“We Don’t See Our Past as a Mistake”

Changes in the Religious Identity and Organizational Pattern of a Community of *Baalei Teshuvah*

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ABSTRACT: This study discusses the religious identity and organizational patterns of a community of *baalei teshuvah* as a unique form of new religious movement. Findings over time show that community members originally took steps to integrate and merge with the dominant group of ultra-Orthodox in Israel (the Haredim), later adopted a sectarian pattern, then moved toward an alternative way of religious life, in time even challenging and criticizing the dominant Haredi stream. An additional objective of the study was to identify the sources and mechanisms of organizational and identity changes experienced by this community. The empirical analysis reveals that these changes were influenced by universal, local, national, and personal factors, such as the leaders’ worldview and biography. In light of these findings, we claim that when analyzing new religious movements, researchers must integrate and synthesize several aspects: structure and agency, macro and micro, and intentionality and contingency.

KEYWORDS: baalei teshuvah, community leadership, contingency in social science, new religious movements, religious collective identity, spiritual transformation model, universal vs. particular relationships

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The term *baalei teshuvah* refers to newly religious individuals of Jewish origin who were raised with little identification with Judaism as a religious system, and subsequently became Orthodox.[1] Research on *baalei teshuvah* intensified in the past several decades, with an increase in attention on the post-secular era, a period when spirituality and religious practices have been on the rise in Western societies.[2] Since the mid-1970s, the numbers of *baalei teshuvah* have continued growing, mostly in North America and Israel. Our research examined the expansion of this movement based on the assumption that *baalei teshuvah* are part of a broader phenomenon, that of new religious movements.[3]

A general consensual assumption that guides scholars is that new religious movements have emerged, at least in the modern era, as a counter-reaction to the old established religions; thus, although scattered around the globe, these movements share some common characteristics.[4] Within this framework, religious studies scholar J. Gordon Melton defines new religious movements as religious groups that "have been diverse, new, alternative, marginal religious movements."[5] According to this inclusive definition, such movements are both unpopular and out of consensus, being out of step with established religious movements and situated in the contested space at the fringes of society, and their members are considered outsiders.[6]

In the contemporary Jewish world, this marginality takes a different shape and draws from unique sources. Unlike in other Western societies, where new religious movements emerge as attractive alternatives to the old, dominant, established religions, in Israel *baalei teshuvah* do not aim, at least in early stages, to suggest an alternative option to the dominant religious groups, which in the Israeli context refers mainly to the ultra-Orthodox streams (in Hebrew, *Haredim*).[7] On the contrary, *baalei teshuvah* display a strong orientation toward converging and integrating with the Jewish ultra-Orthodox streams.[8] In 2019, the Israeli ultra-Orthodox community constituted over 12 percent of the population of the country—about 1.12 million people.[9] It consists of a wide range of sub-communities, and it is known as an extremely conservative, highly segregated, collectivist community.[10] Its members strictly adhere to Jewish religious commandments and, to a certain degree, maintain separation from general Israeli society.[11] For the present study, the Haredim are considered "dominant" in the sense that in relation to the broader group of Israeli religious people, they have gained high prominence in the public sphere and the political arena. This dominance has been achieved thanks to religious prestige derived from keeping alive the authentic tradition through famous rabbinical dynasties.[12]

Theoretically, the strong desire to join the old ultra-Orthodox communities places *baalei teshuvah* in a relatively inferior position: the fact that *baalei teshuvah,* by definition, lack early socialization as religious

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individuals, and lack heritage and prestige, detracts from their value.[13] Furthermore, *baalei teshuvah* learn about the ultra-Orthodox religious society, which often serves as their host society, from cross-cultural encounters that may be awkward.[14] An unavoidable outcome of such encounters is that at some point *baalei teshuvah* feel both separate from the community they joined and marginal to it.[15] In one way or another, *baalei teshuvah* come to a showdown with the host Orthodox community, which places them in an equivocal social position—between being a newcomer and being fully accepted into the Orthodox community.[16] An additional outcome of this complex situation concerns their self-image: as secular individuals who became religious, *baalei teshuvah* tend to experience contradictory feelings of both pride and shame.[17]

In light of these general structural conditions, it is reasonable to assume that marginality, relative inferiority, and contradictory feelings will affect the religious identity and the organizational type of any community of *baalei teshuvah.* At the same time, identifying the actual sources behind the processes undergone by a particular group of *baalei teshuvah* must account for the local and specific context of the community in question.

An intriguing study that addresses the local and general origins of influences was carried out by Rivka Ausubel Danzig and Roberta G. Sands.[18] Building on research that highlighted the role of social interaction in shaping behavior and social grouping (in particular through the mechanism of *conversion*), the authors focused on about fifty American *baalei teshuvah.*[19] Most were upper-middle class in education, occupation, and income, and resided in urban or suburban neighborhoods of three East Coast cities in the United States. The authors aimed to explain what brought these people to become religious and Orthodox. Using a qualitative approach, Danzig and Sands identified seven nonlinear processes that characterize the spiritual development of *baalei teshuvah.* First, there is the "spiritual eclipse of the soul," referring to the fact that individuals who became *baalei teshuvah* are commonly those who were born into an environment that did not allow them to pursue spirituality. In such environments, community members, primary caregivers, or other significant early life figures tended to "block or impede spiritual development."[20] Second, there are "spiritual imprints," which means that at some point such individuals were suddenly affected by experiences that left a strong impression on them. The third stage is "existential vacuum," which refers to these individuals entering "a state of emptiness" and developing a perception that life is meaningless.[21] Individuals who had experienced such conditions and seek religion are likely to follow a certain pattern: in response to the "existential vacuum," they may experience "spiritual reactivity," which is a highly emotional and spiritual state.[22] Following this process, such individuals move later to "spiritual immersion," and "moving toward

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Kedushah (holiness)," which allows them to gradually engage in activities that enable them to connect to God. The last stage is "living the commitment," when the enthusiasm that characterized *baalei teshuvah* in the earlier stages slowly decreases as the routine sets in, and the religious observance becomes normative and constitutes the basis of one's everyday life. As part of this stage, the authors noted that over time *baalei teshuvah* tended to change their perception of the Orthodox community, and even de-idealize their adopted communities.[23]

Another framework that can serve as a useful tool for analysis has been proposed by sociologist Penny Lewis, who addressed another social category, that of the immigrants.[24] Although Lewis did not comment on *baalei teshuvah*, her framework is applicable because, in Sands' words, both immigrants and *baalei teshuvah* are "engaged in a process of social integration that can take generations to accomplish."[25] According to Lewis, communities of immigrants, which by nature operate under conditions of marginalization, tend to behave dynamically and systematically in a certain manner. In the first stages, they are likely to behave in a conformist way and idealize the values and culture of the majority, at the same time underestimating and rejecting their own. Later, following social interaction with the dominant group, they are likely to feel disappointment and dissonance with their identity. At an advanced stage, following introspection, the self-abnegation of immigrants is expected to wane; rather, they tend to value their original identity highly and even criticize the hegemonic group.

The present research aims to uncover what stands behind the religious identity and organizational pattern of a community of *baalei teshuvah*. To this end, we use a case study method, which is best suited for examining questions that are qualitative by nature, such as why and how a certain identity has developed.[26] The case we consider in this study is that of Sde Tzofim, a small group of Israeli *baalei teshuvah* who have been conducting their life as a place-based community for about three decades (1990s to the present).

The empirical section of the paper traces the changing identity and the organizational pattern of this community diachronically, starting from its establishment to the later stages. To identify the sources and causality behind the identity, at each stage, the analysis and ensuing conclusions rest on a recursive examination that involves both *induction* and *deduction*.[27] In the deductive part we use theoretical frameworks, examining their validity by cross-checking and comparing them against local data and knowledge on the ground (induction). Local data and knowledge from the field were derived mainly from interviews and participant observation. We interviewed six respondents: four female community members and two male leaders. The authors have no social or any personal connections, direct or indirect, with the community under research.

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THE FIELD

Sde Tzofim is a community of about sixty couples of *baalei teshuvah*, and with children the group reaches about 450 people, who have lived as a place-based community for nearly three decades.[28] The class background of the community is heterogeneous: about half of the community members are university graduates, and the others have up to twelve years of schooling.[29] (The community leaders' profile is more distinct, however.) The occupational composition of the community is diverse: a significant percentage of members are artists; others work as practical engineers, technicians, coaches, and some in alternative and holistic medicine. The members' average income matches the national average in the country. The daily life and social interactions of these families are conducted in a way representative of a "faith-based community": that is to say, one that is based on reciprocal trust, with members maintaining an extensive network of mutual aid.[30] An important element that supports this mutuality is the collective biography: having been born in Israel in the 1960s and early 1970s, the parents in these families share a common secular background, and during the first half of the 1990s they made their first steps in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious community.

Two main figures lead the community, Rabbi Oded Nitzani (b. 1958) and Rabbi Amit Kedem (b. 1970). Both grew up as secular individuals of the old Israeli upper-middle class (see below "the Israeli elite"); during the late 1980s, they left behind their secular lives and became religious. Nitzani is serving as the chief rabbi of the community, and Kedem serves as the principal of the local primary school, where most of the children of the community are enrolled. Based on participant observations and interviews conducted from 2019 through 2021, our strong impression is that the people of Sde Tzofim enjoy a high level of spiritual satisfaction and share a strong sense of harmony, joy, and happiness. This, however, was not always the case: the community underwent substantial changes in religious identity, organizational pattern, social stress, and place of living.

In the course of its existence (1990s to the present), the community underwent the following changes. During its first period (1990–2000), community members made their first steps in the Haredi world and invested great effort to integrate with the host Haredi society (the ultra-Orthodox community), resulting in minimal social distinction from it. In the second period, approximately 2001–2008, community members increasingly developed a sectarian identity and lifestyle. The third period, lasting from 2009 to the present, is characterized by community members moving step-by-step toward an alternative type of identity and organizational order, faithfully adhering to a religious lifestyle but at the same time distancing themselves from the Haredi society both

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sociologically and theologically. In the meantime, they developed a different worldview that challenges and criticizes both secular and Haredi cultures and ideologies. Note that since our main focus is on exploring religious identity and social organization, which are subject to fluid change, the above temporal division is not precise and is introduced mainly for the sake of clarity. The following section describes and conceptualizes these dynamic changes and analyzes their underlying causes.

SDE TZOFIM, 1990–2020

1990–2000: First Steps in the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Religious World

As noted, the people of Sde Tzofim organized as a community of *baalei teshuvah* during the mid-1990s. In the first half of the 1990s they were living as secular individuals scattered geographically, undergoing a significant change when they adopted an ultra-Orthodox religious way of life. They became interested in Judaism as a result of initiatives by institutions and individuals from the Israeli ultra-Orthodox stream. Following such encounters, the people of Sde Tzofim experienced an exciting spiritual revelation that brought them to acknowledge the existence of God and attracted them to Jewish Orthodoxy. Leah, a community member, described her personal experience in the first days of becoming *baalat teshuvah*:

> My life has changed dramatically. Suddenly, words got meaning. Everybody is speaking to you; Heaven is speaking to you. At this point, there was no such thing as "something happened by accident"; everything is directed by God with love and affection. The heart was in upheaval, and being happy was not artificial, as it was before. Everybody around us aimed at serving God in joy. We got meaning and taste for life. We did not feel weakness or burnout; everything was fresh. At the same time, I remember how what we used to call pre-*teshuvah*, "the funny dress of the typical old-fashioned Haredi," suddenly disintegrated. Instead, an intelligent young man who devotes himself and his soul to Torah appeared.[31]

Seen through the lens of spiritual transformation, a model grounded in a distinct social and cultural context, Leah's experience and feelings are reminiscent of those of American *baalei teshuvah* in their first days. Leah's experience corresponds to the state of "spiritual reactivity," which is highly emotional and spiritual, of someone who begins a new life and is charged with vitality and energy.[32] In a slightly different conceptual framework, described by anthropologist Victor Turner, Leah's experience and feelings fit the post-liminal stage, where the sense of confusion is gradually replaced by a sense of clarity, joy, and happiness.[33]

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This spiritual experience of excitement and freshness caused a substantial transformation of Leah's social views and hierarchies. "Old-fashioned Haredi," a stigmatic expression used by many secular Israelis to describe ultra-Orthodox people, became a model image of real Jewish life and a source of inspiration. This, in turn, caused a complete sociological reorganization, in which Leah and her friends left behind the secular way of life and joined the wider ultra-Orthodox community. Leah recalls, "If I show you the pictures of me and my husband, when we lived in Beitar-Illit [a Haredi town], you wouldn't recognize us. We wore masks [metaphorically], dressed like the Haredim; we wanted to be like them."[34] Leah's views and feelings indicate total identification with the dominant Haredi group in a way that minimizes social distinction—a state that generally characterizes marginal groups, such as first-generation immigrants.[35] Clear evidence of this identification can be seen in a decision made by these *baalei teshuvah* to take residence in Beitar-Illit, a segregated ultra-Orthodox suburb in the greater metropolitan area of Jerusalem. By taking this step, the members of Sde Tzofim experienced a kind of "spiritual immersion," which, according to the spiritual transformation model, is a situation related to sociological change: the *baalei teshuvah* revel in their Torah learning and idealize the ultra-Orthodox community.[36]

In sum, in those earlier days, the people of Sde Tzofim were highly enthusiastic about their new way of life and joined the dominant Haredi group based on total identification. In a sense, this kind of social interaction fits what David G. Bromley and J. Gordon Melton called the dominant/isomorphic pattern.[37] This is the kind of relationship in which the minority group strives to merge with the hegemonic group (in this case, Israeli religious people), and minimize social distinctiveness from it. Theoretically, the adoption of the new identity and social organization at this early stage of becoming *baalei teshuvah* may look unsurprising. After all, it is reasonable and logical that *baalei teshuvah*, as a minority and marginal group who has no earlier knowledge of the Orthodox way of life, would gladly place themselves under the auspices of a main group perceived as an authentic representative of the religious heritage. It also results in adopting a conformist attitude toward the host group.[38] This general-universal explanation can also be supported by the similarity between the behavior of Sde Tzofim members at this early stage and the group of American *baalei teshuvah* who shaped their lives in a different cultural context, as explored by Danzig and Sands. However, this may be a deceptive conclusion, and it needs to be validated by taking into account aspects of the particular local context.

Within contemporary Israeli society the ultra-Orthodox population, of which the Sde Tzofim community was a part in those days, is characterized by strict regulation and limitation of socializing

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between its members. Haredi individuals are expected to comply with decisions made by their rabbinical leaders, and compliance is supported by hard sanctions.[39] This strict pattern is not only the result of the power structure, in which the Israeli ultra-Orthodox is a minority group that strives to ensure and maintain its identity within general society; rather, it has roots in the collective Jewish history of the last two hundred years.

A crucial chapter of modern Jewish history took place in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the Enlightenment was gaining momentum. Fundamental values brought by this movement—rationalism, relativism, and free choice—began to spread over Europe and rapidly influence Jews and non-Jews alike. The rabbinical reaction to this wave was extreme rejection: books written by Enlightenment figures were confiscated, and Jews who chose to engage with these ideas were ostracized and banned from the community.[40] At the turn of the twentieth century, the anti-Enlightenment reaction became even more severe. After two thousand years of religious life in exile, new, secularized Jews emerged, offering modernity and secular nationalism (Zionism) as an alternative basis for the old religious Jewish identity. Inspired by the anti-religious ethos, this Jewish vanguard rejected as a matter of principle the antiquated religious lifestyle, claiming it to be degenerate, passive, and wallowing in misery.[41] In the second half of the twentieth century, the descendants of these secular Zionists became the main part of Israeli political and civic elite. Furthermore, members of that elite considered both the quest for spirituality and the supernatural, and those who engage in it, as "either primitive and archaic [. . .], or worse, as expressions of mental pathology."[42]

Over the course of the twentieth century, many young Jews left religion. This, in turn, inflicted collective trauma on traditional Jews.[43] Shocked by this trauma, and to stop the flight from religion, Haredi leaders reorganized their strategy. To preclude exposure to modern/secular influence, they erected symbolic "high ramparts" around the Haredi neighborhoods and developed an entire culture of absolute obedience of the members to rabbinical leaders.[44] A clear manifestation of this strategy is seen in dozens of Israeli neighborhoods and towns that were constructed in the last hundred years with a purpose of self-segregation.[45]

This historical background helps uncover the reasons behind the complete identification with the dominant group and the conformist stance adopted by the Sde Tzofim community in the beginning. At first glance, their attitude seems like the behavior of people who lack knowledge about tradition but aspire to join a dominant group that is identified as utmost religious. This explanation is, however, insufficient because a holistic view of the process reveals an additional aspect at the

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local level—the expectation of the Haredim, the dominant hegemonic group, that *baalei teshuvah* would completely submit to local norms.

Additionally, the above characteristics—total identification with the dominant group and a conformist attitude—also had something to do with the biographies of the community leaders. The personal biographies (pre-*teshuvah*) of Nitzani and Kedem align well with the aforementioned collective biography of secular European Jews. Kedem described the social milieu of Israel within which he grew up as being "elite good boys and girls; some of our parents were judges in courts and professors at universities, far from Judaism."[46] When he completed his military service, Kedem traveled to India and became familiar with the local spirituality. Discovering this Indian spirituality was, in a sense, part of a widespread trend among secular Israeli youths, mainly of upper-middle class, since the 1980s, which led them eventually to join the movement of *baalei teshuvah*.[47] The strong shift toward religion and spirituality also intensified because of substantial changes in the Israeli cultural climate: in the late 1980s, the dominant modernist-rational-Zionist attitudes were in decline, and embracing the supernatural was on the rise.[48] Following his experience, Kedem was "angry with his parents and school, who did not expose him to the richness of the Jewish religious heritage."[49] Within the framework of Danzig and Sands' spiritual transformation model, Kedem's pre-*teshuvah* experience may be classified as a "spiritual eclipse of the soul" or an "existential vacuum," because it amounted to living in a social and cultural climate in which the society was silencing or blocking the spiritual needs of the individual.[50] Our empirical exploration shows the local and personal biographical roots of the leaders' evolution: both Nitzani and Kedem were born into a cultural climate where people who sought traditional Jewishness or spirituality were labeled as either primitive or archaic. This had an opposite effect—longing for spirituality and religiousness. Hence, an appropriate way to explain the leaders' quest for spirituality and Jewish identity stems *also* from that local basis.

The early lives of both the Israeli and the American groups of *baalei teshuvah* were shaped by an environment that did not allow them to pursue spirituality. However, there is a substantial difference: the leaders of Sde Tzofim originated from the Israeli elitist hegemonic families that eschewed religious Jews, whereas the American group of *baalei teshuvah* originated from a secular *pluralistic* environment.

2001–2008: Moving Toward Sectarianism

A few years after becoming *baalei teshuvah*, and in the process of ongoing interaction with the Haredi society, the members of Sde Tzofim experienced rejection, exclusion, and a sense of dissatisfaction

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with the host community. As we demonstrate below, community members have never felt fully accepted or integrated within the Haredi world. As a result they developed a sense of disappointment, confusion, and dissonance regarding their identity and self-image. Leah reminisces about her feelings during this period:

> On the one hand, I got to meet people I desired to know. I was amazed at the wonderful modesty, devotion, and faith of their souls, humility, and modesty. I was privileged to see how they served God at the highest level. But despite the yearning for Heaven and the enflamed heart, I felt a void: I missed color, groomed gardens, action, and self-realization. As a young and talented woman, I wanted to break out and there was nowhere to go. Many times I felt that this was not my home, that I was a guest for an hour.[51]

Leah's words indicate ambivalent feelings: longing to be immersed in the ultra-Orthodox world, but at the same time the culture and the ecosystem of that world restricted her personal values and ambitions. These derived from her secular background where she had space, independence, and a pleasant natural environment. The feeling of dissatisfaction was not limited to the private sphere but also reached the level of the collective as a sense of exclusion and deprivation. Dorit, another community member, related:

> We felt cruel deprivation. It is hard to see this "on the table." When it comes, however, to the school system and to getting jobs, you increasingly notice that there is a big problem. Many of us would tell you about this. We saw the outcomes of this deprivation in a higher rate of student dropout: our children, as the entire community of *baalei teshuvah,* left the school system at a younger age. It was disproportional in comparison to both regular Haredim and secular families. The Haredim, I think, were increasingly afraid that their children would mix with ours.[52]

As implied by Dorit, depriving and excluding *baalei teshuvah* was not explicit but implicit. After a few years of interaction, members of Sde Tzofim became more aware of the local internal Haredi hierarchy, which increased their sense of inferiority and frustration. Smadar Gilad, a community member, was bitter when she described her feelings:

> If I had been in Beitar-Illit right now [a Haredi town, the original place of residence of Sde Tzofim], my son would probably have been labeled "*shababnik*" [a teenager whose behavior deviates from the strict Haredi expectations]. I feel quite bad about such stigma. Here, by contrast, I feel much better: nobody would dare use such an insulting label.[53]

Smadar raised a normative practice in which Haredi youth negatively label those who do not dress or speak in complete compliance with the original codes of those who were born and grew up as ultra-Orthodox.

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These experiences have brought feelings of confusion and dissonance to community members, and particularly its leaders. Nitzani related the following: "We had a feeling that something wasn't okay. The ongoing relations with the Haredim forced us to think: 'Who are we?' 'Who am I?' 'What am I?' 'Where lies our uniqueness?' We found ourselves spending a lot of time on such questions, every day."[54] These feelings of frustration, social exclusion, and dissonance made the people of Sde Tzofim gradually abandon their conformist attitude and reorganize their lives in a way that signified a move toward sectarianism; that is, they made a slight shift toward social distinctiveness without leaving the original host group. According to Bromley and Melton, the sectarian organizational type is a social form in which people "share a claim to the dominant religious tradition, but they have broken organizational ranks and created new organizational auspices to represent the tradition."[55]

Between 2001 and 2009, members of Sde Tzofim undertook several steps that are indicative of this shift. They did not voice a fundamental critique of the Haredim, who were their hosts. Instead, to ease social integration and satisfy their specific needs they took steps that reinforced social distinctiveness. Establishing a private Haredi primary school specifically for children of *baalei teshuvah* served as clear evidence of this shift. Furthermore, the leaders insisted that the teachers in the school also be *baalei teshuvah.* In the next few years, this position, which was less pronounced in the beginning, reached a higher level of reflexivity, recognition, and awareness.

As noted, the main question that we seek to address is what stands behind the change in identity and organization patterns of the Sde Tzofim community. In other words, what brought the community members to abandon their conformist stance in favor of a sectarian organizational practice? As we show below, the answer is based both on universal exogenous logic and local endogenous factors.

This transition from complete identification with the Haredi hegemonic group to a sectarian organizational pattern may not appear surprising. Like other minority and marginal groups, the communities of *baalei teshuvah* experienced tensions and conflicts with the hegemonic host group. At some point, these were likely to drive the minority group toward social distinctiveness, in other words, a social reorganization without leaving the fold of the majority world, in this case, the Haredi world.[56] Yet, a more complex picture is revealed when examining the issue through a local prism. The feelings of bitterness and frustration that pushed the community members toward choosing a sectarian pattern were *also* fueled by a factor deriving from the unique Israeli and Jewish context: a discrepancy between the perceptions of the members of Sde Tzofim and of the surrounding Haredi public. This discrepancy created different expectations and a lack of mutual understanding, eventually leading to this transition.

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The discrepancy had a long origination path. The Talmud, the great ancient corpus of Jewish law, which is well accepted by all Orthodox streams as a source of Jewish ethics and morality, praises *baalei teshuvah* who returned to God, emphasizing that it is vital for people to help others do *teshuvah* (to become a *baal teshuvah*).[57] Despite this unambiguous moral guideline, the Israeli ultra-Orthodox treat *baalei teshuvah* with suspicion, and their attitude toward *baalei teshuvah* may be negative. The ultra-Orthodox identify themselves as the authentic successors to the ancient Jewish tradition, and secular Jews are portrayed as wicked, powerful people who constantly conspire against traditional Jews.[58] According to the Haredi narrative, because of their secular past, *baalei teshuvah*, the penitent sinners, cannot reach the same high status as a native-born Haredi person does. In anthropologist Tamar El-Or's words: "the filth that touched these sinners before they purified themselves cannot be removed; Cain's mark is on their foreheads."[59]

This internal hierarchy sheds light on the substantive issue of the relationship and causality between general-universal explanations and local cultural conditions. It reveals that the attitudes and feelings that guided the members of Sde Tzofim as *baalei teshuvah* in choosing a sectarian pattern were not the result of mere natural reaction or minority-majority tensions. Rather, such feelings were also based on the unique cultural preconceptions of the two specific groups. The Haredim, who on the face of it welcomed the *baalei teshuvah*, in practice rejected them. The people of Sde Tzofim were blind to this cultural line, not expecting such a gap between rhetoric and practice. They could not imagine that the Haredim, who profess strict adherence to Jewish law, in real life would act against the Talmud's moral line and exclude the *baalei teshuvah* from their community.

2009–2020: Moving Toward the Alternative Pole

Following the encounter and clash between the closed Haredi environment and the people of Sde Tzofim, and after a decade of living in a sectarian organizational structure, the community members found themselves at a sociological-theological crossroads. According to psychologist John W. Berry's acculturation theory, *baalei teshuvah* who interacted and engaged with the hegemonic group would probably adopt one of two strategies: marginality or separation.[60] Marginality means that *baalei teshuvah* would recognize their relative inferiority—poor heritage and lack of religious knowledge—and keep viewing the Haredim as superior. They would not be able to offer an alternative worldview to the dominant host culture. Separation means that *baalei teshuvah* would substantially disagree with the host Orthodox community, minimizing interactions with it and possibly even criticizing it publicly. In practice,

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the leaders of Sde Tzofim chose a strategy that was close to separation. In fact, the community members even went one step beyond the sectarian stage, toward being separated sociologically, geographically, and theologically.

Beginning in 2009, the community leaders started to create new institutions that fundamentally challenged the main values and perceptions of the Haredi world, a change that fits what Bromley and Melton label as the alternative type of social organization: "Lay[ing] claim to legitimacy as authentic representatives of non-dominant religious traditions. . . . These groups pose a cultural challenge to dominant tradition groups, at the very least by professing mythic narratives that are to some degree incongruent with the foundational logic of dominant tradition groups."[61] Note, however, that the community of Sde Tzofim has never fully adopted the alternative pattern. People still conduct their lives as a sectarian group; at the same time, they moved one step further toward challenging the Haredi world by stating and practicing norms, values, and perceptions that are substantially incongruent with the foundational logic of the dominant Haredi tradition.

A clear expression of this transition was manifested in 2010, when about sixty families (about one hundred individuals among the greater community of Sde Tzofim) decided to relocate collectively from the Haredi town Beitar-Illit to Ma'alot, where they still live today—a town where most of the population is not Haredi but consists of moderately religious Jews. Another manifestation of the shift was that in 2013, the parents at the Sde Tzofim community decided to send their children to a state Haredi religious primary school. As noted, in the sectarian stage, the community children were studying in a private Haredi primary school that was tailored exclusively for children of *baalei teshuvah*. This decision was not an administrative move or a circumstantial change, but one that indicates substantial change. State schools are subject to regulation by the Israeli Ministry of Education; their curriculum includes science, and is based on modern national values. Furthermore, unlike in the Haredi system, in state schools, principals can hire only teachers who have earned an academic degree. The traditional attitude of the Haredi rabbinical leaders is a persistent rejection of the Israeli state education system; they even ban and ostracize the ultra-Orthodox parents who enroll their children in it.[62] By contrast, the parents in Sde Tzofim began to use the state religious school system, which signals a substantial change toward a relatively moderate and modern lifestyle.

What brought the members of Sde Tzofim, who formerly leaned toward the Haredi worldview for two decades and derived fundamental perceptions of identity from it, to turn their back on the dominant group, even criticizing and challenging it? The answer may lie at the universal-sociological level: as in other marginal communities, the people of Sde Tzofim transformed their earlier self-image of inferiority in

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relation to the dominant group and began to proclaim their heritage proudly. It may even reach the point of criticizing and de-idealizing the majority group. To use the terminology from Lewis, originally applied to immigrants, following a process of learning and inquiry, members of the minority group tend to re-examine their beliefs introspectively, basing their attitudes on higher-level thinking and self-consciousness, and present attitudes and ideology that are more balanced and voiced with confidence.[63] This explanation, however, needs to be validated empirically through knowledge derived from the local and personal realm. As we show below, the move toward separation and consolidation of an alternative worldview and lifestyle is also rooted in a unique *local* source.

The leaders of Sde Tzofim reached the stage of criticizing and challenging the dominant group as a result of feeling frustrated with the situation that developed, and only after a process of reorganization and reformulation of their thoughts.[64] Kedem admitted that "it took us a lot of time and frustration to understand the Haredi world."[65] He further described his feelings and attitudes in those days:

> I remember, I guess it was in the course of 2009, we gathered intimately with some community members to deal with actual collective problems. At some point, I stated that I can't tolerate the current situation, in which our community children, and mine as well, are being forced to deal with sociological issues! I wish to educate a new generation of children who conduct a dialogue with God, not with society.[66]

This introspective stance placed Kedem and his followers at a crossroads, "taking their first steps on an unpaved road."[67] After relocating to Ma'alot, which as noted is a town with a mixed population, the community members experienced less pressure and began to gradually free themselves from the Haredi sociological-theological constraints. In that period, they intensively engaged in rethinking and reformulating their religious identity, comprehensively and independently—a process that erased their earlier self-image as inferior to Haredim. In the next few years, the community leaders increasingly challenged and criticized the Haredi world, a stance that clearly reflects their adoption of an alternative philosophy. They formulated and praised the values that should guide their lives as modern and moderate religious people: free choice, free will, tolerance, openness, and social inclusion. As we demonstrate below, this new attitude was realized in several aspects, including education, social relations, and theology.

The Haredi pedagogical worldview is based on the premodern tradition of Judaism, in the sense that its value system is extremely conservative, characterized by strong faith and adherence to one ultimate truth; it is less inclusive and does not embrace freedom and tolerance.[68] By contrast, the members of Sde Tzofim, whose children in the meantime

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have become teenagers, in the last decade adopted a different pedagogical model, one that purports to be inclusive, relatively open, and tolerant, as reflected in the socio-cultural composition of the student population of the school.[69] Leah explained, "In the Haredi world, where we came from, there are strict hierarchies in ethnicity and identity. By contrast, in our Talmud Torah [primary school] there is a place for everyone: Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Mizruchnik, and Hasidic."[70] Leah indicated that in the Haredi world the boundaries between sub-groups are sharp and clear, whether based on ethnicity (Ashkenazi vs. Sephardim), collective biography (*baalei teshuvah* vs. those born Haredi), or ideology (Hasidim vs. Lithuanian).[71] In state schools, however, such as the one attended by Sde Tzofim children, a relatively inclusive approach is practiced, and students who might be considered underprivileged elsewhere enjoy much space and tolerance. In addition, the pedagogic staff of Sde Tzofim has formalized and rationalized a view that for the sake of the teenagers' wellbeing, the curriculum and the pedagogy practiced in a community of *baalei teshuvah* do not necessarily have to be based on core Haredi values or be committed to Haredi ideology.[72]

A crucial element of this worldview concerns the issue of parent-child relations: first- vs. second-generation relations. Sands noted that American *baalei teshuvah* consider their children as "*frum* [religious] from birth."[73] This implies that, unlike the parents, the children are enrolled in religious day schools and yeshivas (the equivalent of a high school for boys) and are better versed in Jewish texts. At the same time, however, it raises some problems, at least in the parents' eyes: the second generation has not experienced moral dilemmas and social complexity as their parents did. Furthermore, Sands noted that some parents were dissatisfied with the fact that their children, having experienced complete social integration, refused to open themselves to the outside world, preferring to remain strictly observant (*shomrei mitzvot*).[74] The Sde Tzofim case is somewhat different. Like the second generation of American *baalei teshuvah*, the teenagers of Sde Tzofim are also considered "*frum* from birth." Unlike their counterparts, however, the second-generation Israeli *baalei teshuvah* experience a different social dynamic. Shira Kedem, a leading figure in the community's educational staff, has written: "Our children are born into an environment that is full of contradicting components, including the fact that their grandfathers and grandmothers espouse a different cultural line. This, in turn, unavoidably brings the teenagers to internal struggle and mental conflicts."[75] It is instructive that given these objective circumstances, the leaders of Sde Tzofim chose a model of intervention that draws on a unique perception. Shira Kedem also made this statement: "We don't view this environment full of contradictions and confusion as a problem, but rather as a challenge. For us, it is an advantage, since this disharmonic, complicated, and conflicted environment allows our teenagers to really

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exercise free choice. In other words, the situation serves as a greenhouse for positive fermentation."[76] At least according to Kedem, who published an academic study on the topic of the second-generation *baalei teshuvah* teenagers, adopting a model for educational intervention that views complicated circumstances optimistically has produced better outcomes in teenagers' wellbeing.[77]

Philosophy and theology also substantially challenge the Haredi worldview and clearly reflect the leaning toward an alternative pattern. In 2008, a group of Israeli *baalei teshuvah*, mostly members of Sde Tzofim, launched a philosophical-sociological periodical targeting a readership of *baalei teshuvah*, called *Adraba*.[78] This periodical was dedicated to publishing papers authored by Israeli *baalei teshuvah* and discussing various Judaism-related issues, mainly Jewish thought in light of current problems. The articles are not committed to following classical Haredi thinking. Moreover, unlike the Haredi publications that emphasize the importance of rabbinical authority, implying that a Haredi individual should be strictly aligned with the local hierarchy, the authors of *Adraba* emphasize the importance of freedom of choice. In general, almost all ultra-Orthodox communities enforce discipline and dictate the believer's behavior in a way that precludes any realistic possibility of shaping religious beliefs freely and honestly. The community of Sde Tzofim, by contrast, emphasizes that the best way to be religious is to serve God out of a free will and free choice, and the most highly valued believers are those who acknowledge God honestly and authentically.[79] Orit, a community member, noted with great satisfaction: "Rabbi Nitzani taught us to use our own mind. In our community there is no such thing as 'the Rabbi said!'"[80] Rabbi Kedem strongly supports this attitude, referring to his inspiration, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772–1810):

> Rabbi Nachman of Breslov said: "The Hasidim [followers] must exercise free choice, just as God allowed the righteous rabbi free choice in the world." Furthermore, in my view, in opposition to Haredi norms, if a person comes to his rebbe, and the rebbe claims to know what is good or bad for him, in fact it means taking away the person's own responsibility, the person should run away from this kind of rebbe, no matter how great and well-accepted he is![81]

Another pillar of this alternative theology has to do with the place of rationalism, science, and academic thinking versus mysticism and spirituality. In general, new religious movements tend to adopt ambivalent attitudes toward science and rational thinking.[82] The same is true regarding the leaders of Sde Tzofim, who accept rational thinking but at the same time severely criticize science and rationalism, arguing that these forms of thought are inherently limited in explaining the cosmic and social order. Kedem expounds:

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> I acknowledge that there is a built-in flaw in that [secular] world: secular people, in particular academics, reject mysticism and despise non-rational believers. They don't recognize the built-in limitations of the human mind. The greatest Western philosophers were mystics too! Unlike these extremes [Haredi and secular], we combine the positive values of both worldviews; by doing so, we obtain the benefits deriving from both God's work and education.[83]

A significant internal drive behind the transition from a sectarian pattern to new thinking and reformulation of theology had to do with the leaders' collective biography. The fact that since 2008 *Adraba*, a periodical targeting Israeli *baalei teshuvah*, maintains its circulation attests to a higher level of self-awareness and introspection of its readers. The published articles, however, are not addressed exclusively to *baalei teshuvah*, but to wider social circles, expressing an important particular Jewish cultural aspect—the concept of *tikkun olam* ("repairing the world"). This notion, extensively discussed in Jewish sources and assimilated into Jewish culture, refers to a moral imperative for Jews, religious and non-religious alike, to base their activity on social responsibility for the benefit of wider social circles.[84] As opposed to the ultra-Orthodox society, which generally tends to keep its focus at the local communal level, the leaders of Sde Tzofim display a strong drive to get out of their own community and to influence wider societal circles. The implementation of this value can be seen, for example, in the fact that Nitzani used to travel to India every year to meet with the numerous secular Israeli backpackers who travel for several months in Far East countries after their army service. This massive pilgrimage resulted in growing exposure of Israelis to local Indian spirituality, which in turn encouraged them to seek existential meanings, including taking interest in Jewish religion.[85]

Seen in a broad perspective, the leaders' experiences, both those of Nitzani and of Kedem, who also traveled to India, parallel the global trend of young secular individuals gradually approaching religion in their search for existential meaning, thus giving rise to movements of the newly religious. This global phenomenon, however, intersected with the local one: as noted, Kedem and Nitzani grew up in the modern Israel of the 1960s and 1970s as "children of the disillusioned elite."[86] Living in this atmosphere may have reinforced their longing for religion as a counter-reaction.

Another engine behind the move toward the alternative religious philosophy, often quite eclectic, had to do with the leaders' own interpretation. The motivation to integrate and harmonize sacred and secular values was an outcome of the leaders' internal dialogue between their secular origins and present religious life. Kedem explained:

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> We don't see our past as a mistake. See, on one hand, ultra-Orthodox society preserved an amazing thing: the ancient tradition, which I didn't have when I was a child, an entire treasure that was intentionally concealed. On the other hand, *baalei teshuvah* who are carrying a secular heritage [as I did] bring with them other things: creativity, openness, curiosity. This is a tremendous treasure!

Kedem's explanation and rationalization point directly at the dualism in his biography as a source of his eclectic worldview and theology. They also indicate a confidence in and joyful acceptance of his secular past.[87]

Another important factor supporting an alternative theology and challenging the Haredi one had to do with the figures of inspiration for the leaders. Kedem made his first steps in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish world under the influence of the Breslov Hasidic community. Hasidism is a stream within the Haredi world that includes various distinct communities. Members of every Hasidic community share unique traditions that are generally derived from the founder's origin in Eastern Europe. Their communal life assumes a certain tribal form, and relationships are based on a strict internal hierarchy. Within the entire Hasidic world, the Breslov community is a group that unlike other ultra-Orthodox groups is characterized by inclusive community membership. Breslov Hasidism does not impose collective discipline on its members; believers are allowed and encouraged to be inspired by the unique Breslov traditions and heritage. At the same time, people are free to build their own spiritual and social world eclectically and independently—a line that allowed Kedem much space for establishing his own philosophy.[88] Further, as a Breslov follower, Kedem based his eclectic integrationist-harmonic ideology on the writings of Nachman, a popular and venerated figure in many Israeli communities. As Kedem explained: "Rabbi Nachman said: 'Go back to your own treasure.' This means, in my view, that we should not repress our secular past, as if it were a scar; on the contrary, we should use it."[89]

Biography, both personal and collective, cannot serve as the sole basis for theological justification. Individuals, especially leaders, must rationalize their experiences through a wider inquiry that involves both philosophy and knowledge of the society for which this philosophy has developed. This reveals another crucial mechanism behind adopting an alternative philosophy and social organizational order: the leaders' decisions and strategy. Unlike some *baalei teshuvah,* who shape their theology by identifying themselves with certain cultural groups or adhere to existing models (in Sands' terms, "choosing a strategy of marginality"), the leaders of Sde Tzofim chose to develop a new theology based on new thinking and reorganizing their basic premises.[90] This implied a willingness to do analytical work and engage with moral and philosophical dilemmas. Kedem was aware that shaping religious identity by

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identifying oneself with an existing cultural group is inherently flawed.[91] According to the above excerpts, Kedem chose to legitimize his old-new theology, at least implicitly, based on the notion that the separation between religious-sacred and secular values (as practiced in the Haredi society) is not derived from an ultimate truth, but rather is a cultural construct. Therefore, to establish a "true and real" religious identity, one must look beyond one's own cultural context and conduct a dialogue with the fundamentals of Judaism, which means selecting and integrating values dialectically. Kedem chose, at least at this later stage, a much more complicated and challenging strategy: rebuilding and reformulating theology independently. So too did Nitzani, who after having spent many years learning Torah was more likely to openly consider the substance of Judaism without shrinking away from a fundamental critique of the Haredi way of life. He argued: "When we are looking at our wide Jewish horizon, keeping such internal distinctions in strict dress codes, in customs, in halakhic observance that Haredi communities insist on preserving, decreases our heritage; it even makes it ridiculous."[92]

Nitzani's critique and open worldview are not detached from his own background: as a *baal teshuvah*, he lacks a distinct, sectarian heritage and has no sentiments toward a particular religious group. Therefore, he tends to view Judaism and Jewishness substantively and holistically. Nitzani's own theology also has something to do with independent decisions: he could have been satisfied with an existing theology that would free him from the need to face moral and intellectual dilemmas. Both Nitzani and Kedem rejected this easy path and chose instead to create a more complicated theology, which necessitated analytical, comparative, and abstract work.

Notwithstanding philosophical and idealistic explanations, a more complete understanding of forces behind the community's transition from the sectarian way of life to the way of an alternative religious tradition also requires looking at external institutional changes. As noted above, since 2013 most community children and teenagers among Sde Tzofim community have been studying in a Haredi-religious state school, which is a relatively open, moderate, and inclusive institution. The parents' decision, however, to send children to such a school was not purely the outcome of their ideals or of striving to add formal education to boost their updated worldview. The parents' ideals were in tune with a significant change that happened in the political and institutional realms. To encourage modernization and integration of the Haredi population, in 2012 the Israeli Minister of Education, Shay Piron, declared the establishment of a new educational system—the Haredi state system. This initiative had significant implications for moving toward an alternative theology: unlike in the private Haredi system, teachers who work in state schools receive higher salaries and full social

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benefits. In addition, state schools enjoy a higher priority in budgeting, and the parents pay less money compared with those who send their children to non-state schools. In other words, the new policy allocated significantly greater institutional and material resources to schools promoting the values favored by the community members.

In sum, the combination of values and practices adopted by the community at this advanced stage reflects a unique cultural attitude—serving God; seeking spirituality; being inspired by the ancient Jewish heritage, at the same time, valuing openness, inclusion, and tolerance; using the best of one's secular background; and insisting on incorporating free choice as a moral Jewish guideline. This entire set of preferences and values does not fit either the Haredi world or the secular one, but rather combines these two opposites. Seen in a broad historic perspective, *baalei teshuvah* adopting these values represents an intriguing shift: moving back to modernity, in the sense of refusing to delegate responsibility to others, which also means rejecting the old Haredi anti-enlightenment tradition.[93] This shift, however, did not lead to entirely accepting classic Enlightenment values. Instead, in a kind of postmodern twist, the leaders of Sde Tzofim combined and harmonized beliefs that seem contradictory, such as modernity and relativism, rationality and mysticism, freedom of choice and the Orthodox religious way of life. This combination of values and social dynamics apparently constitutes what anthropologist Joanna Steinhardt characterizes as the neo-Hasidic style of *baalei teshuvah.* This refers to a pattern in which the believers long for the renewal of tradition and adherence to a more mystical outlook on life, at the same time that they are drawing on Western values such as freedom and tolerance.[94] This style is also reminiscent of new religious movement ideologies that include liberty, equality, and other values prevalent in contemporary Western societies.[95]

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of the present study was to identify and explore the origins and mechanisms that shape the religious identity and type of social organization of *baalei teshuvah* as a sub-category of new religious movements. The community under research, Sde Tzofim, a group of Israeli *baalei teshuvah,* underwent significant transformation over the period of three decades. In their first steps, community members showed a strong desire to join and completely integrate into the dominant ultra-Orthodox group, the Haredim. Shortly thereafter, following experiences of exclusion and rejection, they adopted a sectarian pattern, which involved continuing to view the Haredim (the host community) as authentically representing Jewish heritage, but at same time reorganizing their own institutions and ability to manage their lives separately. In

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the past decade, the community has gradually transformed into an alternative type, becoming distinct not only organizationally and geographically, but also sociologically and theologically. The alternative position is manifested in adopting a distinct, eclectic, and syncretic worldview, referring to a theology and philosophy that bind and harmonize various apparently contradictory systems of beliefs, such as liberalism and conservatism, mysticism and rationality.

What stands behind these organizational changes? A general answer could rely on traditional explanations that attribute the expansion of new religious movements to their ability to satisfy a basic need of contemporary Western society—the human need for religious renewal—which the old religious establishment no longer does. At the macro level, this brings to life new religious movements (including *baalei teshuvah*) that long for religion, at the same time challenging the conventional and dominant religious establishment. A reasonable outcome of this dialectic is the emergence of eclectic and syncretic ideologies, or cultures, as happened in the community of Sde Tzofim. Additional support for this general-universal explanation is lent by the fact that the community under research underwent a process that looks similar to that undergone by American *baalei teshuvah*, a group of people who have been shaped in a substantially different context.

Nevertheless, our analysis limits the validity of this abstract general-universal explanation. The empirical section uncovered various factors that originated at the micro level, at the local and personal level, that significantly affected the changes in the identity and organization of the community: Jewish national history, local cultural hierarchies, collective biography, and individual interpretations. Of these factors, we found those related to leadership to be most crucial. This was clearly demonstrated by the fact that despite Sde Tzofim lacking prestige and tradition, its leaders succeeded in shaping a new theology using their secular background as a resource that gave community members a voice and moral-religious legitimacy.

These local sources do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they interact with general-universal principles by means of personal and cultural interpretation. This provides an important methodological insight: although a correlation between the explained and explaining variables may lead some to support a universal deterministic explanation, scholars should take into account local empirical data to discover how they eventually shape the identity and organizational configuration of a specific community.[96]

The findings also highlight the role of contingency in shaping religious identity. By "contingency," we mean both local cultural circumstances and political changes that may divert the cultural, or ideological, intentionality. A good illustration of this is presented in the discussion of the later stages, when community members adopted an inclusive and

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relatively open identity, clearly rooted in the community members' values and aspirations. The shift, however, has been shaped also by unexpected, external events in the political and institutional realm, such as the decision made by Israeli Ministry of Education to establish the Haredi state schools. This decision had a significant effect, as it gave financial and regulatory backing to the values adopted by the community at this stage (inclusiveness, openness, and modernity). In the absence of such backing, the inspiring ideas and philosophy of the community leaders probably would have remained largely an abstraction.

The notion that identity and social construction as a whole are not determined in a fixed, static manner, but rather are also shaped by contingency and fluidity, sheds critical light on a conventional view of how new religious movements emerge. The well-known consensual principle that new religious movements emerge, first and foremost, as a counter-reaction to the old established religions in the Western world must be revised. Indeed, the latter are a precondition that by itself is not sufficient to explain the phenomenon. In practice, such movements, with their unique identities, are influenced also by occurrences and decisions made at historic crossroads, which cannot be predicted or understood through rational or purely cultural explanations.

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ENDNOTES

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[6] Melton, "Perspective," 73–78.

[7] Melton, "Perspective," 73–78.

[8] Zaidman-Dvir and Sharot, "The Response of Israeli Society," 279–295.

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[10] Menachem Friedman, *The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Society: Sources, Trends and Processes* (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1991), 10.

[11] Friedman, *The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Society*, 115–61; Charles S. Liebman, "Extremism as a Religious Norm," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22, no. 1 (1983): 75–86.

[12] This definition does not correlate with the one suggested by David G. Bromley and J. Gordon Melton, discussed later in this article. According to their categorizations, "dominant groups" are those who "are granted status as the legitimate cultural and organizational representatives of the dominant religious tradition." By contrast, the Israeli Haredi community is far from a wide consensus, and they tend to reject, ideologically, Israeli state institutions. See Bromley and Melton, "Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Organization: Dominant, Sectarian, Alternative, and Emergent Tradition Groups," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15, no. 3 (2012): 6.

[13] Sands, "The Social Integration *of Baalei Teshuvah*," 100.

[14] Sands, "The Social Integration of *Baalei Teshuvah*," 97.

[15] Sands, "The Social Integration of *Baalei Teshuvah*," 97.

[16] Sands, "The Social Integration of *Baalei Teshuvah*," 96.

[17] Sands, "The Social Integration of *Baalei Teshuvah*," 94.

[18] Rivka Ausubel Danzig and Roberta G. Sands, "A Model of Spiritual Transformation of *Baalei Teshuvah*," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 26, no. 2 (2007): 23–48.

[19] According to Danzig and Sands, "Conversion" is a psychological dynamic in which people made a radical change of "relinquishment of one world view or religious system in favor of another," Danzig and Sands, "A Model of Spiritual Transformation," 24.

[20] Danzig and Sands, "A Model of Spiritual Transformation," 32.

[21] Danzig and Sands, "A Model of Spiritual Transformation," 33.

[22] Danzig and Sands, "A Model of Spiritual Transformation," 23–48; Sands, "The Social Integration of *Baalei Teshuvah*," 100.

[23] Danzig and Sands, "A Model of Spiritual Transformation," 42.

[24] Penny Lewis, "Multiculturalism and Globalism in the Arts in Psychotherapy," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 24, no. 2 (1997): 123–127.

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[25] Sands, "The Social Integration of *Baalei Teshuvah*," 100.

[26] Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012).

[27] James Mahoney, "The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences," *Sociological Methods & Research* 41, no. 4 (2012): 570–597; Stefan Timmermans and Iddo Tavory, "Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis," *Sociological Theory* 30.3 (2012): 167–186.

[28] In Hebrew, *Sde Tzofim* means "field of scopus," and has no special meaning concerning the vision or strategy of the community. In giving this name to the group, the leader, Nitzani, was inspired by the sacred book *Likutei Moharan*, written by Rabbi Natan, a Hasid of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov.

[29] Leah Tanami (a community member of Sde Tzofim), interview with Janet Cohen, Ma'alot, 12 January 2022.

[30] Richard Farnell, "Faith Communities, Regeneration and Social Exclusion: Developing a Research Agenda," *Community Development Journal* 36, no.4 (2001): 267.

[31] Leah Tanami, interview with authors, Ma'alot, 15 September 2019.

[32] Danzig and Sands, "A Model of Spiritual Transformation," 45.

[33] Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* 94, no. 113 (1969): 30–125.

[34] Leah Tanami, 15 September 2019.

[35] Lewis, "Multiculturalism and Globalism," 123–27.

[36] Danzig and Sands, "A Model of Spiritual Transformation," 46, 38.

[37] Bromley and Melton, "Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Organization: Dominant, Sectarian, Alternative, and Emergent Tradition Groups," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15, no. 3 (2012): 4–28.

[38] Lewis, "Multiculturalism and Globalism," 123–127.

[39] Yitzhak Brand, "Non-Jewish Courts in the Jewish State," Policy Paper no. 83 (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2010) [Hebrew]; Benjamin Brown, *Trembling at the Word of the People: Haredi Critique of Israeli Democracy* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2012) [Hebrew].

[40] Shmuel Feiner, "'Eradicating Wisdom from the World': The Enemies of the Enlightenment and the Origins of the Radical Orthodoxy," in *Religious Radicalism*, eds. Meir Litvak and Ora Limor (Jerusalem: Shazar, 2007), 57–83 [Hebrew]; Chaim Waxman, "The Iron Law of Humra (stringency) and the Haredization of Orthodoxy," in *Religious Radicalism*, eds. Litvak and Limor (Jerusalem: Shazar, 2007), 181–198 [Hebrew].

[41] Rina Peled, *The "New Man" of the Zionist Revolution: Hashomer Hazai'r and his European Roots* (Tel Aviv: Am-Oved, 2002), 84–140 [Hebrew]; Shmuel Feiner, "The Beginnings of Secularization in European Jewry," in *Secularization in Jewish Culture,* eds. Avriel Bar-Levav, Ron Margolin, and Shmuel Feiner (Raanana: Open University Press, 2013), 185–292 [Hebrew].]

[42] Ariel, "Paradigm Shift," 4.

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[43] Friedman, *The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Society*, 10.

[44] Benjamin Brown, "Jewish Political Theology: The Doctrine of Da'at Torah as a Case Study," *Harvard Theological Review* 107, no. 3 (2014), 255–89.

[45] Yosseph Shilhav, "The Haredi Ghetto: The Theology Behind the Geography," *Contemporary Jewry* 10, no. 2 (1989): 51–64.

[46] Quoted in Yehuda Yifrach, "The Soul is Talking to You and You Allow Listening," *Makor Rishon*, 5 August 2019, https://www.makorrishon.co.il/judaism/159573/.

[47] Darya Maoz and Zvi Bekerman, "Searching for Jewish Answers in Indian Resorts: The Postmodern Traveler," *Annals of Tourism Research* 37, no. 2 (2010): 423–39.

[48] Ariel, "Paradigm Shift," 8.

[49] Quoted in Yifrach, "The Soul is Talking to You."

[50] Danzig and Sands, "A Model of Spiritual Transformation," 45.

[51] Leah Tanami, 12 January 2022.

[52] Dorit (a community member of Sde Tzofim), interview with Janet Cohen, 12 January 2022.

[53] Smadar Gilad (a community member of Sde Tzofim), interview with authors, Ma'alot, 15 September 2019. See reference for *shababnik* in Yohai Hakak, *Haredi Masculinities between the Yeshiva, the Army, Work and Politics: The Sage, the Warrior, and the Entrepreneur* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), chap. 3.

[54] Oded Nitzani (the chief rabbi of Sde Tzofim), interview with authors, Ma'alot, 25 November 2019.

[55] Bromley and Melton, "Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Organization," 6.

[56] Lewis, "Multiculturalism and Globalism," 123–27.

[57] Hershey H. Friedman, "The Power of Repentance: Penitents (Baalei Teshuvah) of the Talmud and Midrash," SSRN, 2 October 2019, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3463505.

[58] Tamar El-Or, "Captured Babies: The Ultraorthodox Perception of Non Orthodox Jews," *Megamot*, 34 (1991): 104–121. [Hebrew].

[59] El-Or, "Captured Babies," 119. Translation by authors.

[60] John W. Berry, "Conceptual Approaches to Acculturation," in *Acculturation: Advances in Theory, Measurement, and Applied Research*, eds. Kevin M. Chun, Pamela Balls Organista, and Gerardo Marin (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2003), 17–37; also discussed in Sands, "The Social Integration of *Baalei Teshuvah*," 98.

[61] Bromley and Melton, "Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Organization," 6.

[62] Shai Katzir and Lotem Perry-Hazan, *State Haredi Schools: A New Educational Option for the Ultra-Orthodox* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2018), 22– 24 [Hebrew].

[63] Lewis, "Multiculturalism and Globalism," 123–27.

[64] Throughout the entire stage of challenging and criticizing the dominant group, members of Sde Tzofim limited voicing their criticism to internal meetings. As people who had taken their first steps in the Haredi world and who were warmly welcomed by it, they never voiced extreme anti-Haredi attitudes publicly.

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[65] Amit Kedem, quoted in Yifrach, "The Soul is Talking to You."

[66] Amit Kedem (instructor of the schoolchildren of Sde Tzofim), interview with authors, Ma'alot, 29 December 2019. By "sociological issues," he was referring to prejudice, stereotypes, and unfair, strict hierarchies.

[67] Quoted in Tamar Rotem, "Every Question Gets an Answer," *Haaretz*, 7 August 2010, https://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.1220487.

[68] Yoel Finkelman, "Ultra-Orthodox/Haredi Education," *International Handbook of Jewish Education*, eds. Helena Miller, Lisa Grant, and Alex Pomson (Dordrect: Springer, 2011), 1063–80.

[69] Shira Kedem, "Mental Welfare of *Baalei Teshuvah*'s Second Generation Teenagers," *MOVILIM* vol. 1 (2021):193 –212 [Hebrew].

[70] Leah Tanami, 15 September 2019. In everyday Hebrew, "Ashkenazi" refers to Jews of European origin, which in the Haredi world are considered privileged, and "Sephardic" refers to Jews of Middle-Eastern and North African origin, which in the Haredi world are considered less prestigious. "Mizruchnik" is a moniker with a negative connotation that is used by many Haredim to refer to religious Jews who, unlike themselves, are more moderate, modern, and better integrated into the Israeli mainstream.

[71] The prevalent socio-cultural division among ultra-Orthodox Jews in contemporary Israel is between Lithuanian and Hasidim. The former refers to those who dedicated their lives to Torah learning and strict observance of Halacha. By the mid-eighteenth century, under the influence of Rabbi Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidut, a significant split in Judaism occurred and a growing number of various place-based Hasidic communities formed. Unlike the Lithuanian tradition, Hasidism professes serving God in joy. Hasidim are more likely to lean toward mysticism, and they are known for submitting to the authority of their rabbi.

[72] Kedem, "Mental Welfare of *Baalei Teshuvah*'s Second-Generation Teenagers,"193 –212.

[73] Sands, "The Social Integration of *Baalei Teshuvah*," 97. Italics in original.

[74] Sands, "The Social Integration of *Baalei Teshuvah*," 97.

[75] Kedem, "Mental Welfare of *Baalei Teshuvah*'s second-generation teenagers," 202

[76] Kedem, "Mental welfare of *Baalei Teshuvah*'s second-generation teenagers," 202.

[77] Shira Kedem, "The Influence of Community Leaders of *Baalei Teshuvah* on the Mental Welfare of Second Generation Teenagers," (master's thesis, Shaanan College, Haifa, Israel, 2018).

[78] *Adraba* is a term in Aramaic, the language spoken by the authors of the Talmud in the first millennium CE. The word means "on the contrary" or "rather." The choice of this title may be interpreted as a message of the newly religious authors that they do not consider their perceptions and worldview as second-class for being new on the religious and Orthodox scene, but *on the contrary*. In their opinion, the combination of a secular past with religious renewal leads to a high-quality result. *Adraba* can be viewed at: http://aderaba.com/.

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[79] Kedem, "Mental Welfare of *Baalei Teshuvah*'s Second-Generation Teenagers,"193 –212.

[80] Orit Turjeman (a community member of Sde Tzofim), interview with authors, Ma'alot, 15 September 2019.

[81] Amit Kedem, 29 December 2019. The term "rebbe," with reference to a rabbi, is generally used by speakers of Yiddish in Haredi communities.

[82] Benjamin E. Zeller, "New Religious Movements and Science," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 14, no. 4 (2011): 4–10.

[83] Amit Kedem, 29 December 2019.

[84] "Introduction," *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, eds. David Shatz, Chaim Waxman, and Nathan Diament (London: Jason Aronson, 1997), 1–16.

[85] Maoz and Bekerman, "Searching for Jewish Answers," 423–39; Ariel, "Paradigm Shift," 6.

[86] Ariel, "Paradigm Shift," 6.

[87] In a sense, the leaders' earlier background served as a "biographical resource" (i.e., as a means that provides the individual with moral justification and motivation for action). On "biographical resources," see Lynn Froggett and Prue Chamberlayne, "Narratives of Social Enterprise: From Biography to Practice and Policy Critique," *Qualitative Social Work* 3, no. 1 (2004): 61–77.

[88] Asaf Sharabi, "Teshuvah Baskets' in the Israeli Teshuvah Market," *Culture and Religion* 13, no. 3 (2012): 273–93.

[89] Amit Kedem, 29 December 2019.

[90] Sands, "The Social Integration of *Baalei Teshuvah*," 86–102.

[91] Amit Kedem, 29 December 2019.

[92] Oded Nitzani, 25 November 2019.

[93] Waxman, "The Iron Law of Humra," 193–94.

[94] Steinhardt, "American Neo-Hasids in the Land of Israel," 25–26, 32–35.

[95] Yaakov Ariel, "Jews and New Religious Movements: An Introductory Essay," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15, no. 1 (2011): 19; Ariel, "Paradigm Shift," 8; Steinhardt, "American Neo-Hasids in the Land of Israel," 22–42.

[96] A framework that sought to address and handle such epistemological theoretical complexities and contradictions was suggested by Anthony Giddens. In his seminal work, *The Constitution of Society*, Giddens suggested an intriguing theory that synthesizes and connects several systems and disciplines. According to his analytical method, social structure and general-universal theories should be treated as a variable whose existence does not depend on the micro level, for example, of a specific community. Social theories and structures do affect the micro level, including personal interpretation; but because theories and social structure are by nature abstract, they cannot determine the reaction of a certain individual or community, although they may affect and direct them. Rather, in practice, a particular community and particular individuals use the rules and resources that are embodied in social structures or in the logic of the theory. They are doing this transformatively and differentially, in accordance with their particular historical and cultural background. In so doing, the

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individual and the community reconstruct social structure (the micro level shaping the macro level) and express their values and perceptions (agency). According to Giddens, the outcome of this reconstruction is the social system—a reality that is not identified with "structure," which is an analytical concept. This reflects the duality of structure, a key principle that social structure is both the medium and the outcome of human activity. See Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

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