

To Gulie

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Preface

As a member of the first generation of children born under renewed Jewish sovereignty, I had the privilege of being taught by the first educators of the State of Israel. My late father, who guided me from my earliest steps until his death, was himself an educator, so I grew up in a National Religious home and studied in National Religious schools. In my educational atmosphere we always strove as much as possible to combine the Jewish religion with universal science and culture, which every cultivated person is required to know. From my first moments of self-awareness, I felt the tension in which the people around me lived in maintaining this combination, and I witnessed many discussions revolving around it. The depth of the spiritual questioning that arises from this tension between the two worlds that this educational philosophy seeks to combine can be felt only by someone who has experienced it.

As I grew older, I saw that some of my friends managed to cope with the difficulties and lived with the challenges without seeking one-dimensional or easy solutions or escape routes. In contrast, other friends could not bear the tension. Some of them chose the yeshiva

and a Haredi lifestyle, which, while it did not solve the problem of struggle with their impulses, which is the eternal struggle of every human being, at least resolved the tension for them between the pronouncements of science and reason and those of revelation. Others chose a secular way of life, which left the halls of academe in their possession—scholarship, medicine, law, industry, and finance—but God and His word to man were absent. In my view, the former gave up the autonomy of their intellect, and the latter forwent religious experience. All these friends are dear to me, as long as they observe the principles of morality, in which they were educated from childhood, and which are an essential part of their being.

In recent years, the tension within Modern Orthodox Judaism has intensified and brought a crisis with it. Young people find it harder and harder to accept a complex world view, and proponents of the Middle Way, which combines Torah with science, are becoming scarcer. On the one hand, a significant portion of Modern Orthodox youth in Israel, who call themselves “Haredi-Nationalist,” chooses the path of Torah, preferring rabbis who will guide them along a clear, well-worn path, which denies both universalistic thinking and critical scholarship based on reason. Rather frequently, this path is strewn with romantic, messianic ideas with a New Age flavor that entice young people’s hearts. On the other hand, people who call themselves “formerly religious” have no interest and see no importance in observing the Torah and its commandments, and they choose secularism. In the post-modern world, where the prevailing view is that there is no absolute truth, but rather narratives of groups with different languages of discourse, those who become secular ask why they should choose a burdensome and archaic narrative whose proponents—fundamentalist Orthodox rabbis—behave as if the entire truth were in their possession and given at Mount Sinai, and they claim dominion over Halakha and the tradition.

Beyond the crisis in Modern Orthodox Judaism, there are the newly religious Jews, formerly secular, who generally choose the Haredi path because it seems like authentic Judaism to them, and there are also

other seekers of Judaism who are not interested in observing the commandments but are content with studying Jewish texts. The former remain ignorant of other authentic religious possibilities, and the latter miss out on individual and communal religious experience. Another distinct group consists of people who have rejected Haredi life and cut themselves off entirely from the experience of keeping the commandments. If they still have a desire to seek a Jewish spiritual life, they often find what they are looking for in the antinomian mysticism of kabbalistic groups and Bratslav Hasidism.

From the time I first became self-aware, I decided to choose the Middle Way. This was not a compromise allowing me to enjoy both worlds in a less intense way, but an effort to combine and balance the two worlds, to create integration, and to seek to achieve, in dialectical fashion, a more fulfilled life than either of its components by itself. I decided that the tension and the challenge would not deter me. On the one hand, I believed in the religious message and the moral guidance of the commandments of Jewish law and the spiritual elevation of the sages, but I understood that Orthodox truths and the apologetic evasions of those who propounded them could not, from my point of view, pass the test of criticism. As an academic scholar, I accepted and internalized the achievements of autonomous human reason, which has developed science and philosophy, but I noted that criticism alone cannot provide personal and communal religious experience. Thus my life became a series of searches and efforts to establish points of equilibrium, to integrate, and to unify. Today I regard myself as “Orthoprax,” or “post-Orthodox,” or “religious-secular.” I constantly hear the echo of the voice of my God, saying that the combined path that I have taken is the one that He desires, at least for me. I hope this book will strengthen those who espouse the Middle Way and even contribute to convincing some who have chosen an extreme path to return to the middle and renew it.

My search for points of equilibrium, integration, and unification produced this book, which is based on my doctoral dissertation, presented at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. It examines the

first times in which the encounter between traditional Judaism and modern European culture took place, and the first religious thinkers of the modern period who sought to integrate Torah with science, revelation with reason, prophecy with philosophy, Jewish ethics with European culture, sanctity with sensuality, and the redemption of the Jews with universalism. The book presents an analysis of the thought of Z. H. Chajes of Galicia, Poland, S. R. Hirsch of Germany, and S. D. Luzzatto of Italy. These three men were active in the first half of the nineteenth century; they personally experienced the tensions and challenges of the period; and they chose the Middle Way as the true way to form a person as complete as possible. The book examines what is common and what is distinct in these versions of the Middle Way against the background of these thinkers' time, places, and personal stories, their teachers, and their cultural heroes. The examination is based on an analysis of their responses to six modern phenomena:

1. Biblical criticism, which challenged the divine origin of the Torah;
2. The movement of religious reform within Judaism, which proposed a developmental view of the history of Halakha;
3. The Haskala movement, which proposed the integration of secular studies in the curriculum;
4. Emancipation and the neutralization of Redemption, which contradicted the traditional idea of the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel;
5. Improvement of the status of women, which stood in opposition to the prevalent traditional view of their inferiority;
6. Religious tolerance, which opposed the traditional hostility that prevailed among the monotheistic religions, especially between Judaism and Christianity.

The responses to these challenges trace the outlines of the Middle Way.

With the publication of this book, I wish to thank my parents, the late Dr. Haim-Itzhak and Hava Chamiel. My father, the educator, romantic poet, and scholar of the Bible and its Aramaic translations, and my mother, the sober rationalist, provided the basis of my life and always stood by my side and by my wife's side.

Over the course of my life, I have lived in two worlds. I earned my living as a banker, but I found my spiritual happiness in the Torah and in the halls of academe. I am grateful to my teacher and friend Professor Aviezer Ravitzky, who stimulated me and encouraged me to begin and to persevere in my studies of Jewish thought, and who also initiated me in the secrets of Maimonides.

I am particularly grateful to my teachers and mentors, Professor Shalom Rosenberg of the department of Jewish thought and Dr. Michael Silber of the department of Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who also taught me about the period I was dealing with.

Professor Eliezer Schweid taught me the history of Jewish thought.

Professors Yehuda Liebes and Rachel Elijor introduced me to the Kabbala, the Zohar, and Hasidism.

In addition to working with my advisers, I studied modern Jewish thought and its historical background with Professor Paul Mendes-Flohr, who directed my masters thesis, and Professor Benjamin Ish-Shalom and Professor Rabbi Yehoyada Amir. I am grateful to them all. Without them I would not have had the background necessary for understanding the thought of the subjects of my research. I would also like to thank Professor Nachem Ilan, who read several chapters of the book and made wise comments on them, encouraging me and advising me along the way.

I would also like to thank the editor of the Hebrew edition of this book, Dr. Asael Abelman, who turned an academic text from a doctoral dissertation into an accessible and informative book. The director of my Hebrew publisher, Mr. Yisrael Carmel, and his assistant Ms. Hadas Hener deserve great praise for the way they produced the book, as do

the production editor, Mr. Tanhum Avgar, and the editor of the indices, Doron Livneh.

I am very grateful to my sons, the computer experts: Noam, Nitzan, Itai-Jacob, and especially to Liad, who helped me overcome every difficulty and responded to all of my requests in coping with this marvelous tool. Last but far from least is my dear and beloved wife, Gulie, who spared no effort and did all she could to enable me to persevere in this work. This book is dedicated to her.

Jerusalem, August 2010

Preface to the English Edition

I am grateful to Academic Studies Press for accepting my book for publication, and to Professor Marc Shapiro for agreeing to serve as the academic editor. I was also fortunate in that Dr. Jeffrey Green was available and willing to accept the challenge of translating this complex and lengthy book. I am also grateful to Deva Jasheway of Academic Studies Press for her meticulous and intelligent editing. I would like to thank Mrs. Fern Seckbach for preparing a comprehensive index for the reader's benefit. Special thanks to Professor Lawrence Kaplan, who took it upon himself to review the translation of many quotes from Chajes, Shadal, and others, which are very difficult to translate; his important comments and corrections greatly improved the present text.

The book you are holding is my life's work. I regard it as a great privilege to offer it to a much larger group of potential readers in English than in the original Hebrew.

My book takes up subjects that have concerned religious Jewish thinkers for the past two thousand years and examines the way modern religious scholars of the nineteenth century dealt with them. Indeed, these issues are perennial and continue to affect those concerned with the Jewish religion—Orthodox and non-Orthodox

Jews, as well as non-Jewish religious thinkers—all of whom must attempt to reconcile ancient traditions with modern and post-modern culture and society.

While preparing this translation for publication, we noticed certain minor errors in the original Hebrew, and these, of course, have been corrected.

I would be happy to respond to any comment or suggestion to my e-mail address: echamiel@gmail.com. Also please see my website: www.echamiel.com.

Jerusalem, October 2013

Translator's Note

The length and complexity of this book made this a challenging and enriching project for me. In addition to the text in contemporary Israeli Hebrew by Ephraim Chamiel, I had to translate the nineteenth-century Hebrew of Chajes and Luzzatto. Both of these authors wrote before the conventions of modern prose were consolidated in Hebrew, and for that reason they are sometimes quite difficult to understand. Without Dr. Chamiel's assistance, and that of Professor Marc Shapiro, who corrected the translation as I proceeded, I could not have managed.

In some cases, where Luzzatto was quoted in a Hebrew translation from the Italian, I was able to locate the original Italian source and work from that. Regarding Hirsch, he wrote some essays in Hebrew, and I was able to translate passages from the original. However, he mainly wrote in German. Fortunately, his works have been translated into English, although by different people, so the passages in English quoted in the book are not uniform in style. Among the translators of the *Collected Writings* were the late Dayan I. Grunfeld, who also translated *Horeb*. The most readable and clear

translation of Hirsch's commentary on the Torah was done by Rabbi Daniel Haberman. These translations and others have been quoted in the book, and I am grateful both to the translators for their hard work and to Feldheim Publishers company for allowing us to quote extensively from the *Collected Writings* and the commentary on the Torah.

JMG

Introduction: The New Middle Way and Its Proponents

This Torah is like two paths:
one of fire, and the other of snow;
Turn toward the one—die in the fire;
turn to the other—die in the snow.
What should one do? Walk in the middle.

Jerusalem Talmud, Hagiga 2, 1 (9a)¹

This study deals with one of the most significant processes in the development of modern Jewish thought: the creation of a new trend that sought to combine the Jewish tradition with modernity, which had changed the face of Europe during the nineteenth century. The philosophical, social, economic, and technical-scientific developments in that period confronted traditional Jewish society in Europe with unfamiliar challenges and new issues. The tensions that emerged between the traditional and modern views split Jewish society and led to the creation of new streams of Judaism. Fidelity to the Jewish tradition and Halakha, on the one hand; and the need to respond to the new

¹ The citation appears in Krochmal, *MONH*"Z, 10; also in Chajes, 'Ateret zvi, 396. For full bibliographical information on primary sources, see the list of abbreviations at the end of the book.

challenges, on the other, created a middle trend of thought that stood in the breach between the pious traditional stream and the Reform movement.

To understand the development of the middle stream and its characteristics, I have concentrated on the works and views of three leading thinkers: Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), Samuel David Luzzato (1800-1865), and Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes (1805-1855). Each of the three was active in a different country: Hirsch in Germany, Luzzato in Italy, and Chajes in Galicia, Poland. They acted by themselves, independently of other thinkers. Nevertheless, examination of their views on several of the controversial topics of the time shows that they had a similar line of thought and that their activities led toward the same new trend, combining tradition with modernity.

THE MODERN JEW

Contemporary scholars of modern Jewish thought explain that modern Jews are unique because they construe change, innovation, dynamism, and cultural shifts as positive phenomena. A modern Jew views change and innovation as a desirable goal, as an end in itself, and as an ameliorating factor that opens up new possibilities for people, something to serve as a guiding principle in culture. Modernity is connected in the modern Jew's mind with contents and values that arose in the new world that took shape outside of Judaism, such as the autonomy of the individual, rule over nature, critical thinking, historical consciousness, creativity, spontaneity, authenticity, the capacity for self-expression, and so on.

The modern world view is also identified with ideological and social movements that sought a meta-narrative to explain nature and history, artistic and literary currents, and new developments in the area of technology and industry.

The modern Jewish thinker relates positively to the modern world that lies before him beyond Judaism and is prepared to receive and absorb truth consciously from anyone who speaks the truth. He or she will be willing to respond to the external modern world and to actually live in two realms—Jewish and modern—participating in processes

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