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RELIGION FOR THE SECULAR
The new Israeli rabbinate

*This article introduces two national religious-oriented (*dati-le'umi*) organizations that have emerged within Israeli society since the 1990s. Neither has openly called for the dismantling of the state rabbinate. Nevertheless, they challenge central aspects of its hegemony over religious life. Both are independent initiatives whose main mandate is to provide the average non-observant Israeli with an alternative address for religious guidance and services. Beyond engendering a re-conceptualization of the nature of the rabbinate in Israel, the article suggests that these new frameworks offer a window into broader realignments that began to emerge at the turn of the twenty-first century both in regard to the relationship of the secular population to religion and within Israeli national religious Orthodoxy.*

Introduction: From conflicts to new alternatives

Conflicts over the role of religion in society were part and parcel of the Zionist enterprise from its inception and continue until today (Friedman, "Yahasei datiyim-hiloniyim"; Luz; Reinharz). Since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, one of the main bones of contention has been the coercive power held by the Orthodox in regard to public policy and matters of personal status (Cohen and Susser; Edelman; Zarembski). Nevertheless, the government-sponsored Orthodox rabbinate has remained the central purveyor of religious services to all Jews other than the *haredim* (Orthodox non-Zionists).[1] Two national religious-oriented (*dati-le'umi*) Orthodox organizations that have emerged since the 1990s challenge central aspects of the state rabbinate's hegemony while not openly calling for its dismantling. Both are independent initiatives whose main mandate is to provide the average non-observant Israeli with an alternative address for religious guidance and services. Beyond engendering a re-conceptualization of the nature of the rabbinate in Israel, I suggest that these new frameworks offer a window into broader realignments that began to emerge at the turn of the twenty-first century, both in regard to the relationship of the secular population to religion and within Israeli national religious Orthodoxy.

Hiloni, dati-le'umi **and** *haredi*

Before elucidating the conceptual foundation of the state rabbinate, I will expand upon three terms that are used throughout the discussion: "secular", "national religious" and "*haredim*". "*Hiloni*", or secular, is the word used colloquially to describe the majority of Israeli Jews who do not follow the strictures of traditional Jewish law. As the Guttman

Institute reports of both 1990 (Liebman and Katz; Susser and Liebman, *Choosing Survival*, 98–107; Susser and Liebman, "The Forgotten Center", 211–20) and 2000 (Levy, Levinsohn and Katz) demonstrate, however, the ideologically secular actually represent a relatively small but politically and culturally powerful minority. Most non-observant Israelis are not militantly anti-religious and continue to include many aspects of religious tradition in their lives, but are increasingly uncomfortable with religious coercion. As will be pointed out below, the influx of over a million immigrants from the former Soviet Union since the 1990s has increased the ranks of the ideologically secular. Even so, Asher Cohen (*Yehudim lo-yehudim*, 35–84) has shown that in many cases, part of the swift acculturation process of the Russian-speaking population has entailed the introduction of more traditional Jewish ritual into their lives.

The term "national religious" (*dati le'umi*) refers to those Israeli Jews who identify with the ideology of Religious Zionism[2] and on some level feel that the modern State of Israel possesses positive religious meaning (Ravitzky, *Messianism*, 10–39). I prefer the term "national religious" to "Religious Zionists" because the latter entails a broader group that includes, among others, both Israelis and Jews in the diaspora. For the most part, the national religious primary and secondary schools combine intensive religious studies with a full programme of secular subjects, and their graduates are active in the country's economic and cultural life. The male youth are expected to serve in the Israeli army, while the women are encouraged to perform national service for one or two years. Indeed, an agreement reached with the army in the late 1960s led to the creation of a vast network of postsecondary "*hesder*" *yeshivot* that combine high-level talmudic studies with army service over a five-year period (S. Cohen; Don-Yehiya, "The Book and the Sword"; Lichtenstein, "The Ideology of Hesder"). For most of Israel's history, the national religious were represented in parliament by the National Religious Party (NRP, or *mafdal*). The national religious were the most active supporters of Israel's efforts to settle the territories captured in June 1967, and thus the government policy of territorial compromise adopted in the 1990s caused a great deal of ideological confusion for this sector. One result was the splintering into additional political parties. Since the 1990s, the religious and social attitudes of a sizeable portion of the national religious camp have gravitated toward the *haredi* positions (Cohen and Susser 50–72). This, too, may be related to disappointment with the direction the state has taken (Finkelman).

For the *haredi* Orthodox, living in the Holy Land is a religiously meaningful endeavour, but not participation in the sovereign state. For some, the secular state is comparable to any non-Jewish regime (Ravitzky, *Messianism*, 145–80). Others consider its very existence to be counterproductive to achieving God's will, while the most extreme even campaign for its demise (Ravitzky, *Messianism*, 40–78; Friedman, "Religious Zealotry"). Most *haredim* view modern society negatively and secular education is kept to a bare minimum, if not completely prohibited, unless it is deemed crucial for financial welfare. Rather than serving in the Israel Defense Forces, young *haredi* men are encouraged to study full-time in a *yeshiva* until long after they have married. That being said, economic necessity, as well as the ongoing reality of living within a secular culture, has led to greater involvement in the workforce, more openness to pragmatic secular education (Lupo, Shtadler) and introduction of aspects of popular culture (Baumel; Caplan, "Heker hahevrah haharedit", 260–4). The ranks of the *haredim* include the various streams of hasidic and *mitnagedic* Ashkenazim whose parliamentary representatives stem from the *Agudat yisra'el* and *Degel hatorah* parties, as well as the Sephardi Jews connected with

the *Shas* political movement. Each sub-group possesses its own particular ideological and educational outlooks. The authority of independent rabbinical figures is very strong within *haredi* society.[3]

The Israeli state rabbinate and the broad constituency model[4]

Like its precursors in Europe and the Ottoman Empire, the Israeli state rabbinate is predicated on the idea that all Jews within a given locale make up the constituency of the local rabbinical appointee.[5] On a legal level, this dynamic is secured through the exclusive authority given by the state to the officially appointed local rabbinate—national, regional, city, town and neighbourhood rabbi—regarding personal status law (marriage, divorce, death), as well as the supervision of public religious standards (dietary and Sabbatical laws in food establishments, maintenance of the *mikvah* and *the eruv*, and the *halakhic* sale of leavened products before Passover). The state-sponsored rabbi generally occupies the pulpit of the city's or town's central synagogue, where many of the local non-observant families celebrate *bar mitzvahs* and attend services on high holidays. He is also expected to be the representative of the Jewish religion at public events, such as memorial services or affixing a *mezuzah* on a new government building or factory. Thus, based on his legal authority in certain areas, and his ceremonial position in others, the Israeli state rabbi is charged with serving a broad, heterogeneous constituency.

His appointment as the official representative of the secular-Zionist establishment only buttresses the sense that he is meant to be the rabbi of a wide cross-section of the Israeli population.[6] Paradoxically, however, many of those who occupy state rabbinic positions are products of the *haredi yeshiva* world, and do not necessarily identify with Zionism as a positive ideology. This seeming contradiction is primarily economically motivated as the state-sponsored positions are generally more lucrative than working as an independent rabbi or *yeshiva* lecturer. The willingness of the *haredi* rabbis to work within the Zionist enterprise may stem as well from the fact that through the more informal roles adopted by many state rabbis, such as teaching daily Talmud classes or delivering sermons in area synagogues, they come into closer day-to-day contact with their more observant constituents (Schwartzfuchs, 141).[7]

Despite the state rabbinate's ideologically hybrid human makeup, from a conceptual perspective it has long functioned as a central symbol of the modern Jewish political renaissance. The very idea of a sovereign Jewish state sponsoring its own rabbinic corps conjures up associations with Jewish nationhood of the ancient past.[8] Such images of a natural synthesis between political and religious heritage resonate in particular for many within the national religious camp who remain ideologically committed to ultimately transforming Israel into a *halakhic* state (A. Cohen, *Hatalit vehadegel*, 89–109, 72–88).

Parallel to the broad constituency approach that stood at the foundation of the Israeli state rabbinate, there have always existed alternative rabbinic models. Like the broad constituency model, the latter approaches also found their roots in historical precedent from nineteenth-century Europe (Bacon; Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy*, 117–92; Liberles; Katz; Silber) as well as early twentieth-century Palestine (Friedman, "Harabbanut harashit"). On one side of the religious spectrum, those who served the *haredi* communities have, for the most part, focused almost exclusively on their own observant

memberships. On the other side, particularly from the late 1970s, Conservative and Reform rabbis in Israel have provided religious leadership to their local congregants. Yet their narrow constituency was primarily made up of English-speaking immigrants and, until recently, their impact on broader developments within Israeli Judaism was limited (Tabory and Lazerwitz, 177–87). While their numbers remain miniscule in comparison to the Orthodox, since the 1990s there has been a marked expansion in non-Orthodox congregations and in local rabbinical training for this religious sector (Tabory).

Unlike the predominant *haredi* outlook, the new Orthodox rabbinic approaches do not represent an ideological abandonment of the aim of serving all Jews. However, on a practical level, some national religious figures have reached the conclusion that the broad constituency model of the state rabbinate has at best failed to address effectively the spiritual needs of the highly diverse contemporary Israeli population, if not actually producing greater alienation. In order to deal with this situation, the new Israeli Orthodox rabbinate—like the non-Orthodox movements—has chosen to focus on the non-observant population.[9]

Orthodox rabbis for secular Jews

Tzohar[10]

Tzohar (window) was founded in 1995 by a group of young national religious rabbis in the wake of the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (Barkat, "The Reform Movement").[11] Its self-proclaimed aim is "to become partners in the fashioning of the Jewish identity of the State of Israel, through dialogue and the search for common elements of identity, as opposed to differences that threaten to polarize Israeli society" (http://www.tzohar.org.il/en_tzohar.pdf). In practice, *Tzohar*'s main activity is cultivating a cadre of rabbis and, for specific tasks, female religious guides, whose task is to provide religious services to non-observant Israelis.

To date, Israeli law only recognizes marriages between Jews that have been performed by Orthodox rabbis (Cohen and Susser 18–20). *Tzohar*'s first project, which remains its core activity, is its wedding initiative. Non-observant couples who are engaged to be married are offered a "*Tzohar* rabbi" who is trained to be sensitive to the couple's backgrounds. The rabbi is approved to conduct wedding ceremonies by the state rabbinate, but is not one of its employees. The wedding will also be performed free of charge. The rabbis are often relatively young graduates of national religious *yeshivot*. Like the couple, they have served in the Israel Defense Forces and are conversant with contemporary popular culture. In advance of their wedding, a couple is often invited to meet the rabbi in his home. There they get to know the person who will play a crucial role in their own central lifecycle event. They also have the opportunity to explore the legal and contemporary philosophical meanings behind the ancient ceremony. Depending on the specific rabbi, they may also be able to introduce personal elements into the ceremony, as long as they do not contradict prevailing law and custom. For many couples, this is their first direct exposure to Orthodox Jews other than the popular images and often negative characterizations encountered in the press.

The success of *Tzohar*'s marriage initiative can be demonstrated in a number of ways. For one, other Orthodox organizations such as *Makhon binyan shalem* (http://

www.binyanshalem.org.il) and *Chupa* (http://www.chupa.co.il) have created frame-works that offer similar services. Moreover, as of 2005, the number of weddings performed by *Tzohar* rabbis has reached 2,500 per year (Chabin). This amounts to nearly 10 per cent of the 26,454 couples who were married in Israel during that year (Sa'ar, "Marriage, Divorce"; Sa'ar, "Fewer Israelis"). The rise in the number of *Tzohar* weddings is particularly significant in light of the overall decline in the total number of marriages taking place in Israel (Sa'ar, "Marriage, Divorce"). In fact, during the peak spring/summer wedding season, couples who do not register with *Tzohar* far in advance are often told that there are no rabbis available.

In light of the positive response to its marriage initiative, *Tzohar* has expanded to other activities, most of which are dedicated almost exclusively toward addressing the specific needs of non-observant Israeli Jews. A closely connected programme is the training of religious women, many of them wives of Tzohar rabbis, to teach non-observant women the laws of ritual family purity before their weddings. Such instruction is required by the state rabbinate in advance of receiving sanction to marry. These practices relate to private and intimate issues and are often completely foreign to the average Israeli. If they are not presented with proper sensitivity and intellectual sophistication, they potentially can turn the wedding experience into a source of increased alienation between the couple and religious tradition (http://www.tzohar.org.il/nisuim_show.asp?id=5912).[12]

Moving beyond the matrimonial realm, since 1997 a new type of Yom Kippur service, popularly known as a "*Tzohar minyan*", has appeared on the Israeli scene. This initiative actually evolved into a cooperative effort with the Israel Association of Community Centers (*Hevrat hamatnasim*), the Ohr Torah-Stone educational network and the Ministry of Social and Diaspora Affairs. Traditionally, many non-observant Israeli Jews attend synagogue services on the High Holidays, particularly Yom Kippur. From the last decade of the twentieth century there was a sharp decline in this custom. *Tzohar*'s leaders felt that among those who had stopped attending services there was still a considerable group who wanted to participate in the familiar Yom Kippur prayers, but felt alienated among the predominantly Orthodox crowds at most synagogues. The solution proposed was to hold services in community centres and other neutral public spaces that would be facilitated by *Tzohar* rabbis and would focus on explanations and the singing of well-known tunes. In the words of Rabbi Shai Peron, one of *Tzohar*'s founders and the head of this project, the local synagogue "is a community where every-one knows everyone else, and they [the non-observant] are unfamiliar with the prayer service. That is why we decided to organize the services in places other than synagogues" (quoted in Sheleg, "Don't Be in Awe").

In October 2005, about 250 *Tzohar* prayer gatherings took place across Israel (Meisels). Curiously, with the rise of this phenomenon some non-observant Israelis have expressed an original critique of the *Tzohar* services. While the user-friendly aspects of the initiative have been roundly applauded, some have found fault with the move away from the neighbourhood synagogue. In their opinion, there is something special about Jews of all lifestyles joining together—if only once a year—in prayer. By establishing independent services, *Tzohar* and its partners have sealed the fate of the community synagogue as the exclusive precinct of the observant. In parallel, they have spurned "synagogues for seculars" that are similarly off-limits to the religious sector except for the few individuals who come in order to assist the *Tzohar* rabbi in running the services (Meisels).

Regarding weddings, which by nature draw attention to the individual couple, the *Tzohar* way could be dismissed as simply softening the edges of the bureaucratic rabbinate. The rise of the alternative prayer venue highlights *Tzohar*'s role in re-conceptualizing the Israeli rabbinate. A declaration of sorts has been made that the nature of the relationship between the non-observant collective and religion is so different from that of the observant that the two no longer can be viewed as one broad constituency. Even if they pronounce the same prayers using the same tunes, the cultural divide between them remains a stumbling block to the creation of a common sense of community. Many *Tzohar* rabbis continue to address both populations. Rather than seeing these directions as part of one synthetic role, however, a demarcation has materialized between two distinct functions: serving as a "rabbi for the religious" and a "rabbi for the secular". Moreover, numerous individuals who perform weddings or run services are school or *yeshiva* teachers who are identified within their more familiar religious surroundings as part of the rank-and-file and not as clergymen. It is only through their encounters with the non-observant population that they become transformed into rabbinical authorities.

While regular contact with a rabbi is common among strictly observant Orthodox Jews who can be confronted daily by *halakhic* questions, this is rarely the case among the non-observant. That being said, *Tzohar* feels that many individuals within the broader population would appreciate greater access to rabbis who are equipped to answer their questions. With this in mind, *Tzohar*'s website includes an "Ask the Rabbi" section. Listed there are eleven rabbis, each a specialist in a particular area of Jewish law or custom. Among them are a rabbi/physician, a rabbi/ritual circumciser and a rabbi/attorney. Here, once again, the emphasis on responding to the specific needs of the non-observant population comes across (http://www.tzohar.org.il/ask_rav.asp).

There are numerous indications that *Tzohar*'s leaders recognize its subversive role in transforming the Israeli rabbinate's nature. For one, they are not satisfied with running a clearinghouse for rabbinical services in which affiliation of individual rabbis with the organization merely entails the willingness to perform these duties free of charge. Rather, *Tzohar*, with the financial support of the Avi Chai Foundation, has invested a great deal of effort into cultivating a sense of collective identity among its representatives.[13] At the beginning of the Hebrew year, rabbis receive special *Tzohar* calendars that include extensive guides regarding matters of *halakhah* and custom pertaining to their roles, as well as phone numbers of *Tzohar* leaders who are available for immediate consultation. Monthly newsletters are mailed out to each *Tzohar* rabbi in which *halakhic* questions that have arisen among the rank-and-file, and other issues of common interest, are discussed. They also announce the myriad events in which the rabbis can gather with their cohorts and the organization's leaders, including biannual conferences, quarterly regional seminars, enrichment courses and weekend events with families. In addition, since 1999, *Tzohar* has sponsored a journal that publishes rabbinic scholarship, as well as essays addressing contemporary topics. The mission statement of its first issue proclaims: "The Torah world is thirsty for renewal … a general desire exists for path-breaking [initiatives], spiritual refreshment, without which we will remain stationary or worse still regress … the challenges of our times demand a response" (Shilat).

Subsequent public statements by its leaders are consistent with this desire to promote *Tzohar*'s independent position as the voice of a new type of national religious rabbi. *Tzohar* has openly attacked the rabbinic establishment for practices related to

marriages of non-observant Jews, such as not meeting the couples in advance, arriving late, charging exorbitant and illegal fees, and agreeing to perform multiple weddings on a given evening at overlapping times (Chabin). In recent years *Tzohar*'s critique of the state-sponsored rabbinic bodies has expanded to include calls to overhaul the religious court system, including replacement of religious court judges who "endanger the status of the *halakhah*" (Yosef). On a broader societal level, the *Tzohar* leadership initiated a campaign to encourage synagogues to ostracize those guilty of domestic abuse. It also called for the national religious community to refrain from violent behaviour during protests over Israel's 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip (Barkat, "The Reform Movement").

Some of these examples imply, once again, that inasmuch as *Tzohar* aims to service the non-observant constituency, by attempting to mold the discourse within its own natural national religious home it is essentially maintaining a broad constituency approach. On the level of individual rabbis affiliated with *Tzohar* this may be the case. It would seem, however, that even those efforts that appear focused on internal reform of the religious sector are actually motivated by *Tzohar*'s main goals. Such changes stem from a desire to cultivate an alternative religious face that is more palatable and attractive to the broader Jewish population than the traditional rabbinate and religious political representatives.

Tzohar's outspokenness has led to criticism from across Israel's religious spectrum. On one side, rather than wholeheartedly applauding its efforts, Israel's Reform and Conservative movements have attacked *Tzohar*. This was the case, for example, when they expressed disappointment with its negative response to the Israeli Supreme Court's decision to accept non-Orthodox conversions. In the words of Rabbi Gilad Kariv of Reform Judaism's Israel Religious Action Center: "Tzohar is nothing more than packaging for the rabbinic establishment and all of its defects and flaws. It is a rustling, cellophane wrapper intended for consumption by secular Jews" (Barkat, "The Reform Movement"). Notably, this scathing critique still acknowledges that what has emerged from the organization is a cadre of rabbis, albeit Orthodox, but one that specializes in addressing a non-observant Israeli constituency. Indeed, *Tzohar* leader Rabbi Yuval Cherlow made this point explicitly in his response: "As far as I am concerned, saying that we are trying to promote a monopoly of the Orthodox rabbinate is a compliment. We are trying to change the rabbinate from within" (Barkat, "The Reform Movement").

With such an orientation as its calling card, not surprisingly the more confrontational and substantive efforts to confound *Tzohar* have emanated from the official Orthodox state rabbinical authorities. In 2005, the Chief Rabbinate felt compelled to publicize stricter criteria for those licensed to perform religious wedding ceremonies.[14] Previously this role could be proffered by the state rabbinate's local representative to any ordained Orthodox rabbi. According to the more recent by-laws, only those employed directly by the state rabbinate or government agencies are automatically given the right to marry couples that approach them. All other ordained rabbis must be reviewed formally and receive approval by a special committee established by the state rabbinate. As many *Tzohar* rabbis are teachers, *yeshiva* lecturers or work in more informal rabbinic settings, the new standards seem designed specifically to stem its challenge to the hegemony of the state rabbinate. The Chief Rabbinate's website now includes an official letter prohibiting rabbis from receiving payments for performing weddings (http://www.religions.gov.il/ Forms+DocFilez/Hupot. pdf.). This new policy statement came in response to public attacks on the practice of accepting additional money for work that is part of the state

rabbi's job description. Not coincidentally, it also serves to neutralize *Tzohar*'s no-fee clause—one of the additional attractions of engaging a *Tzohar* rabbi. During mid-2007, the struggle over rabbinic certification intensified. To date, no compromise on this issue had been reached (Ben-Hayyim).

The conflict between *Tzohar* and the rabbinate became even fiercer in autumn 2007 with the onset of the Jewish New Year. The Hebrew calendar year 5768 was the seventh of the sabbatical cycle in which Jewish law mandates that the land lie fallow. Since the establishment of the state, the official rabbinate supported a lenient ruling known as the "*heter mekhirah*", which allowed Jewish farmers to continue to cultivate and market their produce after formally relinquishing ownership of their soil to a non-Jew. As long as sellers guaranteed that their produce emanated from farms that followed the rabbinate's guidelines, they were given kosher certification. In autumn 2007, under the influence of *haredi* figures that long opposed the lenient approach, the state rabbinate relinquished the requirement that its local representatives certify as kosher establishments that abided by the *heter mekhirah*. The result was that eleven local rabbinates, including Jerusalem and Petah Tikvah, no longer sanctioned the *heter mekhirah* and required those seeking certification to follow the *haredi* practice of purchasing fruits and vegetables exclusively from non-Jewish sources (Erlander).

From the perspective of leaders within the national religious camp, this decision was not merely an adoption of a stricter *halakhic* standard. Rather, it represented an abandonment of the long-held Zionist notion that Jewish agriculture was a sacred enterprise that needed to be supported by, among other things, depending on Jewish legal positions that would allow the farming industry to maintain itself. In addition, by adopting the *haredi* standard, the rabbinate was catering to an elitist religious population at the expense of the majority non-observant constituency it was also mandated to serve. After appeals to retract the new policy were rejected by the state rabbinate, *Tzohar* took its most radical step yet. With the approbation of a number of the leading national religious rabbis, it created an alternative kosher supervision framework that offered to certify produce and food establishments in cities where the local state rabbinate refused to recognize the *heter mekhirah*. Simultaneously, it supported an appeal for an injunction from the Supreme Court against the Chief Rabbinate's policy. In response, state rabbinate officials threatened to rescind the rabbinic ordination of any rabbi involved in the new *Tzohar* initiative (Wagner, "Kadima MK"). The court actually accepted *Tzohar*'s position and the Chief Rabbinate was forced to create a certification committee for those cities in which the local rabbi refused to sanction *heter mekhirah* produce. Nevertheless, *Tzohar* refused to dismantle its independent kosher supervision agency.

Was this *Tzohar*'s first major step, as an op-ed column in the daily *Ha'aretz* opined, toward "divorcing the rabbinate"? (Pfeffer). While the answer to this question is unclear, it certainly substantiates the claim that *Tzohar* is not simply an effort to make the rabbinate more user-friendly. It is a reformulation of the rabbinate predicated on responding to the realities of Israel's non-observant majority (Wagner, "Kadima MK").

ITIM: The Jewish Life Information Center

Unlike *Tzohar*, ITIM ("times", "seasons") was not created in order to revolutionize the rabbinate, but founded to provide the public with information about religion that would

serve to smooth the relationship between secular Israelis and the state rabbinic bureau-cracy (Glazer). It has, however, evolved into a multifaceted organization providing a myriad religious services to a primarily non-observant constituency. Moreover, it does so through the use of electronic media in a creative manner that dramatically expands the possibilities for addressing this population. As such, ITIM moves beyond the creation of a rabbinate with a specialized focus. It offers a new model for a religious functions provider that is customized to an environment in which the virtual community may have already overtaken the physical one as the primary venue for communicating ideas and values.

ITIM's roots can be traced to the year 2000 and an initiative of American immigrant Rabbi Dr Seth Farber, originally supported by the politically moderate religious Meimad movement and its leaders Rabbis Michael Melchior and Yehudah Gilad (Berman, "A User-friendly Religious Establishment"). Its relatively modest first effort was to prepare explanatory materials regarding Jewish lifecycle events and the procedures involved in interfacing with the state rabbinate. Such brochures were given to new immigrants and others who were likely to be alienated by the rabbinic bureaucracy. Indeed, under Farber's leadership, the now independent (since 2002) ITIM has produced user-friendly booklets with extensive information regarding the historical, philosophical, *halakhic*, customary and procedural aspects of a range of Jewish lifecycle events (circumcision, conversion, marriage, divorce, religious ceremonies for women—*simhat bat, bat mitz-vah*, and burial and mourning). All are published in Hebrew, English and Russian, and distributed free of charge by ITIM itself, as well as through various government bodies and as supplements to lifecycle trade magazines. In 2005, over 100,000 such resource and instruction collections reached the predominantly non-observant constituency (http://www.itim.org.il /Static/Binaries/PhotoGallery/about%20us_0.pdf).

Taken as a whole, the ITIM literature is a valuable tool for those unfamiliar or less at ease with various aspects of Jewish religious tradition. It is through its website, however, that ITIM has transformed itself from a facilitator to a cutting-edge rabbinic portal. For one, all the practical information and guidance provided in the brochures appear on the Hebrew, English and Russian versions of the website, but the list of lifecycle events covered is far beyond the print editions. Moreover, the electronic version offers a wide array of additional services, which include a constantly updated list of contact information for religious functionaries and related services (wedding performers, ritual circumcisers, *bar* and *bat mitzvah* instructors, marriage counsellors, *mikvahs*, cemeteries, burial societies, local rabbinates); databases for prayers and homiletical ideas for special occasions, as well as for Jewish names; a category entitled "personal ceremonies" in which people share their customized rituals and helps individuals create their own; and an "inter-active section" that offers audio clips of religious ceremonies, electronic greeting cards for lifecycle events and a virtual tour of a *mikvah*. There is even a "bereavement notice maker" that provides various formulaic and graphic options for announcing the passing of a relative or friend. As of February 2006, an average of 11,000 people per month were making use of the ITIM website (Farber, Telephone interview, 5 February 2006). [15] By 20 May 2007, the figure had reached 14,500 (*ITIM Update*).

Despite its accessibility and wealth of information, not all issues can be addressed exclusively through even the most sophisticated web interface. ITIM recognizes this and offers a toll-free 24-hour hotline manned by staff trained to deal with more personalized questions and requests for guidance. When necessary, callers are directed to the various

experts who work with ITIM for more specialized advice. They may also be offered an ITIM volunteer, who will meet and escort them through the rabbinate's bureaucratic maze or facilitate a religious ceremony. This service is offered free of charge in Hebrew, English and Russian (http://www.itim.org.il).

ITIM's trilingualism highlights another perspective to its novel approach. If most non-observant Israelis are unfamiliar with the culture of the state rabbinate, the potential for alienation is magnified for new immigrants. The difficulties begin, of course, on the purely technical linguistic level. The already foreign religious worldview and procedure is often exacerbated by the inability to communicate with the representatives of the state rabbinate. This can be especially painful, for example, at moments of sorrow such as death or divorce, when ignorance regarding procedures intensifies the natural feelings of grief (Wagner, "Obscure Rabbinic Ruling"). In addition, some of the religious issues that confront new immigrants on a regular basis differ from those that are standard among secular Israelis. For many immigrants, for example—be they North Americans who grew up in non-Orthodox congregations or Russian speakers whose only earlier connection to Judaism was through a Yiddish-speaking grandparent—a major problem is proving that they are Jewish according to Orthodox standards. While ITIM cannot necessarily solve all the *halakhic* conundrums that arise, its staff members work together with immigrants to gather the appropriate information, and serve as their advocates throughout the process of clarification and rabbinic decision making (Gross; Barkat, "Leading Rabbi"; Berman, "New Rules"). When no acceptable evidence is found, ITIM helps design a conversion programme that is most appropriate to the individual's predicament (Farber, "The Conversion Mess").

On average, over 20 per cent of the calls and e-mail messages received by ITIM come from non-observant new immigrants and foreign residents. Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of the 800 people (beyond the 14,500 web readers) who contact ITIM directly each month are non-observant native Israelis (Farber, Telephone interview, 5 February 2006). Taken together, ITIM has created a framework tailor-made to its large, but specific, constituency: the non-observant Jewish population in Israel. While it does not render the state rabbinate's official functions obsolete, it offers a more personalized quasi-rabbinical framework geared to its primary audience.

Paradoxically, it would appear that centring its product through the seemingly impersonal Internet is actually the key to ITIM's ability to respond to the individual needs of its congregation. Certainly the ease of accessibility offered by this medium explains part of its attraction. Rather than calling up a total stranger—even if he is a rabbi—or waiting in line at the local rabbinate, the ubiquitous web serves as a comfortable environment for the person to learn about the relevant topic. More than mere convenience, the virtual quality of the experience empowers the individual to explore highly intimate issues in relative depth without depending on an authority figure, or displaying a commensurate degree of commitment.[16] In a world populated less by ideological secularists, and more by postmodern "seekers" who may not be antagonistic to religion but are uncomfortable with religious conformism, the Web may be considered neutral territory.[17]

In the specific case of Israel, even as the state Orthodox rabbinate continues to maintain a monopoly on official religious functions, more options are becoming available to the local consumer than was ever the case in the past. Weddings performed by non-Orthodox rabbis, as well as *bar/bat mitzvahs* taking place in their synagogues, while

still a relatively small percentage of the total, have steadily increased, and with them the public profile of these movements (Sheleg, "They're on the Map"). In addition, secular marriage weekend travel packages to Cyprus ("Another Israeli First") are advertised regularly; there is even a new offshore cruise wedding (Anon, "First Israeli Love Boat")—and secular burial (Meyers), and even cremation (Williams) are on offer. In such an environment, ITIM's website gives the individual the ability to consider rigorously the conventional option without formally making a commitment. If the person does ultimately enter the state rabbinate system, he or she will have to conform to its standards. Yet the autonomy engendered by the experience of exploring and choosing, based on knowledge, offers a hedge against the irritation resulting from coercion and alienation (Turkle 149–76).

The empowerment of the non-observant Israeli implicit in ITIM's unique formula raises the question of its relationship to the rabbinic establishment. Unlike *Tzohar*, to date the state rabbinate has not responded critically to ITIM. This can be attributed, among other considerations, to the fact that, as opposed to *Tzohar*, it does not posture itself as a force aimed at "chang[ing] the rabbinate from within" or even offering an alternative to it. On the contrary, its self-presentation is that of a willing partner whose *raison d'être* is to assist the rabbinate in improving both its function and its image. To this end, ITIM's spokespeople go out of their way to emphasize that: "We are not trying to attack the religious establishment, but rather to soften the impact of its meeting with those who choose to peek into [its] world" (Rabbi Seth Farber, quoted in Ravid). Ultimately, however, ITIM may be advancing a quieter, but far more subversive, revolution than that resulting from *Tzohar*'s activities. Indeed, *Tzohar*'s "rabbi for the non-observant" is a fresh concept, but it is still predicated on the rabbi as the primary source for religious authority and knowledge. ITIM, by contrast, has created a framework that significantly reduces an individual's dependence upon such a figure. At the very least, this can be compared to the empowering effect that the Internet has had on the medical consumer.[18] Yet unlike the latter, who knows that trusting one's own evaluation of health information is risky, this would not necessarily be the common reaction regarding religious law and custom. As the rabbinate's formal power weakens, rabbis may be forced to resign themselves to far more limited and technical roles in religious life. Alternatively, they could be inspired to focus on how to serve more as spiritual leaders than as exclusive sources of authority or as religio-legal functionaries.[19]

Alienation and attraction: Non-observant Israelis and religion

The emergence of organizations like *Tzohar* and ITIM and their relative attractiveness for non-observant Israelis illustrates two seemingly contradictory trends. On the one hand, alienation from, and animosity toward, state-sponsored religious coercion and its official agents, has grown dramatically. Nonetheless, there is an increased desire to explore new forms of religious spirituality, particularly among a significant minority of post-army-age young adults. By offering "user-friendly" alternatives to the state-sponsored bodies, both *Tzohar* and ITIM have keyed in to the multidimensional attitudes of young Israelis toward religion.

The cultural divide

The Israeli state rabbinate emerged during the early to mid-twentieth century within a population that possessed a common cultural language. In the nascent years of the State of Israel, the non-observant possessed a familiarity with tradition that could overcome the tension of a meeting with an Orthodox rabbi who had little appreciation for his counterpart's social and intellectual milieu. By the end of the century, accelerated secularization had diluted levels of shared religious discourse that had once permeated the descendants of both the European and Eastern-Sephardi immigration waves of the early and mid-twentieth century (Deshen and Shokeid). Interactions with the rabbinate, which for many of these immigrants had generated warm feelings, often produced a level of anxiety and discomfort in their offspring that alienated them from this institution.[20]

Meanwhile, the major influx of Russian-speaking immigrants since 1989 has brought close to one million new citizens to Israel that were, for the most part, completely ignorant of Jewish tradition (Al Haj, *Immigration*). If native Israelis were apprehensive over an encounter with the rabbinate, for Israel's Russian-speaking population the notion of interfacing with a rabbi was at best daunting, while for many it was not even an option. At least 25 per cent of the Russian-speaking immigrants were not halakhically Jewish or had failed to produce sufficient proof of Jewishness according to the Chief Rabbinate's standards (Al Haj, "Identity Patterns," 8). Therefore, even if they desired guidance from the rabbinate, they were, to a great extent, precluded from benefiting from its services. Certainly the option of conversion existed, but to date only a small percentage of the Russian-speaking population has gone this route (Barkat, "Jewish Agency"; Sheleg, "Most of the Immigrants").[21] Yet this does not mean that Russian-speaking Jews lacked interest in the Jewish aspect of their Israeli identities. Many of these "non-Jewish Jews", as Asher Cohen (*Yehudim lo-yehudim*, 35–84) has called them, expressed a strong desire to engage Jewish culture and heritage. The result was that, to a great extent, the state rabbinate was obsolete as a purveyor of religious leadership and services for Israel's fastest growing sector.

While organizations such as *Tzohar* and ITIM cannot solve every *halakhic* problem, they offer special functions and sympathetic representatives trained to address the immigrants' unique predicaments (Gross; Sa'ar, "Aharei shanim ba'aretz"). This exemplifies the manner in which these frameworks, to a greater degree than the broad constituency-oriented state rabbinate, concentrate on more clearly defined target populations. As pointed out above, the fact that *Tzohar* rabbis have served in the Israeli army and are comfortable in contemporary cultural discourse is a central element in their attraction for secular Israelis.

The Chief Rabbinate and public scandals

Beyond cultural alienation, another more recent factor that has led non-observant Israelis to seek alternatives is the unprecedented public scandals that that have called into question the morality of both the Ashenazi and Sephardi Chief Rabbis. Within less than a year, both individuals figured centrally in highly publicized scandals that raised questions about their personal ethical conduct. In each case, the Attorney General decided to refrain from filing criminal charges against them. Yet the son and

wife of Sephardi Chief Rabbi Amar were indicted, and the Attorney General issued a formal recommendation that Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Metzger resign in order to avoid formal impeachment procedures (Anon, "Time for a New Chief Rabbinate"; Barkat and Yoaz, "Attorney General Mazuz"). Needless to stay, such events cemented the sentiment that the state rabbinate was not a source for sincere religious leadership, only another government bureaucracy—scandals included. *Tzohar* and ITIM responded, at least partially, by offering their programmes and guidance free of charge, thus neutralizing claims of financial impropriety or abuse under the guise of religious leadership.

Non-Orthodox options

As stated above, non-Orthodox synagogues and rabbis emerged throughout Israel primarily from the 1970s, serving an almost exclusively English-speaking constituency. The 1990s, by contrast, witnessed significant growth in the presence of both the Reform and Conservative movements. Debates about the validation of Reform and Conservative conversions made the headlines of the daily press, while about 200 people underwent Reform conversion in Israel in 2007 (Ellenson). Consistent with an overall increase in gender activism and consciousness within Israeli society, the idea of celebrating *bar* and *bat mitzvahs* in an egalitarian setting also gained popularity. Most significantly, as mentioned above, the number of Israeli couples marrying in non-Orthodox ceremonies while attending to their civil arrangements through travel packages or via foreign embassies rose dramatically, with the Reform figure reaching 900 (Ellenson). All this took place while the Orthodox state rabbinate remained the only religious framework sanctioned by the government to perform religious tasks (A. Cohen, "Reshit Zenihat ge´ulateinu", 373–6; Meirovitch; Tabory). Nevertheless, while the increase in non-Orthodox denominations has not yet drawn the core of non-observant Israelis to non-Orthodox institutions (Don-Yehiya, "Orthodox Jewry," 159–61), it has exposed them to the existence of other religious possibilities. Even if most still see the Orthodox version as the authentic or normative one, it has become a target of questioning. A new culture of choice has emerged, especially due to the rising influence of post-Zionist approaches that do not take for granted the Zionist rhetoric that saw the rabbinate as an expression of Jewish sovereignty (Aronson; Kelman). Peter Berger described such a transitional social model in his study, *The Sacred Canopy*:

> The situation, of course, changes drastically when different religious systems, and their respective institutional "carriers" are in pluralistic competition with each other. For a while, the old methods … may be tried. But it may become difficult to either kill-off or quarantine the deviant worlds. The problem of "social engineering" is then transformed into one of constructing and maintaining sub-societies that may serve as plausibility structures for the de-monopolized religious systems. (49)[22]

Both *Tzohar* and ITIM are examples of new initiatives that recognize their roles as one choice among others and have sought to cultivate an Orthodox rabbinical product that can compete as a "plausibility structure" in a de-monopolized market.

The quest for personal meaning and the Rabin assassination

Contemporary Jews in the diaspora insist that Judaism can continue to contribute religious meaning to their lives. The nature of their religious exploration, however, is highly personal. Because of the individualistic nature of their quest, it is not as crucial for them to identify with a particular denomination (Cohen and Eisen 7–9, 13–42, 155–81). Israelis, too, have demonstrated an increased desire for personal religious meaning (Ezrachi, "The Quest for Spirituality"). For some, like numerous post-army "backpackers", their appetites for spirituality have taken them far from their Jewish roots to ashrams and Buddhist monasteries, as well as the beaches of Goa (Noy and Cohen). Particularly since the mid-1990s, Israel has witnessed an upsurge in frameworks geared toward seekers who have not achieved personal satisfaction within standard religious institutions. Upon their return to Israel, some of the "backpackers" themselves have promoted a fusion of their newfound affinity for eastern religions with Jewish identity. One result has been the sprouting of "New Age" Jewish outdoor festivals like *Shantipi* (http://www.shantipi.co.il), *Beresheet* (http://www.beresheet.co.il) and *Boombamela* (http://www.boombamela.co.il).

Hasidism and Jewish mysticism have also found eager audiences among Israeli non-observant Jews. The ubiquitous Habad is certainly one example, but others are also reaching deep into Israeli society. Prominent representatives include the radical Bratslav "Nah Nah" Hasidim (Odenheimer), the Sephardic spiritualist Amnon Yitzhak (Rosenthal), Philip Berg's Kabbalah Centre (Ellin and Sacks) and a nationalist-religious neo-Hasidism that draws inspiration, among others, from the Rebbe-songwriter of 1960s fame Shlomo Carlebach.[23] Other Israelis of a more intellectual bent who have also been exploring their religious heritage have not necessarily turned to the mainstream rabbinic leadership and their institutions. Instead, alternative study halls and prayer groups have been created, such as Alma College, Oranim College, *Elul, Siah b'etzba hagalil*, *Kolot* and *Beit midrash zevulun*, which encourage personal interface with traditional texts and ritual (Ezrachi, *Jewish Renaissance*; Yair et al.).

Some have attributed Israelis' increased engagement in their religious culture to the trauma and identity crisis that enveloped the secular public in the wake of the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (Ezrachi, *Jewish Renaissance*, 4). This intense convergence of politics and religion highlights the fact that while Israelis and other Jews throughout the world have experienced a greater gravitation toward spirituality, Israeli Judaism remains fundamentally different from its diaspora counterparts.[24] Moreover, while Rabin's assassination by a young man associated with the national religious camp caused a great deal of animosity toward the official symbols of religion and its representatives, it simultaneously led many non-observant Israelis to search for spiritual responses.[25]

Recall that this same tragedy also precipitated the emergence of *Tzohar*. During the early 1990s, *Tzohar*'s founders were young rabbis beginning to develop their careers as religious leaders and public figures. In light of the Rabin assassination, they chose to focus their energies on creating a new framework that would serve as a "*tzohar*", "a window between worlds". This by no means demanded renouncing support for the settlement movement. That being said, the disengagement from Gaza in the summer of 2005 reinforced the recognition that most of the Israeli public was alienated by the national religious focus on settlement.[26] Therefore, strengthening other forms of communica-

tion with the secular public was imperative and gave renewed impetus to *Tzohar*'s ongoing efforts.[27] *Tzohar* came into being at a time of acute friction between most Israelis and Religious Zionism. By providing an alternative to the established rabbinate—which, while not necessarily led by national religious rabbis, exemplified the role of religion within the political sphere—the leaders of *Tzohar* sought to cultivate a religious address untainted by the recent debacle that had so fragmented Israeli society. ITIM too, which received its initial support from the moderate Meimad religious party, can be seen as a national religious effort to reconnect to the secular majority after the trauma of the Rabin assassination.

The struggle between the national religious and the *Haredim*

While *Tzohar*'s reconceptualization of the rabbinate is aimed directly at the secular public, it also reflects the frustration felt by the national religious over the increasing *haredi* control of what was meant to be a flagship Zionist enterprise. Indeed, since the founding of the Chief Rabbinate in pre-state Palestine, and since the establishment of the State, many of the officially appointed rabbis have come from the *haredi* non-Zionist sector. Until the 1970s, there were very few high-level Zionist *yeshivot* able to train rabbis capable of occupying the many available positions. This changed with the emergence of the *hesder yeshiva* system in which students enrolled in a 5-year programme that combined advanced talmudic study with army service. In addition, the Merkaz haRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, which had been established by the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Abraham Isaac Kook (1860–1935), experienced a renaissance after the War of 1967. Under the leadership of his son, Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook, it became the ideological centre of the ultra-nationalist wing that continues to dominate Israeli Religious Zionism. With its rise in popularity, it began to produce many more young rabbis able to serve as local state representatives. It also sprouted numerous other *yeshivot* led by its graduates where scores of Zionist rabbis were being trained.[28]

The high point in the "Zionification" of the state rabbinate came in 1983, when the new Chief Rabbis, the Ashkenazi Avraham Shapira and the Sephardi Mordehai Eliyahu, were both identified with the national religious camp. Indeed, Shapira was one of the heads of the Merkaz haRav Yeshiva. During their decade in office, they strove to integrate their disciples into state rabbinic positions. Their efforts, while not without results, were short-lived. During the next two elections for Chief Rabbi, in 1993 and 2003, all four elected rabbis had stronger allegiances to the *haredi* community. This change was due to the decline in the political fortunes of the National Religious Party (NRP) that supported the Religious Zionist rabbis and the increasing prominence within coalition politics of the *haredi* groups—particularly the Sephardi *Shas* party. The result was that after a period of hope that the state rabbinate would indeed become the centre of national religious rabbinic activity the system reverted to its previous condition. In fact, as the NRP's political influence has continued to dwindle, it is unlikely that this situation will change in the foreseeable future (Cohen, "Reshit zenihat ge´ulateinu"; Cohen and Susser 38–72).

In creating an alternative framework fully controlled by avowedly national religious rabbis, the emergence of *Tzohar* in the mid-1990s can be viewed at least partially as a

decision to circumvent the *haredi*-controlled state rabbinate. It is no coincidence that the chief *halakhic* authority of *Tzohar*, Rabbi Ya'akov Ariel, was the candidate for Chief Rabbi of the national religious camp in the 2003 elections, but was defeated due to the political power of the *haredim*.

Conclusion: Rabbinical alternatives and the decline of the collective ethos

One could claim that there is nothing new about the "new Israeli rabbinate". Religious Zionism was predicated from the outset on a partnership with its secular counterpart (Luz; Salmon). The latter would orchestrate the political and economic aspects of the state, while the former would facilitate the ongoing connection of the nation to its religious roots. From this perspective, the influential role played by the post-1967 religious settlement movement and its political representatives regarding national security and international diplomacy was an aberration (Newman). As such, the refocus of an identifiable bloc of rabbis from the national religious camp away from territorial issues and toward serving the religious needs of the non-observant constituency is merely a return to the original state of affairs.

Such an interpretation, I believe, ignores the significant changes in the nature of Israeli society since the 1990s, as well as the awareness of this evolution that is fundamental to the efforts of both *Tzohar* and ITIM. The collective Zionist ethos at the centre of Israeli society in the first decades of its existence is no longer one of its characteristics. Institutions that once symbolized Jewish sovereignty and common heritage have lost their lustre within the public eye, if not becoming completely obsolete. Of all the groups that constitute Israeli society, the national religious, have remained among the strongest loyalists to the formerly held collective sentiment. At a time when army service, once the central expression of "national holiness", is no longer sacred, the national religious continue to volunteer in force for the crack infantry units. Yet even some of this community's representatives have reached the conclusion that institutions that once epitomized the Jewish national renaissance no longer met the needs of Israeli society. The advancement of alternatives such as *Tzohar* and ITIM to the state-sponsored rabbinate is, then, expressive of the national religious rabbinate's efforts to navigate the new social reality they have encountered.

If once it was believed that the settlement movement would inspire a renewal of the Zionist pioneering spirit among most Israelis, political and social realities said otherwise. In view of the diverse society that has developed, Religious Zionism's representatives have the choice of digging deeper into settlement enclaves and concentrating on strengthening their own homogeneous educational and cultural institutions, or searching for ways to connect with the secular population. To choose the latter, however, entails abandoning absolute allegiance to the collective ethos of the past, and accounting for the heterogeneity and nonconformity that has become one of Israeli society's most prominent characteristics. Due to changes in the public character, the state rabbinate— a symbol of the collective Zionist ethos of the past—is no longer a viable vehicle for achieving this goal of re-engagement. The common cultural language of bygone days has dissipated, scandals severely damaged its credibility, non-Orthodox options have arisen that offer Israelis other choices, and the institution itself is dominated by *haredi* rabbis

who possess a different vision for Israel's future. Under such circumstances, *Tzohar* and ITIM—each in a different way—have proposed alternatives to the state rabbinate that focus on the individual needs of their secular contemporaries and offers them access to knowledge that could empower their personal searches for religious meaning.

Notes

1. On the development of the Israeli state rabbinate, see Friedman (*Hevrah vadat*, 110–28); Morgenstern; Schwartzfuchs (137–42). For a case study of the development of an Israeli local state rabbinate, see Willian.
2. On the history of Religious Zionism in the pre-state period, see Salmon.
3. On *haredim* in Israel, see, e.g., Caplan (*Besod hasiah haharedi*); Caplan and Sivan; Friedman and Heilman; Friedman (*Hahevrah haharedit*); Friedman ("*Haredim*"); Sivan.
4. The term "constituency" is not being utilized here to imply the strict sense of people who have democratically elected a political leader. It refers, rather, to a wider formulation along the lines of a collective for whom a certain figure seeks to provide guidance or representation (see the variety of definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*).
5. The roots of this institution can be found in a number of pre-modern and early-modern frameworks including the Ashkenazi traditional communal rabbi, the Central-European *landesrabbiner*, the French *Consistoire* rabbinate, the British United Synagogue Chief Rabbi and the Ottoman *Hakham Bashi* (see Friedman, "Mara de'atra," 91; Schwartzfuchs 60–3, 72–85).
6. On the identification of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate with Zionism during the pre-State era, see Westreich.
7. Friedman ("Harabbanut harashit") argues that the fundamental mandate of serving a broad constituency is actually the source of the Chief Rabbinate's weak leadership. Its strictly Orthodox representatives are rendered ineffectual by their continuous efforts to apply their standards to a primarily non-observant public.
8. See Lichtenstein ("The Israeli Chief Rabbinate, 135"), where he suggests that: "A *rabbanut* (rabbinate) with a leaner self-image and less grandiloquent tone would also be healthier."
9. On differing approaches among nineteenth-century German Orthodox rabbis toward providing religious leadership to non-observant Jews, see Ferziger ("Constituency Definition").
10. To date, no academic studies have been published that examine *Tzohar* or ITIM (for brief references to *Tzohar*, see Tabory 192; Benovitz 310). Numerous journalistic articles have appeared in the Israeli press and have been utilized as sources for this study. In addition to the vast literature on religion and society in Israel and on the modern rabbinate, other sources include official organizational literature and websites, interviews with state rabbis and independent rabbis, leaders of the organizations, and secular Jews who have come into contact with *Tzohar* and ITIM, and observation of weddings performed by rabbis affiliated with *Tzohar*.
11. The founders included: Rabbis Yuval Cherlow, Rafi Feurstein, Micah Halevy, Zahi Lehman, Shai Peron and David Stav. Each of them has subsequently gained stature in their own right as leaders of educational and religious institutions.
12. A new book on the topic was also sponsored by *Tzohar* (see Benovitz).

13. On the Avi Chai Foundation and its perception of *Tzohar*'s mission, see http://www.avi-chai.org.
14. For the updated criteria, see http://www.itim.org.il/Static/Binaries/PhotoGallery/New %20Criteria %20for%20Mesadrei%20Kiddushin_0.doc
15. The only other comparable websites are those sponsored by the Chabad movement (see http://www.chabad.org) and the Aish Hatorah outreach yeshiva (http://www.aish.com). In both cases, a great deal of information is available, but the focus is primarily on exposing the surfer to a defined ideological outlook.
16. For an exploration of the societal and moral implications of the predominant role of technology in contemporary experience, see Gergen.
17. On religious seekers, see Roof, Wuthnow.
18. See, e.g., Bernhardt and Felter; Hart, Henwood and Wyatt.
19. For earlier precedents within the modern period of re-conceptualizations of the nature and primary function of the rabbi, see, e.g., Breuer; Schorsch.
20. See Lichtenstein ("The Israeli Chief Rabbinate," 136): "Sociopolitically, very few can presently remain firmly anchored within the Torah and *yeshivah* world … on the one hand, while developing genuine rapport with the general secular community, on the other."
21. The low conversion rate among Russian immigrants has been attributed both to bureaucratic and rabbinic stumbling blocks and to the indifference of the immigrants themselves.
22. See also Berger (*The Heretical Imperative*, 29); Liebman ("Religion," 147).
23. On Carlebach, see Ariel, Trugman.
24. For comparisons of Israeli and American Judaisms, see Liebman and Cohen, Liebman and Susser.
25. On the implications of Rabin assassination for Israeli society, see Liebman (*Rezah Politi*); Peri (*Assassination*); Peri (*Yad ish be'ahiv*); Sprinzak.
26. E.g., Rabbi Shai Peron is the rabbi of the West Bank settlement of Shaʿarei Tikvah. Rabbi Yuval Cherlow previously lived in the Golan Heights settlement of Hispin and served as a senior lecturer in its Yeshiva. Today he lives in the West Bank town of Efrat. On the development of Gush Emunim, the Religious Zionist settlement movement and its role in Israeli life, see Aran; Belfer; Don Yehiya ("Jewish Messianism"); Garb; Newman; Waxman. On settlement as the central motif in late twentieth century Religious Zionism, see Sagi.
27. See the entire section of articles devoted to the disengagement and its ramifications regarding the public perception of religion and national religious camp: *Tzohar* 21 (Winter 2005), 55–112. The debates among the *Tzohar* rabbis continue through articles published in every one of the subsequent seven volumes.
28. On recent ideological debates within the Merkaz haRav Yeshiva and its offshoots, see Rosen-Zvi.

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