in this context and traditionists are very willing to criticize its faulty performance. Keren, for example, who throughout the conversation was very cautious and respectful regarding rabbis, treated the issue of the rabbinate's attitude towards couples wishing to be married and divorced as the final straw: "That is something that quite disgusts me. I have friends who were married, and some also divorced, and in recent years I have discovered how corrupt that system is, how unclean, not what it is meant to be." These negative patterns of behavior and attitude on the part of the rabbinical establishment have brought about the reaffirmation of an essentially negative opinion of the rabbis themselves:

> Those [rabbis] sitting in the rabbinate – I have a very definite opinion of them, and I mean the negative side of the matter . . . They abuse their authority in order to play with peoples' lives . . . They are just abusing their monopoly.
>
> (Tamar)

With this behavior the rabbis alienate Jews from Judaism. The interviewees agreed that this is an unpardonable sin: not only does the rabbinate not bring Jews closer to Judaism, but it also pushes them away, painting Judaism as a whole in a negative, offensive light, and betraying the most basic Jewish values. Many would agree with Revital's statement that "the rabbinate's extremism creates 'anti' "; instead of pulling Jews closer with love, she explained, they push them away with coercion and hate. No wonder, then,

that some interviewees portrayed the rabbinate not as a portal to Judaism, but rather as a genuine obstacle in the way of leading a proper Jewish lifestyle.

The demand for religious reform

One of the most fascinating issues in the context of this discussion is traditionists' attitude towards a possible reform in Halacha. Generally speaking, traditionists' attitudes toward the major Jewish movements to have implemented and applied wide-reaching reforms of Jewish Law and its interpretation is an apprehensive, critical, and negative stance (I shall discuss this in more detail in the second part of this chapter). We have already seen their insistence that, as far as observance of Jewish-religious practice is concerned, a rabbi must be a strict, uncompromising, orthodox Jew. Yet the picture I have presented so far is incomplete, as many interviewees also presented an unhesitant demand – or, more accurately, a resolute hope – that orthodox rabbis would rise above themselves and lead in the introduction of some necessary amendments to the way in which Jewish Law is interpreted.

These amendments relate mostly to the prohibitions and customs seen by traditionists as outdated and irrelevant, and which they tend to transgress against without feeling that they have undermined their identity and obligations as Jews. The clearest example of one such "anachronistic" prohibition is the ban on turning electric light on and off during Shabbat. Several interviewees explained this ban as originating in excessive conservatism, which does not take into account technological changes. Zehavit expressed the opinion of many others on this subject. She mentioned the ban on electric lights as being derived from the ban on lighting a fire, and was straightforward in her criticism of both of them:

> The ban on lighting a fire comes from the fact that it was once hard work – smashing stones against each other, making a great effort. Today there is no effort. You push a button and it is done. So there is no longer a reason for this ban. What is forbidden on Shabbat is work. When the lighting of the fire involved work – it was justified to ban it. Today that is no longer so.

Others also emphasized that focusing on such irrelevant prohibitions is tantamount to distorting God's intentions. At the very least such a prohibition was considered to be illogical, and requiring a clear interpretation in order to be observed. As Batya put it: "I want to know how it would disturb God if I were to switch on a light during Shabbat."

Another interviewee applied this criticism to the complete system of prohibitions regarding Shabbat, which reflects, in his mind, a twisted interpretation of the guiding principle forbidding work on Shabbat:

> Regarding Shabbat, there are many things which to me are not the "labor

> of work", but quite the opposite. I have relatives who are becoming increasingly more ultra-orthodox; they have a tea-urn on Shabbat, and in order to make a cup of tea they pour hot water from one cup to the other, so that it will not be considered as cooking. That is stupid! I do more work in order to avoid working. I think they could have permitted the use of all sorts of things which do not come under the heading of work. There is no reason for us not to switch on a light [on Shabbat]. Today that seems silly.
>
> (Roni)

A similar critical tone can also be heard in Tomer's remarks, explaining that, thanks to his schooling in an orthodox school, he is familiar with the *halachic* logic which is meant to justify these bans, and rejected the interpretation leading to them as lacking any logic:

> I know: you construct an electric circuit, and break the ban of "constructing" on Shabbat. I went to a religious school, but I still do not accept it like that. I don't have to accept it. What electric circuit? Who knew what an electric circuit was in the time of Moses? Constructing? Who said that is constructing? The classic definition of "constructing" . . . is a builder. So with that I can play, and that is what I think makes a traditionist.

Indeed, in these contexts, traditionists do not hesitate in presenting themselves as knowledgeable critics of Halacha. They position themselves as opinionated individuals, examining reality with both practical and theoretical tools, being able to judge it in a worthy, logical manner. This, for instance, is how Tehila reasoned her lack of observance of what she deems as excessive prohibitions associated with Shabbat:

> Religion provides more qualifications than is necessary to make sure that you do not jump the fence . . . For instance, you can't ride a horse on Shabbat, for fear that you may break off a branch in order to whip it, where the act of flagellation is the transgression, and not the riding. I am intelligent enough to stop myself. I don't need such a wall put in front of me in order for me not to jump over such a tiny little bump.

These traditionist critics would like the orthodox rabbis to rise above themselves and offer amendments to the interpretation of the Halacha – amendments that would be acceptable within the orthodox community, and whose authority would be unchallenged – out of an attempt to adjust Jewish Law to modern times. Our interviewees repeatedly insisted that, contrary to the luminary rabbis of the past, who would promptly adjust their interpretations to technological and other developments, contemporary rabbis are busy resisting change, and do not bother to adjust Jewish Law to modern times.

This mindset forces them into a state of stasis. "It is all known: Judaism has changed over thousands of years, adjusted itself to changes and different eras, and at a certain stage that all stopped" (Roni).

> Judaism used to be a very advanced religion. I have read on Halacha and medicine: the Sages of the Talmud were pure geniuses. They saw further. The problem is that during the last few centuries they are looking backwards. Out of panic regarding secularity they become so fanatic in their attempt to conserve it, that they are missing some things here.
>
> (Tehila)

Some accept the rabbis who underestimate themselves when compared with their predecessors, and are thus hesitant to re-interpret Jewish Law. This, for example, is Batya's position: alongside her criticism over excessive conservatism and multiplication of current rabbis' bans, she explained that their ability to lead a process of change is limited: "Who are we to reform Halacha? . . . Rabbis who rose miles above the rest were those to write the Talmud and the Mishna . . . We have no such people around at present, and thus we have no right to change the Halacha." Our generation was not blessed with such great scholars of the Torah, she clarified.

And yet the worst danger is that, in their fear of change, the rabbis are risking the distortion of Judaism and the loss of the Jewish essence, as well as the alienation of Jews from Judaism. If they will not be brave enough to lead the necessary changes to Jewish Law, warned Roni, then "they are risking the loss of the core and the essence, and people drifting away [from Judaism]".

It is important to note that the common traditionist position is careful not to directly call for *halachic* reform, even where traditionists are explicit in their hope that such a change will be brought about by the rabbis. It seems that the interviewees' desire for change clashes with their fear of losing the essential Jewish content – and this fear comes out victorious. Liat's careful and hesitant approach is representative in this context. Liat, who found it difficult to form a decisive opinion on the matter, expressed a theoretical desire for the rabbis to know how to introduce changes into Jewish Law. She demonstrated this through the dilemma with which she is occasionally faced, when going out with friends on Shabbat, and not being able to eat in any restaurant which does not have a certificate of *kashrut*. Many restaurants declare that the food in their kitchens is kosher, but that they are not eligible for a certificate because they operate on Shabbat. Liat would be glad for the rabbis to come up with a solution: "I don't know what to think about [*halachic* reform] but if there were restaurants which were open on Shabbat and still had a certificate, I would be pleased," she explained. Her immediate dissociation from what sounded like the presumptuous demand for change is just as instructive. There is no real room for change in Halacha, she declared; "I can understand why there aren't *kashrut* certificates for restaurants which operate on Shabbat. It would be overly presumptuous to say [that the rabbis

should] change things." Indeed, her tone implied that she feels uncomfortable openly declaring that there is room for change. She explained it as one of those areas in which feeling trumps logic: "I think I would rather leave [Jewish Law] as is, without any changes, and I don't know why. It is a feeling."

A similar explanation of this position touches more upon the psychology of resistance to change, presenting the conservative habit as dictating the traditionist treatment of any potential reform:

> I think I am not looking for change by force of reverse inertia. That is, I am so used to no change, I don't look for it. That is how I was educated, [as were] my parents and grandparents. We were educated to follow the rules without questioning them. This is the Law and that is it. If we were to live in a reality in which there is a figure of authority which changes the Law, and we were to see it change in front of our eyes, I think there would be no reason not to change.
>
> (Roni)

The authority to bring about *halachic* reform, it was made clear, is reserved for the orthodox rabbis, and only for them – the real problem being that no one can be found who is willing to assume this authority. What is clear from this is that traditionists do not perceive themselves as having the authority to bring about such reforms. Roni's remarks on the subject are illuminating as he does not spare himself the rod of criticism for holding this position, which supposedly deprives the traditionist individual of his freedom of choice:

> It is a bit silly; why do I need there to be this or the other great adjudicator . . . to come and tell me what to do? . . . But in order for it to be legitimate, it has to come from within the orthodox system and not without . . . It is important that it is clear that they [reforming rabbis] come from the ranks of orthodoxy, otherwise it will not be a change but a schism, an opening of another direction.
>
> (Roni)

The nature of the necessary change to Jewish Law is also dictated by this position. Unlike the adjustments made by previous Jewish reform movements, which were comprehensive and general enough to be destructive, the changes sought by traditionists must be moderate and cautious: "This opening up [of Halacha] must be done in a much smarter way, and not by breaking all of the rules" (Tehila). This is another reason for which a change led by the orthodox rabbinate would be more favorable:

> Reformists create only extremism and "anti" sentiments. . . . Only orthodox [rabbis] can bring about the change. If there were an orthodox rabbi who had indeed seen secularity and knew how to take the positive things from it, and who would do it even via the traditionists, who are the

> connecting link between the two. As far as I am concerned such a rabbi has sufficient information in [all fields of Torah]; him I would respect.
>
> (Tehila)

Interviewees made clear that they are in charge of introducing changes within the private domain, where they enforce laws different to those preached by the rabbis. Ziva demonstrated this approach within the context of gender relations. "In my private world, I am allowed to make changes," she explained, telling how her relationship with her spouse is marked by equality and reciprocity. Yet within the public realm of institutionalized Judaism she is not in a position to insert changes, and she cannot, for instance, lead a move for equality in the synagogue:

> That is something which is not up to me . . . I can't suddenly decide that I feel like sitting with the men . . . I accept that as the written word of religious law, and I make my peace with them. You accept them without thinking why they are as they are.

Such decisions are in the hands of others: authorized rabbis. But, as Ziva made a point of mentioning, the potential amendments are not acutely needed, as individuals continuously shape and reform their personal behavior – and in this area they do introduce "*halachic*" changes. She used the issue of electric light on Shabbat as an example:

> I do it [switch on the lights during Shabbat] . . . and many more people round me do it. So I don't think there is need for a rabbi to come and permit it. I would rather switch on the light on Shabbat because I don't think that [the observance of the ban] is what will make me into a better person.

This fact lessens the importance of *halachic* reform, and brings Ziva to conclude that there is no need to push for such a change. As has been mentioned, this position is based also on traditionists' criticism of the non-orthodox movements, and nourishes it. Their attitude towards those movements is the subject of the next segment.

Reforms, conservatives, and traditionists

Interviewees' positions on a need for some *halachic* reform highlights the interest in inquiring into their attitude towards the two largest Jewish, non-orthodox movements: Reform and Conservative Judaism. As has been implied in the first part of this chapter, traditionists display a clear apprehension of these movements. Even when they acknowledge their legitimacy, they tend to criticize the non-orthodox movements for institutionalizing heresy against Jewish Law. Although interviewees easily recognize the resemblance

of practice, especially between them and members of the Conservative movement, they nevertheless reject the *halachic* legitimization – and thus, in the most general terms, Jewish legitimization – given to this "incomplete" behavior (according to the orthodox interpretation of Halacha, of course).[3]

Needless to say, any discussion which treats both movements as one "non-orthodox" entity is lacking, as we are dealing with two separate groups which profess contesting arguments regarding the need for *halachic* reform and the nature of this reform. Treating the two as one does an injustice to them both, as it not only blurs the differences between the movements but also makes them one-dimensional and ridiculously simplifies their underlying ideologies. Yet such a fusion is very common in Israel (media campaigns that the two movements ran jointly have only served to enhance this impression), and more importantly – this perception clearly dominated the interviewees' statements. As will be demonstrated, most interviewees adopt the common Israeli discourse which treats both movements as similar, if not outright identical, expressions of the same phenomenon. A small minority made sure to distinguish between the two, usually as a tool used to further criticize the Reform Movement.

The following discussion will thus attempt to study traditionists' attitudes towards the two major non-orthodox movements. These attitudes are of special importance, not least since traditionists comprise the largest, closest, possibly most important – and yet practically unreachable – audience for both movements (and particularly for Conservative Judaism) in Israel, comprising their unrealized potential to become a significant force in Israel. The different issues discussed below, I believe, could clarify some of the most momentous divisions still keeping traditionists and Conservatives on opposite sides of the field.

The sociological distance

The sociological distance is perhaps the most basic fact regarding traditionists' attitude toward the non-orthodox movements. Most interviewees – including those who held firm opinions on the subject – do not know either movement up close. A small minority had attended a Conservative or Reform synagogue; these few visits reported by the interviewees usually took place abroad – in the United States to be precise – as part of a trip or a family visit. As far as the Israeli scene is concerned, traditionists very rarely come into contact with the non-orthodox movements or their representatives.

Tal's story clearly pointed to this fact: he told how, at a certain point in his life, after having grown tired of the stagnation and lack of vitality of the orthodox synagogue he used to frequent every Shabbat, he was intent on looking into the option of attending services at a Conservative or Reform synagogue. Yet Tal – who was at the time a college student – didn't even know how to find or approach either of the movements. He didn't know any of their publications, nor anyone belonging to one of those movements, or even

close to them, and in or around his area of residence there is no synagogue or institute belonging to them. Faced with this virtual wall of sociological distance, Tal, feeling uncomfortable with driving on Shabbat to pray in synagogue (he had heard of the Reform movement's center in Tel Aviv), decided to give up on his attempt to get to know the alternatives to the orthodoxy which had failed him.

This distance, I must emphasize, is often mutual: the non-orthodox movements are not accessible to traditionists, and traditionists, for their part, usually do not seek them out. Ziva, who interpreted the distance between her and the Conservative movement as an expression of the alienation which she believes is typical of the non-orthodox movements, demonstrated this mutual repulsion quite clearly. Declaring that she had never attended a non-orthodox prayer service, Ziva explained her apprehension at even the potential of joining a Conservative congregation as stemming from the feeling of detachment created by this alienation: "I don't think I will have there [at a Conservative synagogue] that same feeling of belonging and identity as I have in the [orthodox] synagogue . . . and I am not at all tempted to try it."

In view of this distance, interviewees' attitudes towards Conservative and Reform Jews seem to be tinged with ignorance of fact and acquaintance. Tahel captured the approach of many others to the subject: "It is hard for me to discuss the Conservative and the Reform, because I really don't know the subject up close . . . My opinion of them mostly feeds off rumors." As we shall see, this lack of knowledge does not necessarily lead to indifference or a lack of opinion.

The non-orthodox movements and the loss of Jewish authenticity

The main characteristic of interviewees' attitudes towards the non-orthodox movements is, therefore, their critical viewpoint as well as their reservations regarding the ideology guiding the two movements. Traditionists view both Conservative and Reform Jews as straying from the path of Judaism, and instead of recognizing the fact that they are straying, seeking to legitimize the path they have taken on their own authority. The term most often used in this context is "invention"; the Conservative and the Reform, interviewees explained, invent for themselves a new religion which is close to Judaism but avoids assuming and following the myriad duties and obligations of true Judaism. As such, they cannot claim to possess Jewish authenticity: they have strayed too far from that essential, indispensable, minimal core of Judaism.

This attitude was common even among interviewees who were careful to emphasize that they do not reject the legitimacy of the non-orthodox movements. So, for example, Sigal explained: "I don't want to invent completely new things. I don't want the tradition upon which my children are raised to be completely invented. I want it all to be based and founded on a long-term tradition." Batya, who had spent some time in the United States, getting to know both movements there, chose a blunter phrasing to express her

position. She aimed her words mostly at the Reform Movement, which, she believes, demonstrates the extreme version of the same logic guiding the two Movements:

> The Reform Movement in general is catastrophic . . . The Reform completely changed the prayer book; they do whatever they want. They play the organ inside the synagogue; they sit men and women together. Conservatives, too, have no partition [separating men from women]. The thing with the food [*kashrut* laws] really disturbs me. They eat non-kosher food, and say it is OK. It is enough that you eat it, but to say that it is OK, that is just the height of idiocy. Because it is clearly written which animals to eat and which not, so you suddenly come and tell me that it is OK?

One of the most evident and interesting expressions of this traditionist attitude towards the non-orthodox movements is the laughter a discussion of the two engenders. Interviewees repeatedly told how the Reform and Conservative make them laugh; they find their Judaism amusing, a humorous distortion of the Jewish truth. This laughter seems to be a reaction to what traditionists see as a distortion of an obvious truth: there is the correct way, the "natural" way for the observance of Judaism, and those who presume to be true to it while at the same time flouting its most basic rules are to be ridiculed and laughed at. In this light we see Tikva's story of her encounter with Conservative Judaism, for the occasion of her nephew's Bar Mitzvah (she explained that the Bar Mitzvah family were forced to choose this synagogue, as the boy's mother was not Jewish), as an amusing situation comedy:

> I really laughed . . . It was funny. There was a very cute rabbi there, young, playing the guitar. My mother, poor thing, didn't understand it. He wanted to switch on the air conditioning on Shabbat. We burst out laughing the whole time. On top of everything else, they brought a video camera and photographed us inside the synagogue.

Tikva explained the laughter caused by the service as the result of the clash between her expectations and reality: "It looked strange, because you were raised differently," she said. Though Tikva and her family do use electricity during Shabbat within their home, they would not expect a rabbi to do so, much less so within the sacred space of the synagogue; the fact that the rabbi had no problem desecrating Shabbat (according to the orthodox interpretation) by switching the light on and off on Shabbat in a synagogue, comes as a mixing and confusing of those distinct areas of sanctity and secularity, which such a major part of traditionist practice is aimed at conserving and distinguishing.

The problem, therefore, is the distortion of the Jewish essence, as well as the *halachic* justification which the non-orthodox movements wish to bestow

upon it. We can also see how such a criticism reveals the logic guiding traditionist identity – requiring "principled" fidelity to tradition, even if it is not fully observed. Thus, a reform of those basic elements, the observance of which comprises a crucial part of traditionist Jewish identification, is that which is seen as particularly severe and problematic. According to one recurring articulation, Reform and Conservative Jews twist tradition and threaten to completely erase it: "We are very much against the Reform, because what is important to us is tradition. The Reform breaks the tradition" (Reuven); "Reform Judaism is a completely new religion" (Michal).

Interviewees are hardly sympathetic towards the non-orthodox movements' attempts at building an alternative *halachic* system. The general mood amongst them tended towards complete negation of the attempted re-interpretations as defying the original, demanding intent of Judaism. So, for example, in Sigal's words:

> It does not attract me; it makes me laugh . . . It amuses me, these inventions of theirs that they, it isn't a nice thing to say . . . that they fast only for half a day on the ninth of Av, they really turn it around. You don't want to do it? – By all means, but why invent something else about it? To me it is, excuse me for saying this, but to me it is like a different religion. Why call them Jews? Invent another religion; it is like Christianity.

To Tom, Reform Jews could be considered, at best, to be an expression of "Jewish folklore", conserving a collective feeling of identification of non-Israeli Jews, who are lacking a strong feeling of belonging to the Jewish people. But the importance of such folklore is not to be overestimated, stressed Tom:

> As far as Judaism goes, this is not Judaism. It is a sort of Jewish folklore, because they do not live according to Judaism. They marry women with women and men with men, and all sorts of Christians and Jews. It doesn't work like that.

Interestingly, the same tone characterized also the statements of those who themselves called for *halachic* reform, though one that should originate with orthodox rabbis. Liron was amongst those to most prominently present both those opinions – the demand for *halachic* reform and the rejection of its institutionalization by the non-orthodox movements. Though his basic assumption was that the orthodox-rabbinical interpretation seems often to be infested with excess restrictions and provisos, which distort the original intent of the Holy Scriptures, mere mention of the non-orthodox interpretation as a possible alternative stirred within him a firm objection. Liron explained that he does not even consider the non-orthodox interpretation to be a sincere attempt at preserving Judaism, but rather an action of somewhat childish defiance against it: "Reform Judaism – I have a problem with that. Because

the Reform, he interprets religion and is being spiteful." Liron's account of this supposed gulf between his two positions dealt with the authentic and sincere preservation of tradition:

> There are things that are already tradition, and there is no point in changing them . . . Such, for example, is the wedding ceremony. There is no reason to have a different ceremony. If it was done by our forefathers, why do we now have to begin doing a different ceremony? This ceremony is meant to have been a ceremony for millions of years. So you [Reform Jews] come here, and do things just for spite. And I don't like it that you are being spiteful, and trying to manipulate and show that here, you are now interpreting, taking religion and attempting to do something innovative. What is innovative? The wedding, to begin with, is not something modern. [It is] something which is stuck 5,000 years in the past.

Liron made clear that not all interpretations of the Scriptures are legitimate. In order for such interpretations to be considered legitimate, they must be "near to the spirit of that which is written"; it is obvious from his remarks that such proximity must be expressed by respecting tradition.

This critical undertone against Reform Judaism also dominated the statements of those who were usually careful not to be judgmental of others. Such was Linor, who, as a prologue to her cautious censure of Reform Jews, expounded on her position by which spirituality takes on countless forms, and that we must not rule out ways different than our own in which to follow the divine will. Despite all that, she cannot accept Reform Judaism: "Perhaps it is not politically correct to say this . . . Anyway, they [Reform Jews] take religion and do what they want with it." The problem, she said, is in their intention to institutionalize their reforms. It is also this intention which distinguishes between their path and that of Linor: "Everyone makes what they want out of religion . . . but I did not make up my own religion, Linor's religion." According to Liat, who also expressed a clear position of non-judgmentalism ("I do not rule people out," she explained), one must be careful when defining the nature – that is, the theological "worth" – of the non-orthodox options. It would seem from her remarks that there is reason to fear that the non-orthodox movements are sinning and causing others to do the same. In light of this, she described the preference of orthodoxy as the default option:

> If I were given to choose between the two, say at a wedding, of course I would prefer the orthodox option . . . Because I don't want to deal with the limbo of maybes. Orthodoxy is, for sure, correct. I will know I have done something which is good with all certainty.

It must be emphasized, however, that the rejection of the non-orthodox *halachic* reform is not always complete, and does not necessarily include all the amendments and practices offered by the non-orthodox movements. So, for

instance, Sigal, whose reservations about Conservative Judaism were quoted above, wished to distinguish gender equality as one of those "very beautiful things" in Conservative services. But such positive amendments do not deal with the deep, significant essence of Judaism as perceived by Sigal. The (perceived) Conservative presumption to apply a whole, comprehensive set of adjustments and amendments in that essential area is what causes the apprehension, as well as the ridicule which expresses it.

Legitimizing the transgression

As can be read between the lines of the interviewees' criticism of the non-orthodox movements above, they do not deny the similarity between the "selective" way in which they observe Jewish religion and the non-orthodox treatment of Halacha. Some also recognized in the non-orthodox movements "a type of traditionists who have found their own path" (Liat). This understanding, whether implicit or explicit, better demarcates the limits of traditionist identification: faced with a near "other", the traditionists' "self" reaffirms the borders defining its identity.

The clearest line drawn by interviewees to distinguish themselves from the non-orthodox movements is the one dealing with their perception and treatment of transgressions against Halacha: even though traditionists, much like Conservative and Reform Jews, knowingly violate some of the *halachic* rules in their orthodox interpretation, they, unlike the non-orthodox movements, do not wish to lend *halachic*, traditional Jewish credence and legitimization to the act. Traditionists, as opposed to other non-orthodox Jews, do not wish to present themselves as doing "the *halachicly* right thing":

> A phenomenon such as the Reform, in my religious perception, it riles me. I don't like them. They make me uncomfortable. A woman laying the *tefilin*, or reading from the Torah [in synagogue], changes in the order and content of the prayers and so on. And then there is the question of how am I different from them? They define for themselves what they want to do, and I too, ultimately, define for myself what I want to choose to observe, and what not to as a traditionist. And I think the most succinct way in which I can describe, for myself, what is traditionist, is that a traditionist is a person who does not observe all of the *mitzvot*, but knows that it is wrong.
>
> (Roni)

What traditionists see as a Conservative and Reform determination to lend credence to their mistaken Jewish lifestyle is seen as an outright illegitimate claim for *halachic* and rabbinical authority. That is, traditionists are aware of their *halachic* transgressions, but do not presume to ordain themselves as *halachic* adjudicators, who could legitimize this transgressing behavior. As opposed to the non-orthodox movements, who would claim that this

behavior is correct and acceptable also according to the Halacha, traditionists insist on distinguishing between theory and practice: "It is all right to lead such a life [which does not live up to all the orthodox tenets] but it is not all right to say that it is correct" (Koren).

This distinction could be seen as reflecting that dominant traditionist distinction between private and public: traditionists are willing to be lenient with regard to observance within the private, personal domain, but are opposed to "public" adjustments aimed at changing Judaism publicly and generally. Moreover, traditionists are willing to live inconsistently and perceive their personal behavior as faulty and insufficient (from a *halachic* point of view), paying the price for that, as they will not accept a public, principle amendment of the law. On the other hand, Reform or Conservative Jews wish to amend the law in that public manner, making their behavior "correct" and appropriate.

The non-orthodox claim of Jewish-*halachic* legitimacy is, therefore, at the root of the problem and what distinguishes Reform and Conservative Jews from the traditionists. In a complementing move, interviewees highlighted their meticulous care to observe those *mitzvot* which they consider to be essential, in full accordance with the rules of the "true" Halacha. The non-orthodox, interviewees argued, wish to introduce a general change which also affects the way in which those essential *mitzvot* are observed. They are twisting religion; we, traditionists, are choosing what to focus on from within the undistorted religion. They are lenient with the *mitzvot* themselves; we may be making concessions on the general number of *halachic* rules, but we adhere painstakingly – in an "orthodox" manner – to the ones we observe.

Halit, who held to this position, demonstrated the difference between herself as a traditionist and Reform and Conservative Jews through the example of dietary rules: her observance of *kashrut*, she stated, was meticulous: "I do not compromise; there is no such thing with me, to compromise on *kashrut*." On the other hand, the non-orthodox movements create baseless innovations: "They will eat lobster but will not eat calamari; that is just nonsense." Halit also presented her principled position, requiring the non-orthodox to be true to the principles of Judaism: "My position is 'Do something right, or don't do it at all.' Truly, even when you are only observing some of the *mitzvot*, when you do practice something – do it right." One could identify an echo of the criticism aimed by secular and orthodox Israeli-Jews against traditionists themselves, requiring them to be "systematic" and "consistent". The way in which Halit differentiated between the two criticisms demonstrates how such criticism serves to emphasize the guiding principles of traditionist identity:

> Traditionists look at it "per *mitzvah*" . . . It is not the same thing, because the Reform, for example, take religion and twist it. The traditionist takes only a part of the religion, but what he does, he does right, according to the written word . . . The traditionist, unlike the Reform or the Conservative, when he observes the *mitzvot*, he observes them religiously.

The focus on a strict observance of the essential *mitzvot* thus becomes the yardstick against which the non-orthodox movements are measured. Meir, who made clear that he does not consider the Reform or the Conservative movements to be *a priori* illegitimate, also described the way in which he evaluates the non-orthodox alternative:

> As long as it doesn't invalidate the Jewish base, then yes, I can accept it. If there are Reform who eat meat and dairy, then I don't think that is Judaism. But if they observe the basic things, so I very much accept it.

Tamir, who displayed some understanding of the non-orthodox path, claimed that the Conservative and Reform refusal to acknowledge that they are violating the rules of the Halacha paints them as extremists. Compared with this extremism, traditionism's moderate image is highlighted. He opened by stressing the legitimacy of the non-orthodox movements:

> Everyone twists religion to fit himself. That's how they view it. They accompany the Friday evening prayers with the guitar. Everyone has a certain way . . . It might seem weird, but it is another way for people to express their faith . . . No matter how you look at it, they observe the *mitzvot*. [But] the traditionist doesn't want to go into a Conservative synagogue, because it seems weird to him that a woman is standing next to the Holy Ark containing the Torah. People don't like extremism – whichever way you put it. There are those for whom that is a red line.

The crossing of these red lines carries with it far-reaching ramifications, of which traditionists refuse to partake. One of the weightiest of those repercussions is the injury to the unity of the Jewish people. Having accepted the orthodox interpretation of Halacha as authoritative, interviewees see the fault for the divisions within the Jewish nation as resting with the non-orthodox movements. It is this point of view which caused Kfir to sum up his attitude towards the non-orthodox with the phrase "it is a pity": "It is too bad, because within our religion, it [the non-orthodox movements] creates more factions. It is enough that there are many factions already. I think it divides us even more."

Many interviewees argued that the non-orthodox movements pose a threat to the Jewish people and to Jewish identity in other ways as well. The most prominent is the threat of assimilation and consequent disappearance of Jewish identity altogether. Hila's remark on the subject reveals the complex construct of identity behind this fear of assimilation, a construct in which the "self" and the "other" are ethnic and racial amalgams of identity as much as they are religious:

> I don't agree with the Reform. I think they go a bit too far . . . Their next generation will marry into the Gentile community. I was in a synagogue

> where they brought the Asian woman to pray on Shabbat. I don't know if she had converted or not, but the next generation won't even care if she had converted. They will marry her and that will be it.

It must be noted that the interviewees did not ignore the potential national repercussions of rejecting the non-orthodox movements. Batya, for instance, stressed the danger of rejecting Reform Jews:

> Unfortunately for us, the vast majority of the Jewish population in the US is Reform. The moment we reject them out of hand, we will lose a great many people . . . To say that everyone there is not considered Jewish because they are not orthodox is to lose lots of Jews, because assimilation there [in the US] is immense.

The problem is that such sensitivity to Jewish unity may bring about mortal injury to Judaism itself: "On the other hand, if that is what they do, so why do I need such Jews? That is really too much."

The issue of gender equality

The non-orthodox movements' treatment of gender equality serves as a sort of lightning rod attracting much of the interviewees' criticism. Generally speaking, interviewees – both men and women – perceive the attempted gender reform introduced by the non-orthodox movements – from encouraging more equal seating arrangements within the synagogue through to involving women in the management of the prayers – to be an expression of the exaggerated, illogical deviation from the "natural" and "correct" order dictated by Jewish tradition. Even where participants accepted and agreed with the ethical values underlying these egalitarian reforms, they tended to present them as a deviation from and distortion of "true Judaism".

Interviewees' criticism of the Reform and Conservative movements in no way conflicts or cancels out their criticism of the rabbinical establishment. As has already been discussed, many interviewees had little if any hesitation when criticizing what they deem to be the material and moral corruption of the orthodox establishment. The fascinating thing is that despite – and possibly because of – this criticism, they perceive the non-orthodox handling of the gender issues to be scandalous. This matter is of special importance as a large part of the efforts by the non-orthodox movements to gain momentum with the Israeli public is aimed at the criticism over the corruption of the orthodox establishment. An illuminating expression of the combination of these two positions – criticism of the orthodox establishment alongside a rejection of the non-orthodox alternative due to its handling of the gender issues – can be seen in Tehila's remarks. Tehila, who defines herself as a feminist, arrived at the description of her approach towards the non-orthodox movements through her dealing with the urgent need for a comprehensive

revamp of the orthodox rabbinical establishment. She told of many personal instances which had taught her just how corrupt, dishonest, and inflexible the orthodox rabbinate actually is. She even mentioned how much better it would be were the rabbis to remove superfluous bans such as the one on switching lights on and off during Shabbat. The supposedly sensible alternative, she admitted, is the non-orthodox movements, who do enact such changes in Halacha, and due to these changes she had indeed found herself at a Reform prayer session. But her encounter with the Reform Movement left her, to use her own expression, shocked. The whole extent of the distress had to do with the gender issue:

> I had a shocking encounter with it . . . Reforms and Conservatives . . . I was just appalled. I saw a woman step up to the podium to read from the Torah. I am a feminist, but that was still too hard for me, it grated on me.

Many interviewees stated that they share that feeling of distress when faced with the mixing of the genders during non-orthodox services. The fact that this disruption takes place, of all places, in the synagogue, a place of holiness, only serves to emphasize the interviewees' discomfort with the non-orthodox movements' handling of the gender issue. So, for instance, Vered told of her encounter with an egalitarian service during a visit to the United States: "Who ever heard of a woman and a man sitting together [in the synagogue]? A woman should sit there [in the women's section] and a man in his own place. Or that a woman would be a rabbi, a cantor and everything? No! No!" Vered and her husband both saw the mixing of the genders as a red line that they will not allow to be crossed, that they could not accept. As her husband explained, the mixed seating diverts one's attention from God in his own house of prayer, and that cannot be tolerated.

A similar stance, one which takes the gender issue to be a red line crossed easily and rudely by the non-orthodox movements, could be seen also in the statements of those few interviewees who were tolerant of these movements and accepted, at least in principle, the legitimacy of their claim for an alternative interpretation of Judaism. One such example was Gidi, who described his attitude towards the non-orthodox movements as one of " 'live and let live'; if that is what they believe, so I have no problem with what they are doing". Gidi even went so far as to say that he lacks the knowledge to pass judgment over these movements: "I am probably not firm enough in my knowledge or opinion about what they are doing in order to be able to say whether it is correct or not, good or not good." But there was one matter in which he does not hesitate to pass judgment and to criticize them: he does not "look with favor upon" the Reform movement's handling of the gender issue. Gidi recounted the story of a ceremony which he had recently attended in which a female rabbi led the Bar Mitzvah of children suffering from Down syndrome. The ceremony itself, which respects the children, affording them the possibility to celebrate their Bar Mitzvah properly, explained Gidi, is a wonderful

and commendable thing. But the fact that a woman served as the rabbi, while donning the *tzitzit*, seemed to him to be like "an idol in the temple [i.e., totally sacrilegious] . . . it felt really bad". Gidi also said that the wording of the prayer seemed overly civic or secular. In light of this he tends to judge the Reform Movement's attempts as not only inauthentic but even dangerous: "Taking something which exists since before the days of yore, and giving it some supposedly modern interpretations, making it permissible for all. So 'Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint' [a reference to Proverbs 29:18]."

The position of those who do, in principle, agree with amendments of an egalitarian nature when dealing with gender within Judaism is highly instructive. These statements emphasize the role of the gender issue as a shibboleth distinguishing between those who have remained true to the essence and authenticity of Judaism, and those who twist it at will. Traditionists, of course, count themselves amongst the former, whereas the non-orthodox movements' treatment of the gender issue places them firmly with the latter group, transgressing against the essence of Judaism. Ziva demonstrated this position when asked to express her opinion of synagogues in which men sit beside women and all are given equal parts in the managing of the prayer service. As she explained, the urge to introduce this equality is not at all foreign to her. Many times, she said, she had found herself wondering why her orthodox synagogue does not enact that same equality:

> I kept on asking myself: why is it not like that [that is, why does the synagogue not permit gender equality]? Are we not all people of faith with that same feeling of belonging? It makes sense, and I see it as a beautiful thing, and if the way things are in the world were up to me, I would perhaps have changed the separation between men and women in the synagogue.

But things are not "up to her", and it is not for her – nor anyone else, it would seem from her statement – to have the right to change the ancient, correct order of things in the synagogue and the managing of the service. He who dares do this is sinning against the fundamental precepts of Judaism, the acceptance of which – even if they are not comfortable, are perceived to make no sense, and may even be offensive and injurious on a personal-feminine level – becomes an important test of fidelity to Jewish authenticity:

> Since then it has already settled in my head, in my thinking. It's a way of life: when you go to synagogue you immediately go upstairs [to the women's section]. Somehow it has become a thing which you just have to accept, and that is that. But it is not a thing which disturbs you.
>
> (Ziva)

Ziva's statement demonstrates how the gender issue has become a sort of position assessor, differentiating traditionists from Reform and Conservative

Jews. This understanding reached by her, according to which one must accept the different gender roles – including what looks and feels like gender-based discrimination – as an expression of Jewish authenticity, is thus transformed into a position distinguishing traditionists, preservers of the essence of Judaism, from those who twist the original, authentic significance of Judaism.

Other interviewees, both male and female, who presented similar positions – clearly distinguishing between their desire for equality in general and their acceptance of inequality within the domain of the synagogue, as part of "true Judaism" – repeatedly stated that they are uncomfortable with the gender equality in effect in the non-orthodox synagogues. Moreover, there were those who mentioned this equality as the ultimate barrier stopping them from possibly becoming part of a non-orthodox congregation. Hence when Dina and Reuven described their joint search for a synagogue which would suit their needs, Dina made clear that "The Conservative [synagogue] is OK, if it were not so feminist." They both agreed that the "orthodox [synagogue] with an Anglo-Saxon orientation", which they had attended in order to celebrate a family member's Bar Mitzvah, was "more suitable. It begins with the seating arrangement: women sat upstairs but they could hear and see" (Reuven). Dina elaborated: "Women had a presence there. They are not put behind an opaque screen," as is common in other synagogues. But to go from that to introducing absolute equality in the managing of the prayers, as is common in some non-orthodox communities, is still too great a leap for them.

A similar tone can be detected in Batya's statement, when recounting some of the experience she gained during her stay in the US: "I was forced to go with my husband to a Conservative synagogue, which I disliked from the start." All the praying experience seemed to Batya – who, it should be mentioned, does not attend prayer services when she is in Israel – to be fake:

> They [the Conservative congregation she had joined] go to synagogue once a week in order to see all of their friends, and that is what makes them feel good. They are neither here nor there. They took a bit from each one, and they do what is comfortable for them. Conservatives sit next to each other; they are starting to be like the Reform. Women freely give sermons; female rabbis, marrying people.

Furthermore, to Batya, the "radical" egalitarian conclusion reached by Conservative women – "If women are discriminated against in Judaism then why shouldn't I be the one to marry them off?!" – is the ultimate proof that the discussion of the gender discrimination within orthodox Judaism is fruitless and pointless. For Batya's husband, however, the egalitarian prayer seemed natural and correct: "He had attended that synagogue since he was a child." Yet, in the end, she said, Batya was the one to win this argument:

> I kept on mentally niggling him. I would ask him: "How does this work?

> What sort of nonsense is this? How come that woman is sitting next to him? Is it even possible to concentrate like that?" I slowly made him ferment. And then he told me he no longer likes the Conservative synagogue, and he doesn't want to go there anymore . . . We left the conservative community and joined an orthodox synagogue.

The sociocultural distance between traditionists and the non-orthodox movements, with which I opened the current discussion, is further highlighted within the context of the issue of gender equality. Traditionists seem to be setting up a virtual wall to protect themselves from the danger inherent in the pseudo-*halachic* seal of approval given to what they consider to be heresy against the fundamental precepts of Judaism; gender equality in the synagogue is amongst the most prominent of those transgressions. See for instance Karin's statement, as she testified that she "doesn't know the Reform . . . never went into a Reform synagogue". The only point of reference she could offer on the subject was her severe criticism of the gender equality common to Reform congregations. Her statement suggests that the reservations regarding this practice are what preserve that distance:

> I was recently invited to a Bat Mitzvah, where you read from the Torah [the girl would read from the Torah] . . . We did not go. I don't know these things – neither from near, nor from afar . . . I was somewhere and someone used the term "a woman rabbi" . . . OK, she does not disturb me, I don't disturb her; just don't let them make their presence dominant in this country.

As a related issue to this discussion I should mention one reservation held by several participants: the non-orthodox movement's treatment of gays. The general tone is similar to that found regarding gender equality: interviewees deem the non-orthodox formal tolerance of gays to be a deviation from the path of Judaism. An absorbing example of this was offered by Limor, who told of a pleasant, though "weird" encounter with a Conservative service. This happened during Limor's visit to the United States, where, like many other Israelis, she happened to go with her family to a Conservative synagogue. The experience was mostly a positive one, but was tainted with strange and puzzling deviations: "I really enjoyed myself. There were things which seemed very nice to me, and there were things which bewildered me, that were strange to me." On the positive side she included the common seating arrangements and the positive atmosphere typical of the service in general. On the "weird" side she simply included the fact that "the cantor was gay".

Conclusion

In an interview given at end of 1974, Gershom Scholem discussed what he termed to be the wretchedness and poverty of the Hebrew language spoken in Israel, and the destitution of the culture built on such a language. His harsh criticism described a process of "barbarization of the language" and warned against "lingual anarchy". Scholem tended to place the blame for the degeneration of language and culture on the project of Jewish secularization, and particularly on the attempt (of which he seemed to be rather skeptical)[1] to secularize the holy tongue, which was the driving force behind the Zionist project, or at least of the "rebellious camp" (Scholem's term) within it. His lamentations invoke a strong sense that the cure for this cultural degeneration is to be found in a different, "non-rebellious" attitude towards Jewish tradition. His remarks on this matter are edifying not only due to the largeness of spirit and depth of vision that they reveal, but also because they contain, almost unnoticed, an outline for an alternative construct of Jewish identity. It appears as though this alternative manages to stay clear of the distorting "orthodox vs. secular" or "modern liberty vs. tradition" dichotomy (Scholem, after all, empties "modern secularity" of any meaningful significance), and remains true to the Jewish ethno-national "calling" and historical commitment, retaining a close, dialogical connection with tradition while at the same time not retreating from modernity – I dare say, the outline of a traditionist Jewish identity:

> We must not delude ourselves – a reversal is not possible . . . The question is to what degree will we nourish on tradition . . . History will not permit the People of Israel to be like all other nations. There are those who would desire that, but I am optimistic. There are and there will be within the people dynamic forces, without which the book will close on our activity here.
>
> The question of "a nation like all other nations" is the question of whether the People of Israel will manage to survive a history without a calling, without a standard by which to evaluate itself. This project here is constructed round contradictions – to be a chosen people and a people like any other, a people responsible towards history. If I open the *Shulhan*

> *Arukh* [an authoritative codification of Jewish Law, composed in the sixteenth century] I ask myself: can a living society live like this? One of the prominent Rabbis – a great Rabbi, whom I respected and who liked me – once told me: If you observe Shabbat, *kashrut* and the holy days, then you are a full Jew. All the rest – he said – is not necessary. That is: without having said it he had long ago given up on the *Shulhan Arukh*. And he of course was making an effort to live according to the *Shulhan Arukh*.
>
> I do not believe that the process of secularization in the Jewish People is the last word on the matter.
>
> . . . [I]s Judaism without the *mitzvot* possible? There is today Judaism without *mitzvot*. I do not know if it has a future . . .
>
> Where will we end up? I don't know. I hope we will bring about something out of a feeling of continuity and sequence.
>
> (Scholem 1994, 62–63)

The sense of national and historical commitment (the "calling"); the recognition of a Jewish "essence" as compelling a lifestyle of observance of the "minimal" religious practices (Shabbat, *kashrut* and the holy days); the apprehensive attitude towards secularity, and the doubt in the ability of "Judaism without *mitzvot*" to survive; the reservations regarding orthodox life (life according to the *Shulhan Arukh*) as impossible; the understanding that "a return [to the way of life typical of the Jews in the past] is not possible"; the "insistence" not to step out of history, but rather to actively live modernity; the dynamic and dialogical approach to tradition; and even the distinct yet limited place awarded the rabbi as a model of Jewish authority – all these are the main outlines of traditionism, as it has emerged throughout this book.

I have described these outlines as directing the Jewish "identity project" which traditionists have taken upon themselves. This comes from the (positively modern) understanding that one's personal and collective identities are no longer to be "taken for granted", and that their maintenance requires the individual to be actively engaged, as it demands investment, commitment, and sacrifice. Moreover, in a context of secular (as well as "rebellious", if we were to borrow Scholem's term) dominance and the isolationist reaction it engendered amongst those who consider themselves to be the ultimate guardians of Jewish tradition, this project comes at a very high social price. This is expressed in the system of cross-pressures questioning the validity of traditionists' claim to both Jewish and modern authenticity.

These outlines could also be interpreted – "empirically" – as the primary foundations of traditionist identity, and thus as the building blocks from which a "working definition" of traditionism could be constructed. I have chosen to avoid any attempt at formulating such a clear definition. Previous attempts to define traditionism tended to turn to common dichotomous divisions as their theoretical framework. I have already dealt extensively with the

modernization theory, and the distinction it creates between the modern and the traditional (or "pre-modern"), as the primary paradigmatic framework within which such attempts to define traditionism were articulated. One notable attempt assumed a different binary division, identifying traditionism as an expression of a "popular religion" versus the rabbinical-orthodox "elite religion".[2] Yet this distinction also proves itself to be problematic, be it because of the implicit value judgment inherent in practically any such "popular vs. elite" distinction – here contrasting a lofty, intellectual and self-aware "elite religion" with the folkloristic "popular" religion of the masses, which is devoid of self-reflection – or merely due to the simple fact that it repeatedly falls into the same track of binary distinctions.

A possible, approximate idea that we have discussed elsewhere (Yadgar and Liebman 2009) was to define traditionism through a comparison with a phenomenon that has already been discussed, examined, and defined in a satisfactory manner: the modern phenomenon of isolationist, extremist religious conservatism, often termed "orthodoxy" or "fundamentalism" (and, confusingly, sometimes also labeled "traditionalism"; see my discussion in the "Theortical Framework" chapter). Such a potential definition deals mostly with the rather "religious" aspects of traditionism. We have argued that this religious issue can be used as a point of interface, justifying the comparison between traditionism and orthodoxy. Such a comparison suggests a list of characteristics which are unique to traditionism, dealing with religion's singular position in traditionists' life, as well as traditionists' alternative approach to religious laws. Most prominent is traditionists' unique solution to the alleged tension between religion and modernity. Unlike the orthodox, who, at least declaratively, live their life strictly according to (traditional) Jewish Law, sanctifying, to some degree, all aspects of their daily life, traditionists incorporate what they consider to be religious, or holy, into the ordinary pattern of their modern, declaratively secular, daily lives.

Yet I suspect that such excessive focus on the religious aspect of traditionism may again portray it as lacking a clear "system". Faced with the rigid orthodox observance of religious rules and practices, as well as the continuous "obsession" over a strict interpretation of these laws, traditionism may seem to be devoid of any underlying guiding principle. Furthermore, this "religious" focus may divert attention from the "more secular" aspects of the traditionist identity structure.

At this point we must again wonder if there is any true sense in insisting on providing a strict definition of traditionism, which is an expression of an individual and collective identity. Identity is inherently a complex construct forever in the process of updating, reaffirmation, changing and redefinition. Any attempt at capturing its "essence" (as the root of its definition) may thus become a violent symbolic action, "freezing" this inherently dynamic construct of identity and chaining it to anachronistic contexts. Moreover, as I have mentioned in the introduction, any discussion of identity must avoid the trap of essentialism – that is, the temptation to try and identify the essential

(and thus unchanging) elements of traditionist identity (or of any other identity). I suspect that definitions dealing with identity tend to fall into that trap.

As can be understood from the way in which my research has been presented, it is my belief that a thick, thorough, and rich description and careful analysis of some of the foundations of contemporary traditionist identity structure is the correct solution. Such a description, formed out of an interpretative approach and understanding based on critical empathy, focuses attention on the nature of traditionism as an "identity project", born of the belief that Jewish identity, or "Jewishness", is not an obvious given, and that it compels the individual into a continuous action of reinforcing and reaffirming his/her identity. These are expressed through a dialogical approach to tradition, and its observance as a way of life, containing the "necessary minimum" of "religious" practice, aimed at what traditionists see as the "essence" of Judaism and Jewishness. This way of life is based not solely nor mostly on considerations of comfort (as is usually argued against traditionists, by both orthodox and secular Jews), but rather upon ethno-national identification, often with strong cultural-communal (or "ethnic" – *adati*) undertones. The often confounding (to the outsider) distinction between religious practices which are observed and those which are respectfully ignored is not based upon the "difficulty" or "ease" of their execution, but rather on their identification as "essential", "basic", and "central" to one's individual and collective identity as a Jew. Thus this distinction serves the individual traditionist in preserving what he or she considers to be the "essence" of Judaism, and hence also the "essence" of his or her identity as a Jew within the ever fluctuating flow of daily life.

The understanding of traditionism as the continuing fulfillment of this "project" or "mission" of identity emphasizes the central role of choice within the structure of traditionist identity. As I have repeatedly claimed in this book, contemporary traditionist identity should not be perceived as a product of some sort of impulsive cultural "inheritance", neither should it be seen as an un-self-reflective continuation of past's practices, but rather the product of a conscious choice. This choice is motivated by one's decision to fulfill his/her (Jewish) "identity project" and is conducted against a background of intimate acquaintance with the dominant Jewish-Israeli identity alternatives. This element of choice is not to be underestimated. It reflects not only traditionists' awareness of the presence of alternative (dominant) identities, but also their understanding that one's traditionist identity is not to be taken for granted. This is, in fact, the quintessentially modern characteristic: the knowledge of the other, awareness of the complexity of one's own identity, as well as the identity of others, and the realization that the components of one's personality are not to be "taken for granted" and are not "a given", but rather form part of a continuing process of choice, preference, and identification.

Moreover, the nature of the traditionist choice is brought into sharper contrast when compared with those dominant alternatives: the comparison

of traditionism, or of the traditionist choice, with secularity on the one hand and orthodoxy on the other – or, to be precise, with the predominant *images* of secularity and orthodoxy – points to the profundity and complexity of the former relative to the later. Traditionist identity seems to be based on reflection and choice which is more "real", meaningful, and substantial than the Jewish-Israeli secular and orthodox choices. Granted, there can be no doubt that many of those identifying as "secular" or "orthodox" also view their identity as a matter of personal choice; moreover, the very argument I presented above, regarding modernity as an age in which identities are no longer to be taken for granted, requires this. Yet I would argue that, within the current Israeli socio-political-cultural context, neither secular nor orthodox Israeli-Jews enjoy a genuine option of choice as regarding their Jewish identity. In the case of the "orthodox" or the "religious" individual, one can reasonably describe him/her as having given up any real option of choice regarding his/her identity. Moreover, being a "modern" phenomenon, which is focused on a rejection of secularization and modernity, orthodox identity is centered, to a large degree, round the negation of the secular other, and the choice of seclusion.[3] On the "opposite" side, the secular choice can be seen as quite limited, even if such a choice is not pre-determined (or precluded). This limitation originates in the secular ignorance of the "substances" from which alternative Jewish identities could be constructed. Since Israeli secularity is based first and foremost on contrasting the "orthodox" – an image signifying the "old", religious Jew as a redundant detail of a distant history and an anachronistic set of values, customs, ceremonies, texts, and beliefs long since devoid of relevance and interest – secularity seems to lack the intimate acquaintance with the "more Jewish" alternatives, so critical for the very feasibility of a genuine choice (Liebman and Yadgar 2009). Jewish-Israeli secularity's self-perception as revolutionary (compared with the "old" tradition), "modern" and not-traditional has become so central (even if it cannot withstand a critical examination), as to create an implicit barrier preventing a potentially fertile dialog from taking place between Israeli secularity and its Jewish heritage.[4] In a context within which orthodoxy has gained a virtual monopoly of the definition of Jewish tradition and the meaning of fidelity to it (as secularity, in turn, is awarded a monopoly over the notions of modernity and liberty), the possibility of an open, multifarious dialog with tradition seems practically impossible. As Sagi (2006, 120–21) sternly concludes, under the heading "The Rejection of the Past in Israel":

> The taking over of the past by one group means, in practice, the exclusion of other cultures and groups from the past. As the ownership of the past has been set, the paths to socialization, which enables individuals and groups to connect with the past, have also been set; they must be "baptized" into the orthodox discourse and faith, with their myriad manifestations. Paradoxically many groups within Jewish society, especially in Israel, have adopted these rules of the game. This adoption

> originates with two different sources: the first has to do with the fact that, other than few, singular personages, the general tone of Zionism was that of rejection or marginalization of Jewish religion and the Jewish past, which was seen as constituted exclusively by religion . . . The other source, to have a much stronger effect to this day, has to do with the fact that, due to political circumstances, orthodoxy (mostly in Israel) has successfully seized control of the Jewish identity discourse, making "others", those who are not orthodox, accept the identification of the past in accordance with the orthodox discourse itself. Many secular Israelis have assumed that the past is indeed a matter of the "religious" (who were, of course, identified with orthodoxy) and any need of it must be mediated through them . . . The appropriation of the past by orthodoxy was completed by a complementary move by non-orthodox groups, in Israel more so than in the United States.

The dominant option, often presented as the *sole* option, facing both orthodox and secular Israelis, is the complete and total abandonment of one's construct of identity, and the full adoption of the "other's" identity, in a comprehensive reversal of one's world. Not incidentally, the Israeli experience shows that these converts (to either side) often turn out to be "extremists". Like almost any revolution, total identity conversions also lead to radicalism, nourished by the repudiation of the alternatives, sometimes as extensively as the complete disassociation from any past connections, including the familial ones. This, I would argue, is a rather limited choice, particularly when compared with the one continuously and constantly made by traditionists. The traditionist option – ever "inconsistent", never obvious or taken for granted by the surrounding society – must always explain and justify itself.

As such, Jewish-Israeli traditionism demonstrates the ability to enter into a dialog with tradition based on a compelling presumption of fidelity to it, while rejecting the ultra-conservative and frozen perception of tradition and the interaction with it. Traditionism encourages us to update our image of tradition. Moreover, it could even be argued that traditionism returns us to a more authentic perception of Jewish tradition (see Sagi 2006, 112–13). The first step towards such an authentic understanding is the abandonment of binary, dichotomous perceptions of reality ("traditional vs. modern", "religious vs. secular", and others).

Some might argue that in the context of contemporary academic discourse it would be wiser to see traditionism not as modern, but rather as post-modern; after all, it is not difficult to recognize the "supermarket-esque" nature of traditionist identity, as traditionists themselves testify to their active, dynamic selection of certain elements of their Jewish identity and/or modern-secular one, continuously deciding whether to observe or disregard varying aspects of what others might consider as the "fundamentals" of one's "authentic" identity. Would it not, then, be more accurate to describe traditionism as an "invented", or "fabricated" identity, much like any other

postmodern identity, which is no more nor less than the mask one puts on and takes off at will in the carnival that is the era of relativistic post-modernity? I believe that such a conclusion would be mistaken, as in most cases traditionists do not accept the value relativism usually identified with post-modernity, and are unhesitant in talking about their uncompromising fidelity to the "essence" of their Jewish identity. As has already been clarified above, the traditionist "method" is based upon the recognition of what can be termed "the core of Jewish authenticity": the minimum of practice, values, and beliefs (i.e., tradition), without which any Jewish identity is inauthentic.

This distinctly judgmental (and thus not exactly "postmodern") position finds its expression, among other things, in traditionists' treatment of the established movement closest to them in terms of observed practice, Conservative Judaism. The similarity of religious observance between the two groups has been much discussed, and it has been often remarked that, at least in theory, traditionists are the most obvious target audience for the Conservative movement in Israel, as they form the unique (unrealized) potential of Conservative Judaism to become a dominant institutionalized denomination in Israel. My discussion of traditionists' treatment of the non-orthodox movements displays not only the criticism and deep-rooted reservations traditionists have about these groups, but also some of the primary explanations for this negative treatment. At this point in the discussion, it is important to pay attention to traditionists' judgmental treatment of the non-orthodox denominations.

The most prominent criticism traditionists have against the non-orthodox movements is that they "make a mockery of religion", by giving a *halachic* stamp of approval to religiously lenient behavior (from an orthodox point of view). In this context traditionists assume the orthodox point of view and accept the orthodox interpretation of Jewish Law as "the authentic Judaism" in all things religious. This might also be seen as yet another result of what was described above as the orthodox "domination" of the definition of tradition and fidelity to it. All this is not to say that traditionists do not consider themselves to be real Jews; yet they are firm in their belief that a Jew wishing to lead a wholly Jewish life, "properly" and "as in the Halacha", must observe all of the *mitzvot* in their orthodox interpretation. This ambivalent approach is the source of guilt and even a feeling of inferiority in many traditionists when faced with orthodox Judaism. However, unlike what traditionists see as the Conservative or Reform forgivingness towards those who do not observe the dictates of Halacha, traditionists refuse to *halachicly* legitimize clemency towards themselves. Traditionist individuals choose not to observe all of the *mitzvot*, are aware of their choice, and are willing to defend and justify it; but they are not willing to support any religious-*halachic* (non-orthodox) legitimization of such leniency.

An even more complex aspect in this context is traditionists' attitude towards questions of gender equality. As the interviews have shown, the institutional-organizational elements of gender equality do not retain a central place within traditionist women's feminine and feminist identity and

worldview. On the contrary, an examination of the interaction between traditionist women's different components of identity reveals a complex and intricate image of a proud, continuing and consistent struggle for a free and equal feminine and Jewish self-identification, often accompanied by strong reservations regarding what many of them consider to be radical political feminism. Indeed this fascinating blend points yet again to the relevance of the traditionist distinction between the public and the private, as well as the formal and the practical, in one's daily lives.

The crucial principle emerging here, as well as with a long list of other elements of traditionist identity, is the acceptance of the orthodox rabbinical leadership as the sole Jewish-religious authority. This is true even when traditionists (and particularly traditionist women) reject the established, monopolistic institution of the Chief Israeli Rabbinate, harshly criticizing the corruption and obtuseness typical of it while reporting the variety of negative feelings brought out by the condescending behavior of the Rabbinate's representatives. But this criticism does not mean that they reject the authority of the rabbis. On the contrary: this criticism stems precisely from the traditionist expectation that the rabbi be a more perfect model of the orthodox Jew than the average person. It is important, however, to also note that the acceptance of the rabbi's authority and its reaffirmation are dependent upon the traditionist uncompromising demand that the rabbis "know how to behave" – that is, limit the extent of their authority and be tolerant (albeit only passively) towards the less than perfectly observant behavior of traditionists. This is not to say that there is an expectation that rabbis give *halachic* legitimization to the traditionist lifestyle (again, this is precisely the source of traditionists' criticism of the non-orthodox movements), but rather that they present a strong, near perfect and pure model of proper authentic religious Judaism. Indeed, part of what is "proper" about it is exactly that tolerance towards those who do not live up to the model. The rabbi, in short, must be a living example, but never force his example upon his audience.

Traditionists' attitude towards rabbis is tightly tied in with the question of their position regarding religious reform. It is quite obvious that traditionists consider many of the *halachic*-orthodox prohibitions and restrictions to be outdated, anachronistic laws which may have been right for their time, but which have long since become irrelevant. It is this perception that affords them the personal legitimization not to observe these prohibitions and still view their Jewish identity as authentic. Many of them are also very outspoken regarding certain prohibitions, dictates, and restrictions which have accumulated throughout the long years of rabbinical Judaism, expressing their belief that the time has come for the halachic position regarding these issues to be amended. (The ban on switching electric lights on and off during Shabbat is a central symbolic example.) This could be seen as one of the most distinct expressions of the dialogical relation traditionists have with tradition. And still – and this is the crucial point here – the only authority acceptable by traditionists as having the legitimacy to make these *halachic* adjustments is

the orthodox rabbinate itself. The misfortune of the last few generations, according to this perception, is that the Jewish people have not produced orthodox rabbis of stature and prominence sufficient for them to be able to insert the necessary changes into Jewish Law.

* * *

Earlier in this book I suggested adopting Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) discussion regarding the characteristics of "liquid modernity", particularly the unique traits of "individualization" and its ramifications regarding the issue of identity, as a theoretical framework within which to study traditionism. I would now like to examine the possible contribution of the case study presented here to the further explication of this theoretical framework. As we have seen, Bauman emphasizes the "task" (or "project") of constructing and reaffirming one's identity, which the late (or "liquid") modern era imposes on the individual. He describes this mission as a product of the disintegration of social and cultural institutions, which in the past had provided the individual with his/her identity as "a given", based upon one's social class, ethnic group, locality, religion, etc. Bauman also remarks on the loneliness typical to the individual undertaking this mission, stressing that it is fulfilled under the – usually groundless – sense of personal autonomy. My investigation into the world of meaning constructed around the traditionist "mission of identity" offers us the individual perspective regarding the disappearance of these identity-supporting institutions. This perspective reveals the individual's need to realize this mission of identity in order to award some meaning to her life, and exposes the heavy social price and identity confusion that "actual autonomy", which forces the individual into this project of identity construction, may cause. The current case study emphasizes the need to position the modern mission of identity within the context of a continuing struggle on the legitimacy of competing definitions of identity. As can be learned from the all-pervasive, dominant presence of the system of cross-pressures applied to traditionists, as well as from the central place held by the images of "the orthodox" and "the secular" as part of the traditionist identity-construction project, we must emphasize the position of the constructed identity within a (rather limited) horizon of possibilities as a fundamental pre-condition of this identity-construction project. This horizon, which in turn is a reflection of the set of dominant values, culture, and meanings, serves as the primary foundation upon which the "manufacturing" of identity takes place. As such, it limits in advance the possibilities for self-definition, dictating a hierarchy between alternative, competing identity constructs.

Traditionists' noticeably judgmental position regarding competing definitions of Jewish identity also highlights the fact that those who take part in that project of identity construction do not necessarily share the sense of value relativism born of the understanding that identities are not "essential" and "natural" but rather "invented" and "manufactured". Moreover, many of our interviewees did not hesitate to negate outright the legitimacy (Jewish,

ethical, or practical) of other, competing definitions of identity, even where these definitions enjoyed an elevated status, above that of traditionists themselves (within the context of the Jewish-Israeli map of identities). Traditionists do have serious reservations when it comes to forcing the set of values and practices associated with their identity on other individuals (and they fear the coercion of competing systems upon them), but are a long way away from holding that all other definitions of Jewish identity are legitimate, authentic, or meaningful.

Similarly, it should be noted that the fulfillment of the modern mission of identity construction and maintenance does not necessarily lead to an understanding of the modern reality which requires it, nor to the preference of ("liquid") modernity over other, non-modern alternatives. This book has dealt with a large group of Israeli Jews who adopt an identity which is distinctly modern but also tagged and understood as being somewhat apprehensive of modernity in its dominantly secular sense; they are engaged in a project of constructing an individual and collective identity which self-identifies as traditional, sometimes portrayed as attempting to preserve the values of the pre-modern past. In other words, people undertaking the identity mission do not necessarily accept the basic assumptions of the reality which forced this mission upon them. They do not hesitate to maintain an identity which self-identifies as traditional and seeks that which the modern age (identified with secularity) tends to erase.

This would also be the appropriate place to focus our attention on the repercussions of the current case study upon the secularization thesis, used in the past as the primary theoretical framework for the study of traditionism. As has already been mentioned at the beginning of this book, the research field seems to be washing its hands of the secularization thesis, or at least questioning many of its base assumptions. The increasing evidence of the prominent, reviving and active presence of religion in the public arena and in politics worldwide (particularly in the distinctly "modern" and "secular" Western countries) seems to be inherently opposed to – and undermining – the most fundamental claims made by the secularization thesis. Critical investigations by historians and sociologists reveal also that some of the socio-historical presumptions made about the supposedly linear process leading directly from pre-modern religiosity to modern secularity are baseless. Paraphrasing some famous quotes, we could say that the rumors about the demise of God were premature, and that the declarations about the removal of religion from public life were equally untenable. In this context, Jewish-Israeli traditionists can serve not only as further evidence for the limitations of the secularization theory, but also as offering a different image of the possible interaction between religion, tradition, and modernity. Traditionists show how religious identity can continue to play a vital role within the modern mission of identity, undertaken by an individual who does not totally reject the "secularized" modern world, and does not shut himself off from it.

As I have repeatedly mentioned, contrary to the expectations engendered

by the use of the modernization and secularization paradigm, traditionists are far from disappearing off the map of Jewish-Israeli identities. The problem is that their voice is only rarely heard within the public arena. Both public and academic discourses continually fail to award traditionists and traditionism their appropriate attention. Israeli Jews who self-identify as traditionists offer a fertile, compelling alternative regarding the multifaceted relation between religion, modernity, nationalism, and ethnicity. At the same time, the dominance of the modernization and secularization discourse has turned traditionists and traditionism into an "anomaly", with much of the research thus focused mostly on "resolving" it, instead of considering the possibility of seeing traditionism as a phenomenon which could shed light on new avenues to the understanding of Israeli society. The correction of this academic fault as well as the cultural-political injustice was among the primary motives for the initiation of this research project and the book reporting it. Such an amendment would call for the abandonment of the modernization and secularization thesis, and the adoption, in their place, of theoretical frameworks and paradigms more sensitive to the characteristics of late, "liquid" modernity. Such a paradigmatic shift may, at least, lead to a research approach, as well as a social, cultural, and political one, which would rise above the dichotomous division of Jewish identities in Israel.

I have focused my attention here on traditionism as an Israeli phenomenon. Many aspects with which I dealt are distinctly Israeli. But this is not to say that traditionism should be seen as a uniquely Israeli phenomenon. On the contrary: I believe that the fundamental outline described here as the basis for traditionist identity in Israel could be utilized as a frame of reference for the formation of proximate identities in other contexts. Much anecdotal evidence clearly points towards the possibility of finding the prominent traits of traditionist identity in non-Israeli, non-Jewish contexts. Translated into general terms, the outline drawn above (for example: the insistence upon the retention of an "essence" of traditionist identity in a modern era; the modern mission of identity wishing to preserve a non-modern identity; the limited acceptance of religious authority in a context which is considered to be "secularized"; the refusal to accept religious reform while selectively following the orthodox directives; the apprehension of extremist discourse and radical identities while holding on to a distinctly critical self-perception) may be revealed to be a frame for the formulation of traditionist identity beyond the Israeli context. The task of investigating this possibility will be left for future research.

Notes

Introduction

1 I will expand my discussion of this issue in the next chapter.
2 See the 2000 winter issue of *Daedalus*, and especially the article by S.N. Eisenstadt (2000) in the same issue.
3 Compare this to Charles Taylor's (1992) discussion of "authenticity" as capturing the essence of modernity.

1 Theoretical framework

1 Indeed, as will be shortly discussed, Shils himself presents a much more complex, sensitive view of tradition.
2 Edward Shils (1958) presents essentially the same argument.
3 Shils (1958) was probably the first to explicitly note the need to distinguish the traditionalist/orthodox stance from other forms of adherence to tradition (although he did not offer a label for this alternative option (see also Jacobs 2007)). However, this notion is also implicit in several other major discussions regarding tradition (Gadamer 1989; MacIntyre 1984; Taylor 1994).
4 A hint of this may also be seen in Gadamer's (1989, 282) rather implicit distinction between tradition and "traditionalism". Stressing that the Enlightenment (wrongly) treated tradition with a large measure of criticism and suspicion, Gadamer attributes the traditionalist mindset to the romanticized view of tradition, and presents it as something born of romanticism's "abstract opposition to the principles of the enlightenment."
5 It must be pointed out that Sagi (2008; 2006; 2003) presents a similar move denying this binary module – a module he says to be intellectually destructive, confounding both the true understanding of tradition and the apprehension of orthodox adherence to it
6 Graham borrows the term "cumulative tradition" from Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1963).
7 For an early criticism of this dichotomy see Gusfield 1967. For a comprehensive criticism of the binary construction of "Traditional Vs. Modern" see Sagi 2006; Sagi 2008.
8 Eric Hobsbawm's (1983) argument regarding the "invention of tradition" is of course worth mentioning in this context.
9 As stated by Shils (1958, 153): "One of the most deeply established traditions of liberal thought in East and West asserts that tradition is antagonistic toward liberty . . . [According to this perception] [t]radition imposed barriers on man's conduct and restraints on his thought and sentiment; it prevented him from feeling and valuing according to his own creative powers."

10 Mizrahi (pl. Mizrahim), an alternative term to "Sephardic", refers to Israeli Jews who were born, or whose parents were born, in non-European, mostly Muslim countries.
11 The term "pre-modern" is taken from the introduction written by Deshan and Shokeid for an article by Yaakov Katz (1984) in a volume dealing with Mizrahi Jews, which they edited. The editors' choice of Katz's article, a summary of the modernization thesis, as the opening article in a book dealing with Mizrahi Jews, while stressing their religiousness, gives a fairly strong indication of the theoretical framework within which traditionism was being investigated. For criticism of Katz's binary approach see Sagi (2006, 88–94).
12 The most extensive survey data available about religious observance and practices among Israeli Jews is the "Guttman Reports" (Levy, Levinsohn, and Katz 1993; Levy, Levinsohn, and Katz 2002). For an interpretation of the earlier survey see Liebman and Katz (1997). These surveys found that those self-identifying as secular ("non religious" or "anti religious" in the updated version) comprise approximately 50 percent of the Jewish population in Israel. The religious sector (including *haredim*) stands at approximately 20 percent.
13 Ashkenazi (pl. Ashkenazim) Jews are those born, or whose parents were born in European, mostly Christian countries.
14 The work of Meir Buzaglo (2008) stands out in this context.
15 The great surprise generated by observers' realization of the rather high rate of "religious" observance and strong belief among secular Israeli Jews is but an indirect evidence of this preconception.
16 See, for example, Levy, Levinsohn, and Katz 2002, 58.

2 Traditionism and choice

1 See also my discussion of the subject in Chapter 4.
2 See especially Chapter 7.
3 On the matter of secular judasim in Israel see Liebman and Yadgar 2009.
4 See Chapter 7.
5 See Chapter 3.

3 "Method", "consistency", and guilt

1 I shall discuss this matter in more detail in the second part of this chapter.
2 The traditionist choice is always in relation to the two dominant options. I focus here on the relation towards the orthodox as representing the Jewish-religious ideal. But the secular is not absent from these considerations: Traditionists view their choice as preferable to abandoning Jewish tradition and erasing Jewish identity (to be expanded upon in Chapter 7).

4 Traditionism and observance

1 See Chapter 7.

5 Cross-pressures and traditionist solitude

1 Rav Yosef Azran, a former Knesset representative of Shas (a party which relies heavily on the traditionist vote) expressed this idea in a television interview. Azran reserved his criticism for the bulk of traditionists: those who, in his opinion, were distancing themselves from the world of religion (He excluded those who were originally secular and were now becoming more religious). In his words: "Why *masortim*? Because it was hard for them to bear the yoke of religion, so they

created an easy Judaism, whatever was easy for them. They keep cutting off more and more until all will be gone." Rav Yosef Azran in an interview with Aliza Lavi, in the program *Shavua Tov*, Israeli TV Channel 1, May 4th, 2002. I am grateful to Dr. Aliza Lavi for securing this quote.

2 Dr. Dror Eidar informed me that Rav Reuven Elbaz, who is famous for his public "awakening" shows (which address traditionists and secular Israelis), describes traditionists as people who are "given into the hands of their evil inclinations" (*mesurim beyad yetzer hara*).

3 See, for example, how one media personality, who is identified with the modern-orthodox camp, described traditionists, whom he derogatorily termed "the secular-religious", alluding to their incomprehensible mixture of these allegedly separate worlds: "The secular-religious is pathetic in my eyes. He wants very much to be politically correct – both an Israeli and progressive and a little bit of a Jew . . . This is an internal contradiction." Kobi Ariel, in an article by Aviv Lavi, "The Judaism of TV Ratings", *Haaretz-Musaf* (November 1st, 2002): 30–34, quote from p. 34.

4 Rav Ovadia Yosef, the most prominent religious Sephardic leader of the current age, is often mentioned as the originator of several such *halachic* solutions. For instance, he distinguished between different ordinances regarding Shabbat ("to observe" and "to remember"), in order to avoid labeling traditionists as desecrators of Shabbat, a label with severe *halachic* ramifications; Rav Yosef decreed that though traditionists do not "observe" Shabbat, they nevertheless fulfill the "remember" decree, by not forgetting the sanctity of the day, thus concluding that traditionists should not be classified as desecrators of Shabbat. Rav Yosef also confirmed and initiated several practices meant to preserve traditionists' Jewish identity and practice within the context of a loosening *halachic* hold over the Jewish way of life (Picard 2007, 87–114; Lau 2005, 41–44).

5 The prominent editor of *Haaretz'* culture and literature section, a man well known for his provocations, gave this attitude a rather crude expression, as he summarized his criticism (which he often repeats in his blog), amid the publication of surveys revealing that a majority of Israeli-Jews – non-religious included – practice several core (religious) rituals related to Passover:

> [The] modern-day Israeli person is a weak and cowardly creature . . . who cannot tell himself, even after sixty years of statehood: "It's time to choose and decide if I am secular or religious." Instead he dances in two separate parties . . . On the one hand, he drives on a Saturday to do some shopping in a nearby mall, but on the other hand he punctiliously eats only unleavened bread during Passover, because that's how it is, and educates his children to be two-faced like him, and calls this hypocrisy "tradition". And what does the child understand? That he has a father who lives in a lie, and this lie is the main value around which his father's life revolves.
>
> (Ziffer 2008)

6 The latest Guttman Report found a large discrepancy between the respondents' self-definition as religious, non-religious, traditionist, etc. and the level of their observance. This discrepancy led the researchers to the conclusion that "the level of observance of tradition is substantially higher than the level of religiosity" (Levy, Levinsohn, and Katz 2002, 6).

7 The mirror image of this underestimation, which also goes a ways to explaining it, is the overestimation of the most extreme secular Israeli-Jews about their percentage of the general population: the 1993 Guttman Report found that the most secular are the least aware group of their small percentage of the Jewish population in Israel (see Liebman and Katz 1997, 95–96).

6 Traditionism, ethnicity, and gender

1 The latest Guttman Report (Levy, Levinsohn, and Katz 2002) found that 50 percent of all Mizrahim self-identify as *masorti*, whereas only 19 percent of Ashkenazim so self-identify. Mizrahim constitute more than three quarters of those identifying as *masorti*.

7 Traditionists' images of "the orthodox" and "the secular"

1 Revital is referring here to a predominant, stereotypical image of the studious orthodox man who does not work and lives off charity, avoiding both military service and labor.
2 Karin is referring here to an image, often portrayed in the Israeli media, of violent demonstration by ultra-orthodox Jews.
3 Roni is referring to a minor media storm which was centered round a journalist's report of a sermon by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, in which he was asked about the danger of ripping hairs out of the nose on Shabbat.
4 Liav is referring to a marketing stunt, in which a recently opened clothing store in Tel Aviv offered free merchandise to women who were willing to undress in public. The event was reported in the media, and stirred a minor public controversy. (See, for example, *Yediot Aharonot*, Nov. 3rd, 2003).

8 Rabbis, *halachic* reform, and the non-orthodox movements

1 This argument is often bluntly expressed by politicians protesting against the rabbinical influence over certain religious political parties which enjoy the support of many traditionist voters. For a refined, thoughtful articulation of this argument see especially Deshen (1994).
2 The orthodox rabbinate holds a monopoly over Jewish marriage in Israel; though slightly loosened in recent years in practical terms, it is still, to all intents and purposes, exclusive.
3 It should be mentioned that the official Hebrew name of the Conservative Movement in Israel is "The *Masorti* movement". This is often a cause of great confusion. Members of the Conservative Movement tend to distinguish themselves by identifying as "Mesoratyim with a capital M" (using the English terminology in Hebrew). This play on words also testifies to the ethnic component – i.e. Ashkenazi American – of the movement's dominant make-up, which is, I suspect, one of the main reasons for the Conservative Movement's inability to appeal to traditionist Mizrahim.

Conclusion

1 See, for example, Scholem's rather cryptic remarks in his Dec. 26th 1926 essay/letter to Franz Rosezweig (I am using the English translation of Alexander Galley, which appears in Cutter (1990, 431)):

> [P]eople here [in Palestine] don't know what they are doing. They believe they have secularized the language [Hebrew], pulled out its apocalyptic thorn. But that is surely not true; this secularization of the language is only a façon de parler, a holy phrase. It is absolutely impossible to empty out the words filled to bursting, or only at the cost of the language itself [. . .] if we, the transitional generation, bring the language of the ancient books to life in them [the children] in such a way that it may disclose itself anew to them, – must then not one day the religious force of this language break out against

> its speakers? [. . .] God will not remain mute in a language in which he has been invoked and summoned into our existence in countless ways.

2 Charles S. Liebman (1977) was among the first to present these terms and set them as a framework for the discussion of Mizrahi traditionism. See also Liebman (1974).
3 Presenting an especially critical attitude towards the image of orthodoxy as "absolutely" and unreflectively true to the frozen image of tradition, Sagi (2006; 2008) also clearly shows the reflective (even though mostly unacknowledged) aspect which exists in the "orthodox" treatment of tradition.
4 Indeed, the writing of this book is concluded at a historical sociocultural moment characterized by varying, growing manifestations of secular Israeli-Jewish attempts at re-engaging a dialog with "religious" tradition.

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Index